



Chassidut: Parshat Beshalach – Spiritual Emancipation

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The *midrash* says that the Egyptian culture was so deeply rooted within the Jewish nation after 210 years of exile, that a part of the Pharaoh mentality accompanied them out of Egypt. Hashem did not lead the Jews through the land of the Pelishtim even though it was the quickest route to Mt. Sinai. He reasoned that perhaps the Jews might experience regret when they would encounter war with the Pelishtim and return to Egypt. This explanation is perplexing. The purpose of the Exodus was to become a nation and receive the Torah. Shouldn't they have taken the shortest path to get to Sinai?

Chazal say that Torah is more than just a culture; it is an experience of oneness with Hashem. Indeed, during Matan Torah, Hashem opened the gates of heaven and revealed to the Jewish people how the

entire universe is connected to Him. There were 26 generations from Adam until the giving of the Torah. The *gematriya* of the essential name of Hashem, *Yud Keh Vav Keh*, equals 26. Hashem kept the world in existence for 26 generations through His *middat hachesed*. However, once He offered the Torah, it was critical that the Jewish nation accept it, or the world would have been destroyed. They needed to adopt this culture of Torah, and even more so, the connection to Hashem that it fosters.

How could the Jews who were so affected by the Egyptian mindset accept the holy Torah and acquire genuine *yirat shamayim*? Hashem wanted them to confront the Pelishtim, who are the core enemy of Israel. The Pelishtim, an illiterate, cynical nation, are the antithesis of Torah, Hashem, and the Jewish nation. Hashem wanted *Bnei Yisrael* to see the stark contrast and reject the evil

Pelishti culture for the sweetness and pleasantness of Torah.

But ultimately Hashem discarded this plan. The Pelishti culture was powerful and seductive, and He was afraid that the Jews would succumb. So Hashem led the Jews back to the *Yam Suf*. This caused Pharaoh to strip off his mask and resolve to recapture the Jews again. The people cried to Hashem. They begged him to save them from Pharaoh and his visibly evil ways. It was a crucial, defining moment that completed their spiritual exodus from Egypt. Indeed, on Pesach we have two days of *Yom Tov*. One commemorates the actual physical exodus, and the other celebrates the spiritual exodus, when the Jewish people completely revamped their mindset and way of thinking.

May we merit to witness the full redemption speedily in our days.

Parshat Beshalach: Noteworthy Notes

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Rav Tzvi Meir Zilberberg notes that when we recite *Shirat Hayam* with joy it is a potent segula for healing of the body and soul. One's sins are forgiven, it purifies one's soul, uplift one's thoughts, helps one merit to sing songs in the future world and greet the *Mashiach*. What is the unique and mysterious power of *Shirat Hayam*?

Rav Akiva Tatz explains that there are three levels of viewing the world. The lowest level is that the world exists as an entity separate from Hashem. Hashem can override nature, but when He doesn't, the world exists on its own. The second level is one that conceives of Nature as a tool in the hands of the Creator. It is as if Hashem needs Nature to control the world. The third and highest level is the perception of Nature as Hashem's way of manifesting Himself in this world. This is the level of full consciousness that nothing exists outside of Hashem. Even one's own existence melts into the Divine essence. Nature is just a smoke screen that Hashem placed in this world to enable free choice. Everything exists by order of the Divine will. Therefore when a miracle occurs, a *tzaddik* will feel perfectly comfortable. In truth, miracles are

natural and nature is miraculous.

At *Kriat Yam Suf*, the Jews reached a very high level of clarity and closeness to Hashem. When they began to sing they started with "*Az Yashir*." The Maharal clarifies that "*Az*" means the one that rides over seven. The numerical value of aleph is one and that of *zayin* is seven. One represents the oneness of Hashem and seven connotes the disparity of parts. Hashem, the One, rides on the disparity of this world and controls all its aspects.

When we live *lemala min hazeman*, beyond time, we are able to see the past, present, and future simultaneously. At *Kriat Yam Suf* the Jewish people reached this level of "*Az*," the ability to see the past and future in the present moment. They saw how everything was part of one composite whole and made perfect sense. Normally we can only see one perspective, as our "vision" is limited. At *Kriat Yam Suf*, our vision was expanded and we perceived there was none except Hashem and that all that transpired was His doing.

Rav Yaakov Hillel explains that if we learn to accept our trials as opportunities, our lives will be much easier because we will not view

hardship as a punishment, but as a chance to develop potential.

