

APRIL 15, 1960

B126

PIDYON HA-BEN.....SON OF PAUL BARIS.....CHOL HAMOED PESACH

1. Happy coincidence of Pidyon Haben on Pesach.
2. Commandment of P.H. evidently one of most important. Is one of the 4 passages included in our Tefillin.
3. In that passage of KADESH LI KOL BEKHOR, find strange turn of events. G-d tells Moses very briefly and succinctly, KADESH LI KOL BEKHOR PETER KOL RECHEM BIVNEI YISRAEL BA'ADAM UVABEHMAH LI HU. And then Moses turns to Israel, and gives them a whole string of three various laws, plus a reminder that G-d took them out of Egypt! Specifically, recalls the mitzvot of a) chametz and matzah, b) korbon Pesach, and then c) bekhorot. Why this elaboration over and above what G-d had commanded?
4. The answer strikes at the very core of the meaning of Pidyon Haben, and also at one of the major motifs of ~~the~~ Judaism. For the exodus story is essentially based on the competition between Nature and History, between subservience to the natural forces and the transcending of them by the development of individuality and uniqueness, by personality and soul, by rising to a high, preordained historic purpose. According to the inexorable laws of nature that determine both physical welfare and community configuration, Israel should have remained a slave people. Yet G-d intruded into the scene, bypassed Nature, and took us out UMAH MITOKH UMAH, to meet our destiny as the AM HANIVCHAR at Mt. Sinai. Yetziat Mitzrayim is thus the triumph of History over Nature.
5. CHAMETZ AND MATZAH reflect the same theme. The Jews in Egypt were sitting down to their meal -- eating is the most natural of natural expressions. They were indulging their natural appetites. But History called at that moment: yetziat Mitzrayim. Which takes precedence? The answer: History. Israel had to leave BECHIPAZON, immediately, responding to the historical challenge, and at the expense of a good meal. Let the dough NOT rise -- history was beckoning. And so: no chametz, only matzah.
6. Similarly: PESACH, the passing over of the Jewish and the striking at the Egyptian homes represents a violation or bypassing of the natural order and acting in the historic order. A plague does not discriminate, an angel does. The demands of history outweighed those of orderly natural processes.
7. And this very same theme is recapitulated in the law of BEKHORIM. The child to be redeemed is a product of Nature. Interestingly, the mother-child relationship is strictly a natural one, it bespeaks a deep, intimate, biological relationship. The father-child relationship, on the other hand, is more distant, less natural, more abstract, less evident. Father represents not a natural relationship, but one of authority or ultimate origins -- and hence is more spiritual in ~~not~~ quality. (Thus: avinu she'bashamayim). The child to be redeemed is one who is most clearly a child of Nature: PETER RECHEM, not a BEKHOR L'AVIV. This naturalness is emphasized again by the equation to animal firstlings: BAADAM UVABEHMAH. Yet the Father, representing the more-than-natural, is the one who redeems the child from his bonds to nature, he releases him from the shackles of TEVA, and responds to the command KADESH LI, sanctify by sublimating and transcending the natural, by overcoming initial limitations, by reaching beyond the environment and purely natural milieu. From a PETER RECHEM, equivalent to BEHEMAH, KADESH LI -- by the father's redeeming act.
8. The KOHEN's question MAH BAIT TEFEL, which do you prefer: the koney or the child, is one directed to every parent, every one responsible for a future soul, in a direct way: what standard do you propose to raise this child by? The natural, the one in which

EDITOR:

NORMAN LAMM

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Marvin Fox, Secretary
Sidney B. Hoenig
Bernard Lander
Emanuel Rackman
Hyman Tuchman

TRADITION

A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought

BUSINESS OFFICE:

331 Madison Ave.
New York 17, N. Y.

EDITORIAL OFFICE:

29 Oakland St.
Springfield 8, Mass.

you accept the limitations imposed by Nature and Society, so that the child will live by a standard of CHAMISHA SELAIM, as does everyone else, or a standard which will help him rise above his initial shackles, which will make him truly BINKHA - your son, in the sense of AL TIKRI BANAYIKH ELA BONAYIKH - - one who will be a builder, a creative link in the chain of Tradition, one who will inherit and pass on to generations following all the ideals you cherish, the Torah you hold sacred, who will rise, above the impersonalities of Nature, to the uniqueness of his Jewish historic destiny?

9. Your answer was recited in clear and crisp words: I prefer BENI - - that he be more than a man of CHAMISHAH SELAIM, more than a conformist to nature and society, but that he rise to fulfill his destiny as a builder-son.... KADESH LI....