

## Part I

To understand the Parsha we must understand the geography of the region we are talking about: The Nile River starts in Africa, through Egypt, and comes at the end as a delta into the Mediterranean Sea. Ramses is at the eastern-most corner of the delta, near the Sinai Peninsula. From there, you can just go north up the coast through the Gaza strip into Eretz Yisroel. But Hashem doesn't take them in that direction. They go due south to Sukkos which is near Yam Suf. They are on the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez, which makes sense if you are on your way out of Egypt. But then Hashem says to go back around to the western side of the Gulf – in the direction of Egypt – to Pi Hachiros next to Baal Tzefone. It is the southern border of Egypt near Migdol, which is a military camp.

Pharaoh gets nervous. Pharaoh stored the treasures amassed by Yosef away from the population centers and protected by the military camp of Migdol and by the god of money, Baal Tzefone. All of a sudden, Klal Yisroel come all the way back to that area – they are apparently coming for the money. Pharaoh thought he could bounce back with the money he had in this treasure house in Migdol, and now he sees Klal Yisroel are coming to get it. But he is confident he can stop them because they are surrounded on all sides and cannot escape.

Pharaoh should have been shattered by makkas bechoros. But Hashem gives him strength to pursue his evil plans till the end. He comes charging down with 600 high quality chariots, many other chariots and soldiers and the entire military camp at Migdol. They all go into the sea to catch Klal Yisroel. They are all there and they drown in the sea. Now the gold and silver are exposed and no one is guarding it. This explains a strange midrash that says that the bizas hayam was greater than bizas mitzrayim – it is referring to the treasure of Yosef at Migdol.

We learn very important lessons from this story. Before leaving Egypt, Hashem tells Moshe to ask Klal Yisroel to request booty from the Egyptians before they leave. Hashem explains that He doesn't want Avrohom to complain that He fulfilled the promise to enslave them but didn't fulfill the promise that they would leave with great riches. But this is strange because only seven days later, Klal Yisroel will become unbelievably wealthy from the bizas hayam. Why can't Hashem wait seven days to fulfill His promise to Avrohom? We see the importance of keeping a promise. Hashem doesn't want seven days to pass to give Avrohom a reason to complain. Klal Yisroel shouldn't think for seven days that Hashem is not fulfilling His promise to Avrohom Ovinu. This is a very important point, but it is a side-point to the overall parsha.

We learned previously that Egypt became a world power because of Yosef. Pharaoh owed his entire empire to Yosef. Yet he didn't hesitate to persecute Yosef's nation when he felt threatened by them. He conveniently "forgot" all the good that Yosef did for Egypt. Besides everything else, Egypt was guilty of lacking appreciation for what Yosef did for them. This is not a minor issue. The Torah is very emphatic that people who do not have the trait of gratitude should not be a part of Klal Yisroel. Ammon and Moav cannot enter the Jewish community after they convert because they lack this trait. Hashem responds harshly to it. Since the Egyptians didn't appreciate how they got all this wealth, they lost all of it. The direct consequence of not appreciating something is losing it. It is a major lesson we learn from this parsha.

Pharaoh got nervous because he is about to lose the treasures of Yosef. But he refuses to acknowledge that those treasures came from these very people he is pursuing. Similarly, the Egyptians give up their horses to pursue Klal Yisroel after Hashem took them out, even though they saved these animals from makkas borod because they feared Hashem. If money is on the line, all one's principles and moral standards quickly go out the window.

Hashem strengthened Pharaoh's heart and he pursued Klal Yisroel. What does this mean? The Rambam says Hashem actually took away Pharaoh's free-will. He became a puppet and wasn't really making these decisions. The Seforno – and also implicit in the Ramban – offer a different explanation. He says that even if Pharaoh would want to keep the Jews in Egypt, a normal human being would have certainly caved under the pressure that the makkos were creating. It was the makkos which were threatening to take away Pharaoh's free-will, and Hashem gave Pharaoh enough emotional strength to withstand the pressure from the makkos and continue to do what he himself really wanted to do. Which was to refuse to let Klal Yisroel go and chase after them after they left and Egypt was in a state of collapse.

So according to the Ramban and Seforno, Pharaoh is deciding to endanger everything that is left – even his life – in order to save his money – even after seeing ten makkos and gilui Shechinoh and everything. This is the observation Rabbi Akiva made. Some people feel their money is even more valuable than their very lives. During the Great Depression and the Wall Street crash in the

late 20's some businessmen jumped off buildings and committed suicide. Why? Without money, some people feel life is just not worth living. People get skewed priorities in life.

