

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Achieve Freedom In The Blink of an Eye

Although I was only nine years old, I recall the moment I heard the tragic news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. My initial reaction was disbelief, and then I cried. In the blink of an eye, I was transformed from an innocent child to someone confronted with the realities of death and evil.

Everyone experiences transformative moments.

For some, it is the death of a parent or friend, and for others, a child's birth. We are transformed instantaneously from one reality to another.

The Jewish people experienced several transformations while in Egypt. For many years, they lived a life of freedom and plenty. Then, with the wave of a hand, the "new" Pharaoh plunged them into slavery, which lasted for 210 years.

Another transformative moment appears in this week's Torah portion Bo (Exodus 10:1–13:16). When all seemed lost, Moses appeared and led the Jews to redemption. In a split second, the Jews were transformed from slaves to God's chosen people.

However, there is a saying, "*it is easier to take the Jews out of Egypt than to take the Egypt out of the Jews.*" It is one thing to free our bodies and another to free our minds and souls.

The solution to this challenge is found in the words of King Solomon, "*I saw that wisdom exceeds folly as light exceeds darkness*" (Ecclesiastes 2:13). In the same way a candle immediately dispels darkness, wisdom dispels foolishness and ignorance.

Egypt represents domination and a lack of control. The spiritual message of redemption from Egyptian slavery is to use the wisdom in our mind to dispel folly and control our emotions and actions to make the world a better place. Judaism views this transformative process as the ultimate way to achieve spiritual freedom.

To highlight this message, the commandment to wear tefillin on the head [mind] and arm [opposite the heart] is mentioned in connection to the Exodus story (Exodus 13:9). The spiritual message of tefillin is to use our mind to control our heart's emotions to act correctly with moral clarity.

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Unlike other religions that view commandments [like tefillin] as meaningless rituals, Judaism embraces the commandments as an opportunity to connect to God and to apply the spiritual and inspirational lessons they offer.

During the messianic redemption, we will witness another transformation that will surpass the spiritual redemption from Egypt. In those future days, not only will we be redeemed physically from exile; God will transform us spiritually by removing the hold our passions have over us.

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you, I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and, to carefully observe My ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

The messianic age is also a time when *“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea”* (Habakkuk 2:14). This knowledge will fill our hearts and consciousness and dispel all obstacles to serving God.

This reinforced relationship with God is the meaning of the “New Covenant” spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-32. The initial covenant at Sinai would never be broken by God [Leviticus 26:44] but could be broken by Jewish rebelliousness. However, in the future, the Jews will no longer break the covenant because their heart will be transformed, and they will keep the commandments without the temptation to do otherwise.

As incredible as this may sound, history has demonstrated, transformative events can happen when least expected *“in the blink of an eye.”*

I believe this powerful message is one of the great secrets of Jewish survival and why we never give up hope that darkness will be transformed to light.

Shabbat Shalom,

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