

Chassidut: Parshat Beshalach Spiritual Emancipation

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur 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.

Tehilim 123 The Handmaiden Near her Mistress

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

There are 15 *Shir Hamaalot* in *Tehilim*. The word *maalot* is very much like the word *madreget*- steps going up. *Metzudat David* quoting *Chazal* tell us that the 15 steps corresponded to the 15 steps that went from the *Ezrat Yisrael* to the *Ezrat Nashim*. The *Leviim* would stop at each step and recite or sing a different *Shir Hamaalot*. *Rabbeinu Sadya Gaon* notes that these psalms begin with *Shir Hamaalot* indicating that they were meant to be sung in an ever rising musical crescendo. Rav Hirsh suggests that it indicates a song of ascent, going from step to step on a spiritual high and rising to become what we were meant to be.

"Behold, as the eyes of slaves to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a handmaid to the hand of her mistress." Why is the word hand used twice? *Seforno* explains that the

same hand that gives you the handout is the hand that punishes. It also implies a sense of hanging in the balance, not knowing one's status, which Rav Hirsh says, is the apt description of the Jew in exile. *Seforno* explains that *Shir Hamaalot* indicates the step-by-step process from exile to redemption.

Rav Hirsh notes that the master represents the many nations that at one point or another have dominion over us. The mistress is *Kneset Yisrael*. We are either like a slave among masters, like a downtrodden people under the thumb of rulers and despots in the diaspora or like a mistress whose handmaiden (the other nations) are dependent on her. Our purpose in *galut* is not only punitive, but to be a light onto the nations and spread the word of Hashem.

"Our soul is fully sated with the ridicule of the

complacent, the contempt to the valley of doves." The dove is the symbol of *Am Yisrael*. Rashi explains, the Jew who is despised and treated with contempt remains proud to be a dove among the eagles. The word *gai* can mean a valley or chasm of the doves and it is a symbol of *Yerushalayim*. In fact, the valley right outside the walls of *Yerushalayim* is called *gei hinom*- the highs and lows, both are symbols of the ancient city.

Mizmor 124 is a continuation of this theme.

"Blessed is Hashem who didn't allow us to become prey to their teeth... our souls are like a bird that escaped from the trap." Doves mate for life and they always come home. *Am Yisrael* and Hashem are compared to a dove. Wherever a Jew ends up, he ultimately comes home.

Parshat Beshalach: Closing the Circle

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

In Parshat Beshalach, the Jewish people ask, "*Hayesh Hashem birkbeinu im ayin?*" (Is Hashem among us or not?) They had just experienced unbelievable miracles in Egypt and at the Red Sea. They witnessed miracles daily in the desert. How did they now doubt Hashem's presence? Why did Amalek come immediately after this incident to attack the Jews? What was the significance of Moshe's hand being held up high during the battle?

Amalek's attack was a reflection of a certain coldness that had set in among the Jews. They didn't feel a connection to Hashem. Surprisingly, it is possible to live a life filled with Torah and *mitzvot* devoid of consciousness. This is true in the realms of thought and of action. We must stop and ask ourselves, "Are we serving Hashem with feeling? Do we sense Him accompanying us or are we walking alone?"

The Mishna says that during the battle with Amalek, when the Jewish people looked

upwards and subjugated their hearts to Hashem, they were victorious. Reaching a level of closeness and oneness with Hashem means serving Him with the mind and the heart. Only then can we win the battle with our evil inclination.

The Netivot Shalom points out that the Jewish people encountered Amalek precisely before they reached Sinai. When we commit to begin growing, Amalek rears his head and says, "Who do you think you are? How can you handle this?" That's the "*Hayesh Hashem b'kirbeinu*," the doubtful enemy. We have to fight that inner voice.

The Rebbe of Vizhnitz taught, "*V'haser satan milfnanei ume'achareinu*." When we are inspired to reach for greatness, the Satan begins to question, "You? Look what you just did, look what you are about to do!" We must not let that doubt overtake us.

Rav Wolbe explains that when the people asked, "*Hayesh Hashem*," they weren't

questioning Hashem's existence. They questioned his method of interacting with them. Is it on a level of *yesh*, somewhat comprehending Hashem, or on a level of *ayin*, not understanding Him at all?

Rabbi Tatz notes that the hands are the limbs of action and the head is the limb of understanding. When the hands are held higher than the head, we affirm that practice comes before understanding. The Jews said, "*Naaseh v'nishma*," we will do what is true and right regardless of our inclinations. In contrast, Amalek put his ego first. Moshe dramatically demonstrated with his hands held high above his head that what matters most is action.

Singing to Hashem means living a life dedicated to Him, putting the hands over the head. We must walk with Hashem, and dedicate our mindset to beautifying the *mitzvot*, feeling connected to Him, and elevating our spiritual, mental, and emotional state to serve Him.