There are different types of suicide. Some are depressed. But some have built a fake image to live their entire lives. And when that illusion was exposed, they can't face the world as they really are. Krias Shma declares that the real meaning of our lives is our connection to Hashem above all else.

There is an interesting dispute among Chazal if Pharaoh survived kriyas Yam Suf. Some feel that if he was left to live after everything else is gone, it is the biggest punishment you can imagine. He has to go back alone on foot to Egypt as a total failure – from being the ruler of the greatest power in the world to being a nothing. Most meforshim say this devastation was the ultimate punishment for Pharaoh. Hashem says Egypt will finally know that I am Hashem – seeing the total devastation at Yam Suf, after being the highest nation, will teach Egypt a lesson that Hashem is in charge of the world.

Just realize what Hashem was doing. He turned the exposed sea bed into dry land. It should have been too muddy for any chariot to make any progress through it. But Hashem is drawing them in by making it dry. The Egyptians knew quite well that Hashem could make things horrible for them and spare Klal Yisroel. He did this with makkas dam and makkas choshech. Why didn't they assume Hashem would also spare Klal Yisroel from the walls of water crashing back down while they would drown? Why weren't the Egyptians more cautious and skeptical about what's happening? We see that when people are blinded by their desire, they can't read the danger signs that are so clear to everyone else. All they saw was that it is now easier to pursue Klal Yisroel since the ground became dry.

Klal Yisroel realized the unbelievable chesed Hashem did and sang shiroh. Each Jew saw the Egyptian who made them suffer be punished and killed in front of their eyes. They saw Hashem's detailed cheshbon of reward and punishment play out before them.

What is the purpose of all the things we are reading? It is not just a nice story. It teaches us basic lessons. One is that hakoras hatov is a fundamental middoh in the Torah. The Chovos Halevovos says you can't adequately serve Hashem without this middoh. Conversely, if you don't have this middoh, you don't have a place in Klal Yisroel. The ultimate punishment is that Hashem will take it away.

Another deep lesson we learn is the power of the yetzer horo and free-will. The yetzer horo can blind you to the realities that are hitting you in the face. There was a person who railed against the covid vaccine and died from corona. People get so far into their own delusion that they overlook obvious dangers. The mitzvah of bechiroh chofshis is to take your life in your hands and stop being pushed around by outside and internal pressures. Take control of your life.

Pharaoh exemplified the ultimate yetzer horo of ego and power and money. It became his whole identity and he was willing to lose everything to save it. If people would take one step back and ask themselves what makes life worth living, if they were honest they will say it is their ego or their illusion of power. If they lose it, there is nothing else to live for. A frum Jew sometimes gets pulled into this illusion and obsession with ego or image and he forgets that a Jew's life is about avodas Hashem.

This is what Moshe tells Pharaoh – we left Egypt to serve Hashem with everything we have. We don't know what He will ask of us. And in the end, He wants our entire being.

This is why the midrash says Klal Yisroel said Shma Yisroel when they were walking through the Yam Suf – they declared that their love of Hashem is the highest value in their lives. We are willing give up everything – life and money – for our connection to Hashem, because it is the most meaningful thing in our lives.

## Part II

We began talking earlier about different aspects leading up to kriyas Yam Suf.

Chazal describe kriyas Yam Suf as Klal Yisroel's gain and Egypt's loss. They lost all the wealth that Yosef assembled for the Egyptian empire. A foundation of Torah is the middoh of hakoras hatov. If you lack this middoh, the punishment is that you lose the thing you fail to be grateful for.

Hashem promised Avrohom that in return for his children being enslaved and persecuted, they will leave Egypt with great wealth. In reality, Klal Yisroel is going to receive an overwhelming amount of booty from the bizas hayam seven days after they leave. Hashem knew this but still insisted that Klal Yisroel also borrow items and receive wealth from the Egyptians before they left. Why?

Hashem didn't want anyone to think He doesn't fulfil His promises, even for a second.

The gemara records that at the time of Alexander the Great, the Egyptians came to him to sue Klal Yisroel for the items they borrowed and never returned. They wanted their wealth back after all these centuries. A Jewish representative volunteered to argue before Alexander that if you make a detailed calculation of all the slave labor Klal Yisroel provided for the Egyptians for so many decades, the cheshbon comes out that the Egyptians owe Klal Yisroel much more! Klal Yisroel didn't steal anything from the Egyptians.

