

בשלה  
Beshalach

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## SONG OF ACCOMPLISHMENT

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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YITZY LANNER ('19)

TY KAY ('18)

SHEVI ZAK ('17)

AVIGAYIL BROIDE ('18)

Johann Sebastian Bach is quoted as saying: "Music is an agreeable harmony for the honor of God and the permissible delights of the soul." In this week's parsha this couldn't be more true! We call this

shabbat "Shabbat Shira" to highlight the shir that Bnei Yisrael sang after they crossed the Yam Suf and saw the sea come crashing down on their former masters, the Egyptians.

אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את-השירה הזאת

"Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael sang this song..."

(Shmot 15:1)

They were so overcome with joy and elation that there were no words - only shir.

Why did the Jewish people wait until now to sing a shir? Why didn't the people burst forth with spontaneous song upon their departure from Mitzrayim, once they tasted freedom for the first time?

As Bnei Yisrael were standing on the banks of the Yam Suf and the Egyptian army behind them, Moshe lifts his eyes heavenward and begins to daven for Divine assistance. Hashem responds:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, מַה-תִּצְעַק אֵלַי  
דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּסְעוּ

"And Hashem said to Moshe, why are you crying out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them travel"

(Shmot 14:15)

What does this mean? Who else should Moshe be calling out to? Isn't prayer the best option at this point? Don't we rely on tefillah to help us in difficult and challenging situations?!

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen of Dvinsk (1843-1926) in his work, Meshech Chochma, explains that until now

the Jewish people had followed Moshe like sheep following a shepherd. Despite the fact that they so often seemed to doubt Moshe's ability and leadership, at the end of the day, he was their shepherd, they believed in him, and they were prepared to follow him into the sea. However, it is here that Hashem turns to Moshe and says, "The people have clearly demonstrated their willingness to follow (they followed you out of Mitzrayim), they must now demonstrate their ability and willingness to take the lead." Hashem is telling Moshe: Now is not the time for prayer! It is not a lack of prayer or supplication that is holding up this process. Tell the people they must go into the Yam Suf first and you will follow them! I need Bnei Yisrael to take initiative. I need them to demonstrate that they have the inner strength to do what is right and take the "bull by horns" even if their leader is not leading the charge."

Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik zt'l explains that shir (or shira) is appropriate only when one attains a victory, and to be a victor one must actively participate in the struggle. There was no shira upon leaving Mitzrayim because Bnei Yisrael were simply being "followers". Shir can only be sung when one has accomplished something. Shir is a culmination of one's work, effort, and struggle. After Bnei Yisrael crossed the Yam Suf, they were able to sing shira. They had to literally jump into the unknown and experience an event that could not be articulated with words, but needed the emotion and power that a shir provides.

Throughout our lives we experience many challenges. How often do we wait for someone to help us or hold our hands along the "treacherous waters" of life? We see from here that if we desire a life that we can proudly sing about, a life of accomplishment and fulfillment, we must be willing to take the initiative, actively participate in the struggle, and initiate our own personal redemption.

## A LEAP OF FAITH

YITZY LANNER ('19)

"I REMEMBER YOU, THE DEVOTION OF YOUR YOUTH, your love like a bride, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown" (Yirmiyahu 2:2). Hashem expressed to Yirmiyahu haNavi how

proud he was of the Jews for leaving Egypt and following him into the desert, which lacked any food, drink, or shelter.

Why would Hashem tell Yirmiyahu that He was proud of the Jewish people for following him into the desert? Why does He consider this to be a praiseworthy act on our part when we simply wanted to get out of Egypt whichever way we could? Why was Hashem so impressed with the Jewish people?

In this week's parsha, Parshat Beshalach, as the Jewish people are leaving Mitzrayim and approaching the Yam Suf, they see Pharaoh and the Egyptian army chasing after them. Immediately the Jews start complaining to Moshe for taking them out of Egypt just to die in the desert. It would have been better to stay in Egypt and live as slaves, they say, than to be redeemed from slavery only to be killed.

From this week's parsha it is evident that the Jews were actually reluctant to follow Moshe into the desert. Humans are, clearly, creatures of habit. We learn to make do with what we are given no matter how difficult the conditions may be. The Jews had become accustomed to living in the land of Egypt and being slaves.

Despite being slaves, they didn't have any big responsibilities or any big decisions that they had to make. They became comfortable with their lifestyle in Mitzrayim and were therefore somewhat hesitant to follow Moshe into the desert.

Due to this fact, Hashem was very pleased and appreciative of the Jews for following him into the desert. It was a very difficult decision for the Jews to make: leaving the lives they were comfortable with to take a giant leap of faith and follow Moshe and Hashem into the desert and the Yam Suf.

Since the Jews decided to go out of their comfort zone and follow Hashem with pure belief, Hashem was very proud and impressed with their decision.



