Nature in the Parasha

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Parashat Shemot – The Burning Bramble Bush

Connecting to Hashem by Taking Notice of Nature

Much is taught about the 'Burning Bush,' and how Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai while he was shepherding Yitro's flock. Actually, the Hebrew word for bush אַסְּלְּבֶּה shares the same root as Sinai, where Moshe later would ascend to receive the Torah. Hashem selected this desolate dry place in the wilderness for Moshe's very first prophesy. G-d revealed Himself gradually to Moshe in order not to blind him from so much unexpected light in one go. First, He showed him an unusual sight, a bush that was aflame but not burning up. Inside of the heart of the flame, an angel of Hashem appeared to Moshe (Shemot 3:2). It was only after Moshe noticed and turned to see why the bush was not consumed (ibid. 3), that "Hashem appeared because he turned to see..." (Ibid 4). Hashem's prophecy to Moshe was in response of Moshe's taking notice of the nature surrounding him and asking questions, going closer to try to understand what he saw. How often do we completely ignore amazing sights happening right under our noses, as we walk around with our smartphones, our faces deeply buried in Facebook. If we want prophecy or even just a glimmer of a connection with Hashem, we need to lift our head out of oblivion to the nature around us and begin to open our eyes and ask questions about what we see!

Hashem's Comforting Presence Within our Pain

Ironically enough even as I myself write this, I interrupted my writing to have a little chat via Facebook with a friend who was in need of chizuk (strengthening). During the Egyptian exile, the Jewish people were in need of encouragement and chizuk as we are today. From time immemorial, our souls are always burning from the fire of trouble surrounding us from all sides. According to nature, we would expect that the Jewish people would succumb and be consumed by our numerous troubles. Yet, we continue to withstand all of our enemies. This is one of the metaphors of the burning bush, which was "Once a heathen asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha, 'Why did your G-d appear to Moshe in such a lowly type of bush?' The Rabbi answered him, 'If it had been a carob tree or a sycamore, would you not have asked the same question? But, I will answer you. Why in a thorn bush? To teach us there is no place where the Divine Presence is not to be found, even in a lowly bush" (Midrash Shemot Rabbah 2:5). It was specifically in the midst of the burning bush that Hashem's presence was found. This teaches us that within the hardships that we go through, that is exactly where we will find Hashem's comforting presence. "Then the angel of Hashem appeared unto him (Moshe) in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked and, behold, the bush was burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed" (Shemot 3:2). Whatever, our troubles may be, they exist to help us find and reconnect with that comforting Presence in an even deeper way. Once we learn to turn inwards to the midst of our thorny pain,



then it can melt away in the warmth of our renewed connection with the Eternal inner love. At that point, we realize that our happiness is not dependent on removing all the things that cause us pain. These are all external, and what really matters is our internal connection with the Divine.

Which kind of Plant was the Burning Bush?

In the Written Torah there is not much information for identifying the burning bush. However, our rabbis during Talmudic times were acquainted with this kind of bush. The Midrash teaches us that it was commonly used as a garden hedge and grew under different types of conditions. "Just as this bush grew by the water, so does Israel only grow in the merit of the Torah, which is called water. Just as this bush grew both in gardens and at rivers, so does Israel live in both this and the coming world. Just as this bush produces both thorns and roses, so are there both wicked and righteous people among the Jewish people. Just as this bush had thorns that curved inwards in such a way that when a person inserts his hand into it, he is unscathed, but when he withdraws it, it lacerates him. Likewise, when Israel went down to Egypt, they were unknown, but when they emerged out, they became known by the signs and wonders of the plagues. Just as this bush has five petals that emerge from one point so is Israel redeemed in the merit of Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'acov, Moshe and Aharon" (Midrash Shemot Rabah 2:5). The Jerusalem Talmud (Ma'aserot 3a) tells us that the bush produced a berry that was at first red and then turned black. All of this point to the correct identification of the s'neh by the monks of St. Catherine in Sinai as the Rubus Sanctus (Louis I. Rabinowitz, Torah and Flora, Chapter 13). I found further support for this in Rav Shimon of Shantz commentary on Babylonian Talmud, Zeraim 46a. He explains that the berries of the burning bush are hairy when unripe. This concurs with botanical descriptions of Rubus Sanctus, also called Palestinian Blackberry. Additional features described by the Midrash are, likewise, botanically verified: "...Petals usually 5, rarely more, occasionally absent, white, pink, or red, or hairy..." (http://zipcodezoo.com/Plants/R/Rubus_sanctus/).

