Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

תורת אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

Volume 17 Number 47

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Chassidut: Parshat Beshalach

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 Pharoh 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 Pharoh to strip off his mask and resolve to recapture the Jews again. The people cried to Hashem. They begged him to save them from Pharoh 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.

Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 17 Part IV

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

Man is described in the Torah as a medaber. His power of speech distinguishes him from the rest of creation. Although it is a physical ability and if a person's vocal cords are damaged he will not be able to speak, it has a divine aspect. When a child is born, although he possesses the tools to speak, he cannot form words yet as his brain isn't fully developed. We see that the power of speech is the point at which the abstract and physical in man meet. That is why when the Torah describes the creation of man, it says- "Hashem formed man from earth," that is the physical aspect of man. "And he blew into him a living soul," that is the divine aspect. "And Adam became a living being," says Rashi quoting Targum -ruach mimalela, he turned into a speaking being. The human is the only creature on earth that is a combination of the physical and spiritual. Inanimate objects, vegetation, and animals are purely physical while angels are solely spiritual. Only man is a combination of the two exemplified by speech which makes him unique and the purpose of creation.

In order to speak man needs both physical tools and intelligence to express thought and emotion. Speech has the power to draw us towards physicality or spirituality or ideally create the proper harmony between the two. Words have tremendous power to cause pain and joy and to build and destroy worlds. Therefore, the Torah puts great emphasis on using the power of speech in the proper way.

It's not easy. Learning the laws and consequences of loshon hara can help, but is not enough. We have to bring Hashem into the picture. And the key to avoiding loshon hara is to train ourselves to give every Jew the benefit of the doubt. If we are judgmental, it will affect us emotionally and cause us to speak evil against others.

Giving the benefit of the doubt all the time sounds artificial. It's difficult to stretch our imagination to try to find reasons for every seemingly negative behavior. What can help us is something I learned in my teaching career. As a young teacher I was nervous about PTA. I wasn't very comfortable pointing out the failings of my students. So, I started the conversation with positive talk and then transitioned over to constructive criticism. I saw the parents get a little tense and then they immediately responded with, "Yes, but…" And then came a long explanation as to why their daughter acted the way she did. This taught me how to avoid loshon hara. If it's my daughter, no matter what you tell me, I'll find a positive spin on it. Every Jew is a child of Hashem. We are all sisters and brothers. If someone tells me something negative about my sister, she might be right, but I'll find something positive to say.

The more we focus on bringing kavod shamayim into this world and understanding that the value of life is not feeding our ego, but submerging it in order to open ourselves up to Hashem and His glory, the easier it will become. On a superficial level, living up to these standard seems very demanding. In truth, it's the key to a peaceful, happy life. Seeing the good in everyone around us eliminates feelings of jealousy and deprivation and engenders the feeling that we are all one family working together to do the will of Hashem.

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Ecstatic Emunah: Parshat Beshalach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowtiz-Stein

Parshat Beshalach relates the narrative of Kriat Yam Suf and the subsequent burst of song praising Hashem for His salvation. At that point, "The nation revered Hashem, and had faith in Hashem..." Yet we find that when Moshe approached Bnei Yisroel about their impending salvation, even before the onset of the plagues, the Torah says, "The people had faith." What was the difference between the earlier silent belief and this one that inspired Bnei Yisroel to sing?

On the simplest level, Bnei Yisroel's faith was strengthened with the miracle of their salvation, but now it was also a faith of a higher level. As Rabbi Schwadron says, citing the Rambam, the intellect knows there is a Creator, but the heart refuses to accept this. When the heart and the intellect are in conflict, we rationalize, and the desire of the heart usually wins. To the extent that we can subdue our desire, that's how strong our faith will be in the Supreme Being.

It is for this reason, says The Heart of Emunah, that teaching our children about God cannot be limited to imparting knowledge; but must involve experiences that generate love of the Creator that will penetrate the heart and cut through intellectual blockages.

This is the difference between the two believing's. While Bnei Yisroel earlier understood intellectually that they were to be redeemed, that realization remained in the mind, never entering their hearts. In fact, as their burdens grew heavier, it became even harder to relate to God and His message. As Tallelei Chaim observes, at the splitting of the Sea, Bnei Yisroel experienced not only their own salvation, but also physically saw their oppressors drowning. Bnei Yisroel had been taken out of Egypt; now Egypt was taken out of them. Not only were they physically free, but they were also psychologically free. To become true servants of Hashem, we must free ourselves from the entrapments of the world.

The greatest work is letting go of the sense of entitlement and arrogance that we are actually in control. My heart, my desires become stronger than my intellect, and I become a slave to my addictions. We have to be ready to see God's light in every aspect of our lives. That Bnei Yisroel continued to fear the Egyptians as they pursued them, showed a lack of faith; Bnei Yisroel was ascribing greater power to the Egyptians than to God. That's why the angels recommended that Hashem not save them. When they removed that fear and recognized Hashem as the only Power, their faith became strong enough to proclaim, "This is my God and I will glorify Him."

One may "know" a truth with either the heart or the mind, yet total knowledge is only achieved when the two are fused and knowledge becomes internalized, writes R Weinberg. Our challenge is to live our faith with every fiber of our being, to praise Hashem with every breath we take.

Darchei Mussar brings an analogy from the Alter of Kelm. Picture a man who has never tasted bread. A philosopher approaches him extolling the wonder of bread while a second philosopher proves the opposite. Once the man eats bread and feels satisfied, no arguments will influence him. It is the physical experience that cements the belief.

Taking it one step further, a disciple once tells his Rebbe that he doesn't believe and then asks the Rebbe if he believes. The Rebbe points to the table and asks his student if he believes that is a table. The disciple answers, "I don't have to believe; I know it's a table." "Just so," respond the Rebbe, "I don't have to 'believe' in God; I know God."

This was the level of palpable faith Bnei Yisroel reached at the Yam Suf, that they could point, "THIS is my God..." Then they reached an even higher, emotional level, connecting their entire existence with all their senses to this God, writes Rabbi Sternbach. Interestingly, when Hashem led Bnei Yisroel through a long, circuitous route out of Egypt, Bnei Yisroel didn't complain. Only when they saw the Egyptians in actual pursuit, did their emotions kick in, so that they cried out, notes Rabbi S. Grosbard. First comes emunah/faith. Yirah/awe, fear, comes with reiyah/seeing, the involvement of the senses, and that arouses emotion.

The women had already internalized this emotional, experiential faith. They accompanied themselves with tambourines they had taken out of Egypt, already knowing within the essence of their being that they would need to sing. And in fact, the splitting of Yam Suf was all about love, writes the Netivot Shalom. In this kind of relationship, the yirah/awe inspires yirah/fear that somehow we will disappoint our Father Who loves us so.

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