

Parshat Beshalach: Living Faith

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

Chazal say that one who recites *Az Yashir*, (the Song of the Sea) with joy is forgiven for his sins. What is the power of these words? After they crossed the sea, the Jewish people complained about a lack of water. Instead of condemning them, Hashem gave them *mitzvot*. How do we understand this? Furthermore, it seems surprising that after the Jewish people reached such heights of prophecy at the sea, that they protested to Hashem? How was it that their faith didn't sustain them?

The Maharal notes that three times during the course of events leading up to receiving the Torah, the word *v'ya'aminu* (they believed) is mentioned. This is to hint to the three levels of *emunah* that they reached. The first level is believing in Hashem's constant presence. Even in times of darkness when He chooses to hide His face, He is still there. The second level is believing that everything is in His control. The third level is *deveikut*, clinging to Him. Rav Gifter explains that during the splitting of the sea the Jews reached the heights of faith. When we are able to sense Hashem's presence, we have tremendous joy and clarity as the soul clings to its source. *Yirah* leads to *emunah* and joy, which ultimately can lead to shira, pure song to Hashem.

The Midrash says that when the generation of *Enosh* sinned with idolatry, the Torah uses the word *az* when describing the events of the era, and the world was doomed to destruction. Hashem sent the raging Flood to destroy

the world, filling dry land with water. Noach and Avraham rebuilt the world and the Jews eventually became the *dor deiah*, the generation of knowledge. They sang as they crossed the sea, and the Torah again uses the word *az*, "*Az yashir Moshe*." Then the Jews reached the heights of the pre-*Enosh* era and Hashem did the opposite and turned water into dry land.

Az connotes an aspect above time. The generation of *Enosh* took an eternal idea, belief in Hashem, and brought it down to the physical world of constriction. This effort was doomed. When the Jewish people said *Az* at the sea, they crossed the threshold from the natural world to the eternal world where they could see Hashem with incredible clarity. When one recites *Az yashir* with lucid vision, where the sea splits and we're able to see dry land and understand that it's Hashem running this world, we can reach a level of eternity. When we return to our spiritual core we are worthy to be forgiven.

How does one reach this level? Rav Matisyahu Salomon explains that faith comes naturally to all people. The question is where do we invest it? Do we trust other people, our own abilities, or Hashem? Just as migrant birds have a homing instinct, every Jew has an innate sense of direction, a built in compass that directs him towards his source, our Father in heaven. Every Jew is a believer because it is part of his inborn genetic makeup. Sins in the realm of *kedusha* such as eating non-kosher food and committing immoral acts weakens our *emunah*. The first commandment of

Anochi Hashem isn't so much to have faith in the Almighty but rather to guard and strengthen our *emunah* by doing *mitzvot* and avoiding sin. The Netivot Shalom says, when we will be asked, "*Nasata v'natata b'emunah*, the meaning of the question is, did you involve yourself in the *mitzva* of *emunah*? We have to work at making it a part of our daily life. The Leket V'halibuv says the time to do this is when things are going well so that when darkness descends we can draw strength from within.

Hashem lifted the Jews up to high levels at the sea but inwardly they weren't transformed. The only way for *emunah* to last is to ingrain it inside of us by doing *mitzvot*. This is why we were given more commandments at *Mara*. They were meant to root us in His will and connect us to Him. One of the *mitzvot* the people received there was *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* is a day that is above time. When we kindle the *Shabbat* candles we bring down the light of clarity and awareness of Hashem. We recognize that there is a Creator who runs the world and that everything that exists has purpose and meaning. The secret of *Shabbat* is the gift of *emunah*, of sensing Hashem in our everyday world, of seeing beyond the here and now. The Torah relates that each person got exactly the amount of *mahn* that he needed. Every person is given precisely what was determined for him at the start of the year. Our efforts are not the direct cause of our blessings, our faith and prayer is.

Chofetz Chaim-Venting #3

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Beinisch Ginsburg

What do you do when you need to hear *lashon hara* (evil talk) that is *l'toelet* (for a constructive purpose)? The Chofetz Chaim suggests that if you see the conversation heading towards negativity you should immediately say, "One second, do I need to know this? Hopefully the person speaking will be honest with you. If he says it will affect you or he hopes you can help him deal with it, it is permitted to listen. However, you shouldn't believe it fully, but suspect that it may be true and check into it further. However sometimes

the response to the question, "Do I need to know this?" is clear that you really don't. Asking right away if you need to hear something is a good way to avoid *lashon hara*. It's also a non-confrontational way to give gentle rebuke. The Chofetz Chaim points out that if you do this often enough, people will stop telling you *lashon hara*.

If by hearing someone's story you can turn the negativity into positive, it's a *mitzva* to listen. If a person mistakenly heard *lashon hara*, he

should immediately try to defend the person and explain why what was said was wrong. In this way he can undo the sin retroactively. But here too, one must be careful. If by defending the maligned person, more *lashon hara* will be said, it's better to keep quiet. If there are other people there who may listen to your defense after the speaker leaves, you should try to undo the *lashon hara*. Sometimes if you talk to a whole group at once, someone may say something negative. Therefore, if you can speak to each person privately to explain how

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what was said was wrong, you should do so.