There is an unbelievable precision in Hashem's judgment going on here – much greater than compensating Klal Yisroel for their labor. Yisro was impressed with what Hashem did for Klal Yisroel in Yam Suf. Hashem paid back each Egyptian middoh k'negged middoh for how he made each Jew suffer. The year of the makkos was a year of education to understand various aspects of the greatness of Hashem. He created nature, He controls nature, and He is involved in human affairs in an intelligent way to give each individual his proper reward or punishment for his actions.

Now they are ready for the next lesson of kriyas Yam Suf. It wasn't just an overwhelming miracle. Klal Yisroel saw the cloud of Hashem move from in front to in back to be a buffer between them and the Egyptians. There is a pillar of fire which represents the Shechinoh in their midst.

Sometimes Hashem is very distant. Human beings have a body and a soul. We more readily perceive the physical world through our senses than the spiritual world. Sometimes a person's physical senses can be dulled or one can lose the use of them altogether. The neshomo also has a sense for kedushoh, and it can also be dulled when the person is constantly involved in the physical world. This is called the orlas halev. The physicality covers over the sense for kedushoh. We ask Hashem to give us a sensitivity to kedushoh and remove our orlas halev.

We say in the haggodoh that during makkas bechoros there was a gilui Shechinoh. Klal Yisroel's sensitivity to ruchniyus was raised that night and they could experience Hashem's presence in the makkoh, killing the first-born Egyptians. And after kriyas Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel had an even deeper sense of Hashem's presence, to the point where they accepted upon themselves ol malchus shomayim. They saw the hand of Hashem clearly and responded with this acceptance. It is internalizing the fact that Hashem is the only power that exists and He runs the world absolutely. When you confront Hashem in such a direct way, the natural response is singing shiroh.

What is the meaning of זֶה קָלִי וְאִנּוּהוּ?

"Zeh" in Hebrew means something is so clear and so manifest that you can point to it. This is how clearly Klal Yisroel perceived Hashem's presence at Yam Suf. Chazal say even the lowest maidservant received a prophetic vision on the level of the greatest nevi'im.

The Rambam explains, what was Moshe Rabbeinu's sin for which he lost the merit to enter Eretz Yisroel? Not that he hit the rock instead of speaking to it. It was because he addressed Klal Yisroel as 'morim' – rebels. It was inappropriate for Moshe to refer to Klal Yisroel that way, since from the time of kriyas Yam Suf 40 years earlier, these people reached the level of nevi'im. This gilui Shechinoh at Yam Suf stayed with Klal Yisroel and transformed them. It elevated their perception of ruchniyus to a tremendously high level for forty years. So you can't talk to them in an insulting way.

Klal Yisroel proclaimed there is no power comparable to Hashem's power. He will rule forever.

Then Klal Yisroel come to the bitter waters of Moroh.

There is a rule in ruchniyus which we learn from the Akeidoh. After the Akeidoh was over, the verses only tell us that Avrohom went back to where he lived. Where did Yitzchok go? Chazal tell us that he immediately went to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Why? After an unbelievable spiritual experience – being willing to offer himself as a korban to Hashem – it would fade away quickly unless he found a way to solidify it and make it permanent. So Yitzchok immediately went to yeshiva to learn Torah. So too here, right after the amazing experience of gilui Shechinoh at Yam Suf, Hashem gives them a few mitzvos in Moroh to be occupied with. A takono was made by Moshe Rabbeinu not to go three days without a public kriyas haTorah. It means you have to stop everything and go back to learning every three days. Klal Yisroel had to make this experience permanent.

Which mitzvos did Hashem give them here? Shabbos, poroh adumoh and dinim. We know they were given Shabbos because the mon included an awareness of Shabbos. In Parshas Vo'eschanon in the Aseres Hadibros, it is implied Klal Yisroel were given Shabbos and kibbud av vo'em. Why?

The answer is that after the entire upheaval of the past year with yetzias mitzrayim and kriyas Yam Suf, they are now getting into a routine of normal life. Everything is quiet. This requires that Klal Yisroel start observing a basic minimum Torah way of life. It involved four things: Shabbos, kibbud av vo'em, poroh adumoh and dinim.

Shabbos is crucial because every Jew has to believe that Hashem created the world out of total nothing in six days. Denying the belief in creation is a

denial of the entire Torah. Hashem created everything from nothing. Without this belief, if you violate Shabbos publicly, you are treated like a non-Jew in halacha. The Rambam says that is why Shabbos is the eternal bris. We testify Who Hashem is. He runs the entire world to the finest detail.