# SHEDDING A SLAVE MENTALITY

TY KAY ('18)

THE STORY OF THE JEWS LEAVING EGYPT IS PERHAPS the most famous one in the entire Torah. After hundreds of years of harsh slavery and ten miraculous plagues, the Jews pack up their bags and exit Egypt. Following an Egyptian pursuit and attempted re-enslavement of the Jews, Bnei Yisrael cross the Yam Suf and are finally free. However, the question must be asked. Was it really so simple? Is one of the most important stories of our nation and the beginning of our formation as a people just about not being slaves anymore?

The story of our Exodus from Egypt is not simply the physical transition from slavery to freedom. Rather, it is a deep psychological transition which can be witnessed in Bnei Yisrael's reactions following Yetziat Mitzraim.

In Parshat Vaeira, the following pesukim appear:

“Therefore, say to the Children of Israel, ‘I am Hashem – and I shall remove you from beneath the burdens of Egypt, and I will rescue you from their labor, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements. And I shall take you to Me as a nation, and I shall be a God to you. And you will know that I am Hashem, your God, Who takes removes you from beneath the burdens of Egypt’” (Shmot 6:6-7).

It is highly intriguing that Hashem repeats that He removes the burdens of the Jews from Egypt. He begins with that as the first of the four expressions of redemption, but then later concludes with it as well. The reason for this is that the first burden is a physical one. However, the second more strenuous burden is a physical burden – a slave mentality. Even after leaving Egypt, the Jews still viewed themselves as slaves who were not independently thinking and had gotten used to the life in Egypt. The Jews had not yet mentally accepted that they were free people.

This is why the Exodus is such an instrumental feat in our nation's history. It was our people's transition

from a nation who had become complacent with being slaves, to a nation who strived for greater things. Hopefully we can all break free of our own mental prisons, and strive for excellence.

## TIME TO TRANSITION

SHEVI ZAK ('17)

IN PARSHAT BESHALACH, THE JEWS HAVE FINALLY ESCAPED EGYPT. God splits the sea, the Jews are all set to go to Israel, everything seems great. Then, instead of taking the Jews directly to Israel, the pasuk says:

וַיְהִי, בְשַׁלַּח פַּרְעֹה אֶת-הָעָם, וְלֹא-נָחַם אֱלֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֲרָץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים, כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא: כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים, פֶּן-יִנְחַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה--וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרַיִם

*“When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Plishtim, because that was near. For God said, “Lest the people change their minds when they see war and return to Egypt.”*

(Shmot 13:17)

This brings up a major question. If the land is near, isn't that easier and more convenient? Shouldn't that be a reason why God would take the Jews on that path, not why He wouldn't take them that way? Additionally, why would the people want to go back to Egypt if they saw war?

Chazal give a very interesting answer. They explain that the reason God took the Jews on a different path is that He wanted the Jews to learn how to fight for themselves, instead of depending on miracles.

Before the Jews left Egypt, God fought their battles. He brought the ten plagues and essentially forced Pharaoh to free them. Now that they are free, God wants the Jews to learn to put in their hishtadlut and work for themselves. However, up until now they have depended on God for help getting through their difficulties. Therefore, God understood that they were not ready to be plunged into war with the Plishtim, because they had no experience in fighting for themselves and would most likely lose and run back to Egypt. Instead, he took them through a longer route where they could transition, mature and prepare before fighting the Plishtim.

The parsha ends with the Jews fighting Amalek. Once they had had time to grow, after taking the longer path instead of the nearer one, and to prepare for independence, they were able to put in their own hishtadlut and work for themselves, instead of depending on God completely. Only then were they able to fight and successfully defeat Amalek.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT PERSPECTIVE

AVIGAYIL BROIDE ('18)

A pasuk in this week's parsha says:

וַיָּבֹאוּ מְרֵתָהּ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשָׁתוֹת מִיַּם מְמָרָה  
כִּי מְרִים הֵם עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מְרָה

*"They came to Marah, but they could not drink water from Marah because it was bitter; therefore, it was named Marah."*

(Shmot 15:23)

Why does the pasuk say that the water was bitter?

Imagine walking into a new school and asking the first two kids you see: How are the kids? The classes? The sports? The first kid responds saying the kids are all losers, the classes are all boring, and our school is terrible at sports. The second kid responds by saying the kids are amazing, the classes are engaging, and the sports are great. You might ask, if these kids are going to the same classes and they're playing on the same teams, how do they have such different views?

It is human nature that someone who is pessimistic will see everything negatively. On the other hand, to an optimist, everything seems great. This example is similar to someone looking at another and seeing that he has ketchup on his shirt. He looks at someone else and sees that he has ketchup on his face. He looks at a third person and sees that he too has ketchup on him, until he finally takes off his glasses and realizes that the ketchup was on his glasses. Whatever state one is in, this is how he will view things.

"The Jews came to Marah, but they could not drink the water because they were bitter."

At first glance, it seems that the pasuk is referring to the water being bitter and that is why the people couldn't drink it. The Kotzker Rebbe explains that the reference is to the people, not the water. The people found the water to be bitter because they were pessimistic.

Instead of going through life complaining and always nitpicking tiny details, it is much more productive to live life as an optimist and everything will automatically will seem better.

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