Healing Israel's Wound of Exile

The greatest healing in the world is the healing of compassion. Our wounds begin to heal when we feel that a friend shares our pain. G-d is the greatest healer. He precedes the healing to the wound. This is why Yocheved, the mother of Moshe, our redeemer, was born before going down into the wound of Egypt (Ramchal, Bereishit). "I will go down and save them from Egypt" (Shemot 3:8). G-d left every mountain and dwelled inside of the lowly bramble bush as it states, "G-d called him from within the bush" (Ibid. 4). Hashem went down to the troublesome and sharp bush, filled with all kinds of thorns" (Midrash Pirkei Hayeridot 2). This is because, "when Israel went down to Egypt, the Shechina went down with them. Pay attention to the Creator's compassion. All of Israel's pain causes Him pain as it states, 'In all their affliction He was afflicted'" (Yesha'yahu 63:9), Batei Midrashot, 2, Mechilta Parashat Shemot).

The Wound Healing Properties of the Bramble

I'm so excited to discover the connection between the spiritual/emotional healing that took place at the burning bush, and the medicinal properties of Rubus Sanctus. Just as Hashem came to down



to the burning bush to heal Israel's wound of exile, young bramble shoots have been used for healing of wounds and infected insect bites in folk medicine for ages. Scientific research was done to evaluate the wound healing activity of *Rubus Sanctus*. *Rubus Sanctus* Schreber aerial parts were collected from Kıbrısköy village, Ankara, Turkey during June to July 2007. Remarkable wound healing activity was observed with the ointment formulation of the methanol extract at 1% concentration. In conclusion, the present study demonstrated that the aerial parts of *R. sanctus* promote wound healing activity in animal as a preclinical study. The methanolic extract showed remarkable wound healing activity and it may be suggested for treating various types' wounds in animal and human beings (http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3139958/). Just as there is medicinal healing properties for wounds within the bristly burning bush, so can we find healing for our painful challenges of life, specifically within the heart of our pain. Perhaps this principle is also alluded to by the fact that *Rubus Sanctus* contain both thorns and delicious berries. When we find Hashem's compassionate presence within our affliction, then the thorns of our troubles make way for the sweetest berries of faith.

29)מדרש פרקי הירידות - פרשה ב

ירידה חמשית שירד בסנה [שנאמר] וארד להצילו מיד מצרים (שמות ג' ח') הניח כל ההר ושכן בתוך הסנה מ"נ [ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה] (שם שם ד') והסנה צרה וצוקה (וכל) [וכלו] קוצים ודרדרים למה שכן בתוך צרה וצוקה בשביל שראה את ישראל בתוך צרה וצוקה מ"נ בכל צרתם לו צר (ישעיה ס"ג ט"). א"ר לויאי אותו המטה שנברא בין השמשות נמסר לאדם הראשון בגן עדן ואדם מסרו לחנוך וחנוך מסרו לנח ונח מסרו לשם ושם מסרו

(34)בתי מדרשות חלק ב - מכילתא לפרשת שמות

שראל למדרגה התחתונה והקדוש ברוך הוא ירד עמהם וגאלם שנאמר (שמות ג ח) וארד להצילו מיד מצרים:
ר' יהושע אומר מפני מה נגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא משמי מרום והיה מדבר עם משה מהסנה והלא כשירדו ישראל למצרים שכינה ירדה עמהם שנאמר (בראשית מו ד) אנכי ארד עמך וגו' ונגלה שכינה עמהם שנאמר (דברים א לא) ובמדבר אשר ראית וגו' ר' חייא ור' יהודה אומרים בא וראה רחמיו של מי שאמר והיה העולם עם ישראל שכל זמן שישראל נתונים בצער [כביכול] צרה לפניו שנאמר (ישעי' סג ט) בכל צרתם לו צר אין לי אלא צרת צבור צרת יחיד מנין תלמוד לומר (תהלים צא טו) יקראני ואענהו עמו אנכי בצרה וכן הוא אומר (זכרי' ב יב) כי הנגע בכם נגע בבבת עינו ר' יהודה אומר אין תלמוד לומר ו"ו אלא יו"ד מלמד שכל מי שמזיק לאדם מישראל כאלו מזיק לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם וכל זמן שישראל שרוים ברווחה הקדוש ברוך הוא שרוי ברווחה עמהם ובשמחה וכן הוא אומר (תהלים קו ה) לראות בטובת בחיריך לשמח בשמחת גויך:

Rubus is a large genus of flowering plants in the rose family, Rosaceae, subfamily Rosoideae. Raspberries, blackberries, and dewberries are common, widely distributed members of the genus. Most of these plants have woody stems with prickles like roses; spines, bristles, and gland-tipped hairs are also common in the genus. The Rubus fruit, sometimes called a bramble fruit, is an aggregate of drupelets. The term "cane fruit" (or "cane-fruit") applies to any Rubus species or hybrid which is commonly grown with supports such as wires or canes, including raspberries, blackberries, and hybrids such as loganberry, boysenberry and tayberry. [3]



RUBUS SANCTUS

Family:- Rosaceae

Common Names:- Bramble, Blackberry.

Synonyms:- Rubus ulmifolius

Meaning:- Rubus The ancient Latin name for brambles, bramble-like.

Sanctus (L)Holy, sacred.

General description:- Very variable, thicket-forming, semi-evergreen shrub with

arching or scrambling stems, armed with stout.prickles, hairy or not.

Leaves:- Hand-like with 3-5 elliptical to oval, toothed leaflets, dark green above but whitish hairy beneath.

Flowers:- Pink or white, 20-32mm, borne in large prickly panicles. Corolla with 5 free petals, with numerous stamens.

Fruit:- (Blackberry) red at first, purplish-black when ripe, edible.

Habitat:- Woodland, thickets, hedgerows, fields, banks and rocky places.

Distribution:- Widespread and common throughout the Mediterranean.

Widespread and common on Crete.

Flowering time:- June-Oct.

Contents

More important than botanical identification of the Burning Bush are the lessons to be learned from the selection of this type of bush over all other types. *Exodus Rabbah* (2:5) tells us:

(3-4)

בתחלה לא ירד אלא מלאך אחד שהיה ממוצע ועומד באמצע האש ואח"כ ירדה שכינה ודברה עמו מתוך הסנה רבי אליעזר אומר מה הסנה שפל מכל האילנות שבעולם כך היו ישראל שפלים וירודים למצרים לפיכך נגלה עליהם הקב"ה וגאלם שנאמר וארד להצילו מיד מצרים רבי יוסי אומר כשם שהסנה קשה מכל האילנות וכל עוף שנכנס לתוך הסנה אין יוצא בשלום כך היה שעבוד מצרים קשה לפני המקום מכל השעבודים שבעולם שנאמר ויאמר ה' ראה ראיתי את עני עמי ומה תלמוד לומר ראה ראיתי ב' פעמים אלא מאחר שהיו מטביעין אותן בנהר היו חוזרין וכובשין אותן בבנין משל לאחד שנטל את המקל והכה ב' בני אדם ושניהם קבלו את הרצועה ויודעים צערה כך היה צערן ושיעבודן של ישראל גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שנאמר כי ידעתי את מכאוביו רבי יוחנן אמר מה הסנה הזה עושין אותו גדר לגנה כך ישראל גדר לעולם ד"א מה הסנה הזה גדל על כל מים כך ישראל אינן גדילים אלא בזכות התורה שנקראת מים שנאמר (ישעיה נה) הוי כל צמא לכו למים ד"א מה הסנה הזה גדל בגינה ובנהר כך ישראל הם בעוה"ז ובעוה"ב ד"א מה הסנה עושה קוצין ועושה וורדין כך ישראל יש בהן צדיקים ורשעים א"ר פנחס הכהן ב"ר חמא מה הסנה הזה כשאדם מכניס ידו לתוכו אינו מרגיש וכשהוא מוציאה מסתרטת כך כשירדו ישראל למצרים לא הכיר בהן בריה כשיצאו יצאו באותות ובמופתים ובמלחמה ר' יהודה בר שלום אמר מה הסנה העוף נכנס לתוכו ואינו מרגיש וכשהוא יוצא כנפיו מתמרטות כך כשירד אברהם אבינו למצרים לא הכיר בו בריה וכשיצא וינגע ה' את פרעה ד"א מתוך הסנה ר' נחמן בנו של ר' שמואל בר נחמן אומר

פירוש הר"ש משאנץ על זרעים דף מו/א

משיקרחו. פירות הללו כשהן בוסר מכוסין בשערות דקות וכשמתחילין להתבשל מתקרחין מעט מעט ובגמר בישולן נופל הכל והן לבנים ובירו' (שם) א"ר חנינא בר פפא משיעשו קרחות קרחות לבנות

