

PARSHAS BESHALACH

תש"פ

This week, Klal Yisroel finally leave Egypt.

The easiest way to go from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel is up the coast—but Hashem did not choose that path. It was too close. The Mechiltah asks the question—why didn't Hashem choose the shorter, less difficult route? The coastal route had many oases along the way. Why specifically go through the midbor?

The Mechiltah answers that if they would arrive in Eretz Yisroel in just two short weeks after yetzias mitzrayim, each Jew will go straight to earning a parnossah and they won't be involved with Torah. Hashem put them in a midbor for 40 years where they subsisted only on man and the waters of the be'er. They had nothing to do but learn Torah all day. This way, the Torah would be absorbed into their entire bodies. Then they could engage in parnossah without losing their connection to Torah and Hashem.

Klal Yisroel were sunk in the tumoh of Egypt for generations. Then they had a full year of the makkos where Hashem lifted them up rapidly from level to level. They saw so many nissim—climaxed by gilui Shechinah of makkas bechoros. They saw all the avodo zoros destroyed in front of them. But just seeing nissim and niflaos is not enough. In order to absorb all the lessons and have it make a deep impression on them, they needed to be immersed in Torah non-stop for a certain period of time. They had to get Egypt out of their being.

How long would that take? The plan was to take two years. Then the incident of the meraglim changed the plan. It is a difficult parsha. These meraglim were great people—the part of Klal Yisroel who experienced the entire process of leaving Egypt. They saw all the nissim and saw how Hashem's power is unlimited. They saw how Hashem utterly decimated Pharaoh's large army in Yam Suf. They should have trusted in Hashem's promise that they could easily conquer Eretz Yisroel from the Canaanim. But deep down they were nervous. They weren't sure they could do it. That means two years of nissim was not enough to make it a deep part of their being.

Hashem decided they needed another 38 years in the midbor. What did they do all day? The Rambam says they got up in the morning and heard shiurim from Moshe and then multiple chazorah shiurim—day after day for 40 years. Why? Because the Torah had to go through their whole being.

There is a lot in Parshas Beshalach which highlights the primary importance of limud haTorah.

After kriyas Yam Suf, Moshe had to pull them away from Yam Suf. When Klal Yisroel saw the entire army wiped out. They thought they could now go back to Egypt in safety. There was no one to fear from anymore—the danger was over. But no—Moshe said we are never going back. They have to go full speed ahead through a desolate midbor—but not up the coast.

And they went three days without water—Chazal say it refers to Torah. The Mechiltah is saying that going three days without Torah caused them to be thirsty and this caused them to rebel against Hashem—they were really thirsty for Torah but they were not getting what they needed! The result was bitterness and complaining. Rabbi Yehoshua asks, if Klal Yisroel had a problem, why didn't they respectfully ask for a solution—calmly and patiently? Why are they complaining and screaming until Moshe does a miracle to bring them water? It is because they were missing Torah.

This answer is found in our everyday davening which we easily overlook.

Every morning we say that Hashem will open our hearts to His Torah and place within us love and fear of Him. What comes first? What is the first step to ahavas Hashem and yiras Hashem? Limud haTorah—this is what brings a person to ahavah and yiroh and then naturally you want to do Hashem's will with a full heart. You won't be confused and disoriented. You won't be bitter and complaining as long as you are connected to Hashem through limud haTorah

What are we saying every morning?

In order to make a deep bond with Hashem—to have love and fear—i.e. to have a real bond with Hashem, you need limud haTorah first. Without it, your attitude towards life is completely different. In the midbor, without Torah, Klal Yisroel's attitude was negative, confused and unproductive. If they had a steady diet of Torah, Klal Yisroel would have been calm and solution oriented. Moshe Rabbeinu realized that if a Jew goes three days without limud Torah he gets disconnected and his attitude becomes negative and despairing. His whole bond with Hashem is lost. Right then and there, Moshe Rabbeinu makes a takono to read kriyas haTorah in public on Mondays, Thursdays and Shabbos Mincha. The ongoing bond with Hashem must be maintained throughout the week with limud haTorah.

The Mechiltah at the beginning of the parsha says Klal Yisroel had to take off a certain amount of time immersed in Torah in order for it to be absorbed into their being. Once the Torah becomes part of who you are, then you can go to earn a parnossah and you can stay connected to Torah your whole life. Without having that period of complete immersion, your bond won't last. Going three days without limud Torah will already weaken your commitment to Hashem.

Which mitzvos were they given in Moroh? One of them was Poroh Adumoh. Why? It wasn't practical at all! They were given mitzvos just to be learned and to be preoccupied with them and to immerse themselves in them. Not being osek in Torah for its own sake will separate you from Hashem.

Then Klal Yisroel came to Refidim. Why is it called Refidim? Rashi explains they got weakened in their learning Torah. Remember—they were living in a completely supernatural environment being constantly reminded of Hashem's existence and His power. Still, they could get used to it. After a while you stop getting impressed by fantastic nissim—because nissim become the new normal state you live in constantly—and you lose your connection. They stopped taking their limud Torah seriously. By lessening their connection to Torah, they were vulnerable to attack. Amoleik moves in. When we are totally connected to Torah, the nations are afraid to approach us.

From the beginning, to the middle, until the end of the parsha, there is one theme—our connection to Torah keeps our connection to Hashem.

There are two ways of going through life. One way is where you dutifully fulfill your obligation to learn sometime after shacharis and between mincha and maariv. Maybe even a daf yomi shiur. But then after you close the sefer, Hashem is out of your mind. You are disconnected from Torah, from Hashem, from Yiddishkeit—from everything. This is exactly what Hashem did not want to happen when Klal Yisroel came to Eretz Yisroel. Hashem knew only after you can make Torah a central

part of your life, can you go on to make a parnossah and you won't be disconnected from Hashem throughout the day.

But it needs to be built on a stage in your life where you are totally immersed in Torah and nothing else is on your mind all day. After that, you know that Torah is your life. It is not secondary to life. It is life itself and the connection that it gives you to Hashem defines who you are all the time—in everything you do.

Without it, we are lost to confusion and vanity. We go adrift and become vulnerable to negativity and threats from hostile enemies. Hashem wants us to be connected to Him in every situation in life—no matter what we do. But that only happens when one stage in your life is dedicated single-mindedly to learning and absorbing Torah. Once that is driven home, and we know deep down ki heim chayeinu, then we are safe to proceed to another stage. We aren't just goyim who don't eat this or that. Our whole identity is defined by the Torah and everything else is secondary.

Having access to the manna and water from the be'er in the midbar had two functions. 1) It freed Klal Yisroel from having to spend time earning a parnossah and let them be immersed in limud Torah. 2) It taught us a lesson in bitachon. Hashem provides parnossah even though we are making our own efforts. We can't cheat and then expect Hashem to help us succeed. A person who doesn't follow Shulchan Aruch in his business is betraying his identity as a ben Torah. Hashem doesn't want to give you brocho in your efforts to earn a livelihood when you try to make it through unethical means. Being a ben Torah doesn't depend on wearing the right suit or the right hat. It depends on acting according to the Torah's demands.

If you are fortunate enough to spend more years in beis midrash—how wonderful. But for those who don't, their years in Yeshiva are so vital to setting up the rest of their lives as defining their essence as a ben Torah and connecting to Hashem by limud haTorah throughout their lives.