Enough!

by

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*It is easier to take Jews out of* Galus *than to take the* Galus *out of the Jews*

- Chasidic Master

Ever been accused of “being your own worst enemy”? In a world filled with real dangers, from cheating merchants to terrorists, how could such an accusation have any real merit? Easy. As Sol Herzig notes in a column on Aish.com, we are all confronted in our lives by the, “…sobering fact that serenity and joy are natural states for all of us…” However, he is quick to point out that we needn’t fear the imminent loss of our treasured discontent, there are any number of methods we can – and do! – employ to ensure that we remain miserable.

I am not a man much enamored by “pop psychology” or “feel good” philosophies that dominate our modern culture. Quite the contrary. The superficiality of much of our times disturbs me more than I can say. But I also know our tradition teaches that God deemed His creation to be good and that we are to enjoy creation and our existence. Even more to the point, our failure to find joy – to get out of our own way – leaves us vulnerable to real dangers and profound misery. A determined and internalized sense of *galus* diminishes us and God. It is powerfully true that we, as Jews, have been victimized too often in history but we are *not* victims! We weaken ourselves by continuing to think of ourselves as such.

Even our archetypal experience of victimization – our enslavement in Egypt – needed to be shrugged off before we could realize the promise of freedom God had for us.

“…and I shall take you out from under the burdens (*sivlot*) of Egypt” (Ex. 6:6)

The Hebrew verb *li’sbol* means “to suffer”. God promises that He will remove us from the burdens, from the suffering, that was a constant of our existence in *Mitzrayim*. *Li’sbol* also means “to tolerate”.   With this understanding in mind, Rebbe R’ Bunim comments that despite their backbreaking labor, the Children of Israel came to “tolerate” their situation. In their perspective, slavery was the natural state of being. They became blind to how terribly bitter it was. As a result, God had to free them not only from their physical slavery but from their *tolerance of their slavery*.

Tolerance of evil is worse than the evil itself.

How easy it is to become benumbed to our discomfort! So much so that we’d rather *continue our misery than subject ourselves to the challenge and uncertainty of change and the hope of betterment.* We know from countless studies that long-term prisoners are reluctant to leave their prison cells to face the “outside world”. So too were the Jews reluctant to leave their “prison” in Egypt.

As slaves, we didn’t have to “think”, we didn’t have to “risk”, we didn’t have to “feel” honest and true feelings. All was decided for us. No uncertainty. Just burden, to which we became tolerant. Imagine! We tolerated – *invited* – the burden of slavery as though it was our appropriate lot in life! If it is possible to become tolerant of *sivlos Mitzrayim* how much more is it to become tolerant of the everyday burdens and challenges, we all confront today!

R’ Menachem Mendel of Kotzk proclaimed that the first step towards freedom is the willingness to rebel against slavery. Before being led to Sinai, *B’nai Yisrael* had to accept God’s great gift of freedom *from* their *savlanut –* their tolerance to their slavery. This, the freedom *from* tolerance, is the ultimate foundation for *geula.* There can be no redemption until *galus* is utterly rejected. Indeed, it is this understanding that prompts the Chidushei HaRim to teach us that the *posuk* should read, “I will deliver you from being tolerant of Egypt.”

In last week’s *parasha*,the Children of Israel criticize Moshe and Aaron for angering Pharaoh by calling for their freedom. They have become so inured to their slavery that they would rather continue as slaves than sacrifice for their freedom. They had become like the beaten down and despondent worker who faces his miserable shop foreman with a shrug, “What else can I do? This is my life.” The necessary implication being, “This is the life I deserve.”

No!

That is not “a life”. That is slavery. It is addiction. It is the antithesis of God’s desire that we enjoy the power and grace of *geula*! The slave, the addict, the downtrodden and miserable want only their daily bread, their drug, the inexorable sameness and numbness of their existence. They do not consider a life of spirituality and meaning.

Our prison can be anything that benumbs us to that life of meaning. Drugs. Sex. Money. Fine cars. Misery. *Anything* that we tolerate that keeps us from enjoying the *geula* that God wants for us is slavery, a prison! Our first step towards a life of meaning is to become ***in****tolerant* to enslavement; to value the dignity of liberty over physical gratification; our first step is to declare without qualification, “Enough!”

Certainly, the generation of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* had to say, “Enough!” before they could cross the Red Sea and enter the wilderness and, ultimately, receive the Law at Sinai.

“Enough” is more than “ouch” to the pain of the lash. It is a declaration that the pain of the lash is not “my due”. It is a statement of absolute refusal. It is not a negation of what is bad but an embrace of what is good. It is an embrace of the possibility of *geulah*.

If it is difficult to cry out, “Enough!” to the lash of slavery, how much more so is it to say “Enough!” to the numbing satisfactions of an everyday life?

It is told that Rav Nachum of Chernobel once stopped at an inn owned by an old Jew. At midnight, Rav Nachum sat on the floor to conduct his *Tikun Chatzos*, crying so bitterly over the Churban that many of the inn’s guests were awakened by his distress.

Trembling, the Jewish owner rushed to the Rebbe. “Why are you crying? Does something hurt?”

Rav Nachum shook his head. “I am bemoaning the Churban and the bitter galus.”

The innkeeper was confused. “What Churban? What *galus*? What is all the grief about?”

“You don’t know?” Rav Nachum asked. “Our Temple in Jerusalem was razed. We were exiled from our Chosen Land because of our sins.” He studied the innkeeper. “I am beseeching God to speedily send the Moshiach, so he brings us to Eretz Yisrael.

“Are you ready to go up to the Promised Land?”

The innkeeper shook with fear and raised a hand. “Wait, Rebbe. I am going to ask my wife what to do. She will know.” He hurried away only to return soon after. “No,” he said, clearly. “We will not go. It would be foolish to lose all the chickens, cows, and sheep. No, it makes no sense to follow Moshiach and leave all this behind!”

Rav Nachum persisted. “Is it really so good here? Often, the locals rampage, kill and plunder!”

The inn owner once again raised his hand. “Let me ask my wife.” Once again, he came back quickly. “She said that this is our life and it is quite satisfactory, thank you. She said I should tell you to pray to God to chase away all the evil locals to the Promised Land. As for us, we will stay here with the chickens, cows and sheep.”

Imagine! To be satisfied, to be *tolerant*, of a simple and vulnerable existence for the sake of a few chickens, cows and sheep!

Foolish people! To say, “What is so terrible? It’s a life after all…” How sad, how *familiar* a feeling, to not be able to cry out, “Enough!” How pathetic to accept *tzuros* rather than embrace God’s gift of *geula*!

It is time for us all to turn away from the acceptance, the tolerance, the embrace of our own *tzuros*; to turn away from that insidious and irksome phrase, “It is what it is” (as if that is an explanation and excuse) and say, “Enough!” It is time that we all stop thinking a pitiful few “chickens” or “cows” justify misery. “Enough!”

*Geula* awaits.