Another instance when it is a *mitzva* to listen is when you know that it will calm down the speaker and he'll be less likely to tell others about it. However, you must be careful not to believe what you hear, although you may suspect it to be true. The Chofetz Chaim says that speaking *lashon hara* in order to assuage the worry in one's heart, may possibly be permitted, provided all conditions are met. This is based on the verse, "*Daaga b'lev ish yasichenu l'acherim.*" One may speak about

one's worries to get advice or help. The Sefat Emet offers a deeper interpretation. Hashem may take away your worries so the listener who is sharing your pain and doesn't deserve to suffer should be spared. Even so, the person venting has to be honest that his intention is not to hurt the other person but to ameliorate his aching heart. The Sefer Chassidim writes that when a person wants to get something off his chest, it's a *mitzva* for others to listen. But if he's telling it over to many people, then you shouldn't listen, and you should rebuke him.

Although the laws of *lashon hara* apply fully to married couples, if one is upset and the other can help him cope, it is permitted to listen with the primary goal to explain the situation in a positive way. Part of a healthy marriage is helping one's spouse deal with the challenges they are facing. If both the husband and wife feel free to unburden themselves, a lot of the small negative interactions that could potentially get bigger can be avoided.

Tu B'shevat: Focus on Eretz Yisrael

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Torah tells us, "*Ki ha'adam eitz hasadeh.*" Man is compared to a tree. The Ramchal writes that the early generations before Avraham defined reality. It was the era of roots. Avraham gave us the trunk-the visible side of spiritual projection. Unlike spiritual thinkers of his time, he saw that this world could be uplifted. Not everyone followed his path and from Avraham's tree sprouted branches and sub-branches which still remained part of one reality. In essence, we are all one people and we draw our spiritual energy from one source. If we look at it from this perspective, *Tu B'shevat* is in many ways the *Rosh Hashana* of our identity.

A person's roots are his past, yet some of these roots are meant to be our inherent faith which the Baal Hatanya says is the ultimate definition of every Jew. There is something within us that desires connection and rectification. If we make this point of faith inside of us real, it will show itself in our thought pattern and actions. This is the trunk, the visible part of the tree.

Fruit doesn't benefit the tree, it benefits others. Yet every part of the tree works in consonance to produce fruit. Similarly, one's good deeds are one's fruit. They are what affect others. Additionally, a person's speech is his fruit. In Hebrew, *niv* can mean either to express or a bud. To a large extent a person is what he says.

On *Tu B'shevat* we pray for a beautiful *etrog*. Why are we thinking about *Sukkot* now? The four species taken on *Sukkot* reflect four

different parts of the body. The *lulav* is the spine, the *hadassim* are the eyes, the *aravot* are the lips, and the *etrog* is the heart. The heart bridges the mind to the body. It is easy to believe intellectually, but true faith is found in the heart. When one prays for an *etrog*, one is really praying for a straight heart, for passion and for a profound connection with our Father in heaven.

Tu B'shevat is the holiday of Israel which is the *etrog*, the heart of the world. There is no place in the universe where the spiritual flow from above is as visible or accessible. Therefore there is a custom to partake of the *shivat haminim*, the seven species of the land, on this day.

Wheat – Wheat relates to the mind which is an integral aspect of our connection to Hashem. It takes human intellect to produce flour. Indeed we find in Gemara that a child begins the process of becoming a thinker in the human sense, when he can eat wheat.

Barley–In early times, barley, was used as animal fodder. It is a tragic mistake to dismiss the animal self. What we are meant to do is uplift physicality by letting our souls tell our bodies who and what to be.

Figs–The Gemara tells us that the tree of knowledge was a fig tree. Figs are usually eaten for pleasure. The pleasure of creativity is almost equaled by the pleasure of destruction. Our challenge is to bring both pleasures into the process of growth.

Pomegranate–All Jews are potentially as full of *mitzvot* as a pomegranate. Every Jewish soul is constructed in a way that the *mitzvot*

will resonate within, if reached and addressed in the right way. It is impossible for one Jew to keep all the *mitzvot* since some *mitzvot* are only applicable to Jews in specific circumstances. The idea is that we are one entity and that the collective of the Jewish nation can fulfill all the *mitzvot*.

Grapes–For a vineyard to flourish, it needs the right soil, climate, and rain. The soil is Israel, I, the vines are the Jewish body that contains a spark of the merit of our forefathers, the rain is Torah which runs from a high place downward and gives us life, and the sun is the light that shines through the *mitzvot*.

Dates–A righteous person is compared to a date tree. It grows straight and sprouts leaves on top. What defines a righteous man more than anything else is his straightness. We all have different inclinations. Some are inclined to be givers, which can lead to manipulation and crossing lines. Some believe in justice and punishment which can lead to corruption and cruelty. Being a righteous person means maintaining balance. This can only come from working on one's attributes. Life is about reaching that perfect equilibrium.

Olives–Olives must be pressed to extract their oil. Until one applies pressure, olives have little value. So too, who we are in essence, comes forth not in times of ease, but in times of challenge.

Tu Beshvat is a holiday of joy, a time to contemplate who we truly are. May all our efforts, our children, our words, and our deeds, bear fruit.