Our lives are like music. We have challenging times, and we experience joy and accomplishment. The totality of the piece is its beauty. When the Jews saw the inclusive picture at *Yam Suf*, their immediate response was song. Song is the result of clearly experiencing that everything has meaning.

In Tehilim, the verse says, "*Motzi asirim bakosharot*." The gemara says that this verse refers to the exodus from Egypt. "*Bakosharot*" can be divided into two words, *bechi* and *shiro*t, cries and song. The exodus of Egypt contained both elements. *Shirat Hayam* brought together the disparate elements, singing and crying. The song coincided with *Bnei Yisrael*'s newly expanded perspective, that suffering too was part of the larger song.

The greatness of *Az Yashir* is reaching a new dimension. Recognizing that there is nothing other than Hashem elevates us to a different plane, where our sins are forgiven and our souls are purified.



Tu B'shevat

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

On Tu B'shevat we celebrate the new year of the trees in Israel. The Gemara writes that it is a special holiday because it marks the beginning of the trees' rebirth. At this time, most of the winter rain has already fallen and the sap in the trees are beginning to flow. How does this relate to man?

The Shem Mishmuel quotes a verse in Yishayahu, "Hashem says, just as rain... falls from the sky never to return, but to be soaked into the ground in order to produce life... so My words that come from My mouth are not empty, [but rather will produce life]." Just as rain revives the trees, the word of Hashem causes the human soul to come back to life. The purpose of the tree is to serve as a transport system between the nutrients of the ground and the fruit. In the same way, a Jew is the connective vehicle between heaven and earth. He unites the physical with the spiritual. Man is a combination of material and heavenly matter. He connects the upper and lower worlds by studying Torah and keeping the mitzvot.

The Hebrew word for tree, *ilan*, has the numerical value of 91. This equals the

numerical value of two essential names of Hashem, *Yud Keh Vuv Keh*, 26, and *Adnut*, 65. *Yud Keh* signifies that Hashem is in heaven. *Adnut* refers to Hashem as he expresses himself in this world. When man melds both aspects of spiritual and physical he produces fruit – *mitzvot*.

The Shem Mishmuel explains that just as rain galvanizes the tree into action so that the fruits will grow, the word of Hashem triggers the Jew to combine heaven and earth and produce fruit, *mitzvot*. When the long winter sets in man may go through a dormant state where he finds it hard to produce spiritually. The Torah Jew knows this is the time to soak in the rain, the *devar* Hashem. The Rambam writes that the optimum time to study Torah is at night. Long winter evenings can be utilized to attain vast stores of Torah knowledge and growth in *avodat* Hashem.

Tu B'shevat is the turning point when we start to see the budding of new fruit and the results of our hard labor. As we begin to sense the approach of Nissan, the month of redemption, a new spirit of life awakes within us. On Tu B'Shevat we celebrate the

transition from planting to fruit-bearing stage, the outcome of our efforts. Kabbalah teaches that the human heart is located 1/3 down the body. On Tu B'shevat when a 1/3 of the year has passed, the heart of man becomes rejuvenated.

We celebrate by partaking of the *Shivat Haminim*, the Seven Species, wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. At this time they are just beginning to sprout. Wheat represents wisdom. Barley signifies animal fodder. Man can reach great heights of knowledge or fall to the lowest animalistic depths. Our challenge is to control our animal instincts with our human wisdom. Wine represents the joy of living and serving Hashem. Figs signify patience because they take a very long time to grow. Pomegranates contain 613 seeds which symbolize the *mitzvot*. Olives correspond to the wisdom of Torah. Dates symbolize the *tzaddik* as it is written, "*Tzaddik k'tamar yifrach*, the righteous shall flourish like a date palm."

On Tu B'shevat we celebrate Man and his boundless potential. He is unique in that he can combine heaven and earth, and reach

Rebbetzin's Perspective II Part 6

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

Is there spiritual significance related to one's Hebrew birthday? Are our prayers more powerful or is there anything customarily done in Judaism on this day?

Answer: One of the things related to your *mazal* is your day of birth. A verse in Tehilim says, "*Ani hoyom yeliditicha, sheal memeni v'etna*. I have given birth to you today. Ask me and I will give it to you." Certainly *tefilot* are more potent on this day. The very elaborate birthday parties we see sometimes have no source in the Torah. The only birthday party mentioned in the Torah

was Pharaoh's. The reason is that the ultimate celebration is really the *hilula*, the day of one's death, when a person goes back to Hashem with hands full of achievements and accomplishments. Just being born is not a cause for celebration, although it is cause for reflection, thankfulness, and new resolutions for the coming year.