Rishonim had different ways of dealing with, and at times accommodating, the ideas of Greek philosophy to various degrees. But one idea of Aristotle – kadmus – that the world had no beginning and always existed – received wall-to-wall rejection by all rishonim. Because creation from nothing is the foundation of everything. The mon showed Klal Yisroel that the creation itself testifies to the reality of Shabbos. It fell every day of the week except for Shabbos.

You can explain Shabbos, kibbud av and dinim in very logical ways. But poroh adumoh has no logic – it is a chok. Why were Klal Yisroel given this mitzvah of poroh adumoh now?

The answer is simple. Poroh adumoh teaches us that we have to bend our mind to the mind of Hashem. Whether we understand it or not, there is a higher mind which runs the world. We submit our understanding to the infinite wisdom of Hashem. This is also a fundamental concept which the entire Torah stands upon. Our minds don't dictate the reality.

Certain people were very upset with what I said last week about a famous abuser who was exposed. Why? Because I said there is a Rambam and there is a beis din, and there is a Torah way of dealing with every problem. People want to feel that they can manage their own lives and solve their own problems, without submitting themselves to what the Torah says. Once I showed that the Torah has a way of dealing with this issue and we are obligated to follow it whether we like it or not, it upset certain people.

There is a higher mind and we have to bend our mind to Hashem's higher mind and give up our own theories and logic. Many things we can understand and many things we cannot. Poroh adumoh is the ultimate chok. We will never understand it and we need to accept it anyway. It needed to be given at the very beginning because this sets the pattern for how we approach Torah.

Dinim – all of Choshen Mishpot. The idea is that all our financial dealings are subject to Hashem's will. Our money is subject to the Torah. Moshe describes the function of a dayan to Yisro. The people aren't coming to beis din for the dayan to personally settle their disputes with his own logic. No. They are coming to Moshe to hear what Hashem has to say about their situation. It is the same for all interpersonal relationships. Hashem has His own way of managing society.

Kibbud av is the final foundational idea of the Torah. The Aseres Hadibros are divided evenly into bein odom lemokom and bein odom lechaveiro – 5 and 5. Which side is kibbud av on? It is surprisingly on the bein odom lemokom side! Why? Because the previous generation is our link to serving Hashem. We come with a mesorah of an unbroken chain to Har Sinai. It is how we know the Torah is true and that everything we do is really what Hashem wants. If you don't treat your father as your source of mesorah for understanding the world, you are totally lost. Hashem gave us a written and oral Torah. The written Torah is an outline – and there is a gigantic oral Torah which stands behind every posuk. Our father and grandfather learned this oral Torah all the way back to Sinai. Each generation adds new insights of their own, but they are building upon a basic foundation that they received from the previous generation. We have to view ourselves at the end of a long chain of mesorah. The entire Torah is built on it.

The Rambam writes in the introduction to Mishnah Torah that there is an authoritative gemara which we are obligated to follow because there is a chain from Ravina and Rav Ashi going all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu.

But it isn't just that we have to keep these halachos as a dry set of rules – a simple list of dos and don'ts. It is much more. Klal Yisroel just went through the most unbelievable, overwhelming experience. The way to solidify this experience is to sit down and learn.

There is a Mechiltoh which asks a surprising question. Why did Klal Yisroel have to stay in the desert for 40 years? It's surprising because there would seem to be an obvious answer – because of the sin of the spies! For every day they spent spying they had to stay a year in the desert! But the Mechiltoh gives another reason. If Klal Yisroel went straight to Eretz Yisroel after leaving Egypt and getting the Torah, each man would go straight to his orchard and his vineyard and be busy with parnossoh, and the Torah would be neglected. Klal Yisroel needed forty years in the desert in order to have Torah absorbed so deeply in their bones that they would never depart from it, even when they become occupied in working for a living. They woke up in the morning and heard a shiur from Moshe and reviewed it every single day for forty years.

What about the sin of the spies, as the verses say was the reason? The answer is that this sin revealed that Klal Yisroel weren't ready to enter Eretz Yisroel so early. It showed they would get distracted by mundane matters and neglect the Torah. So Hashem provided all their physical needs and the people had nothing to do but learn from Moshe Rabbeinu for forty years straight. It should have been two years, but they showed they needed forty years to internalize the gilui Shechinoh and make it a deep and permanent part of them. This can only be done through limud haTorah.