

PARSHAS SHLACH

תשפ"ג

Last week we talked about the downward movement of Klal Yisroel. They were going up and up after Ma'amad Har Sinai and building the Mishkon. They were on their way to Eretz Yisroel, and then they start dropping and dropping downward. This downward movement finishes at Parshas Shlach and Hashem is then silent for 38 years. Although there is some dispute, most meforshim say the events of Parshas Korach happened before the events of Parshas Shlach. This is because we know from midrashei Chazal and most Rishonim that Hashem went silent and did not communicate with Moshe for 38 years only after the incident of the meraglim. For a reason that we will discuss later on, the Torah placed Parshas Korach after this parsha.

Shlach has a history behind it. Klal Yisroel went through a purification process of the slavery of Egypt and are ready to switch the slavery of Pharaoh with avdus of Hashem. Eighty percent of the Jews weren't ready and they all died in Egypt. They wanted a simple, uncomplicated life of stability – always knowing where their next meal will come from – without having to think about anything beyond it. People often get stuck in a pattern of familiarity – as dreary and as depressing as it may be – and are unwilling to break out of it into an unknown future. This was 80% of Klal Yisroel – they wanted to live in a predictable, dependable, material world.

Twenty percent said they wanted something else, something greater. They left with Moshe Rabbeinu. But Hashem has to lift them up for an entire year of makkos, culminating with makkas bechoros. Hashem is in total control of the physical world. Then there is Kriyas Yam Suf and Ma'amad Har Sinai. They are going up and up in levels of nevuah. Hashem is showing them what the reality of the world is all about and how Hashem runs it.

Moshe goes up to Har Sinai for 40 days and Klal Yisroel crash with the golden calf.

Eighty days after that, Hashem forgives them and Moshe comes down with the second luchos. They start building the Mishkon. They are moving up again, a little more slowly this time, but they are on the level of nevi'im. The Rambam says Klal Yisroel maintained the level of nevuah they received at Kriyas Yam Suf for the entire 40 years they were in the desert. They have avodas haMishkon with a Kodesh haKodoshim and hashro'as haShechinah, and they are ready to move to Eretz Yisroel. Had Klal Yisroel managed to enter Eretz Yisroel with Moshe Rabbeinu leading them and build the beis hamikdosh, the final geuloh would have come!

But they wanted watermelon! They couldn't take the restrictions of such an elevated way of life. They complained that in Egypt they got fish for free. Rashi asks – they didn't even get straw in Egypt for free! How can they claim to have gotten fish for free? It means they were free of having any mitzvos, any obligations while being slaves in Egypt. That is what Klal Yisroel were complaining about.

This is an unbelievable idea that goes back to the beginning of human nature. Even in Gan Eden, Odor HoRishon rebelled against the only restriction he had. He could eat from any fruit in Gan Eden – he could have anything any human being could conceivably want – except for the fruit of that one tree, the Eitz Hadaas – and he couldn't accept this one restriction.

We read about super-billionaires who are never satisfied with the vast amount of wealth they have made. They are always seeking new markets and new investments. I often wonder: If you had 500 billion

dollars, how many steaks can you eat in your lifetime? How many suits and shoes can you wear, or cars can you drive, before you die? But they still want more money than they could ever possibly spend in their lives! But they want to have all the possibilities that enormous wealth can offer. They don't want their potential for pleasure and enjoyment to be limited in any way.

Homon had the entire population of 127 provinces of the Persian empire bowing to him. But it wasn't worth anything at all as long as there was one Jew who refused to bow. Because of this inability to accept limits, all of Homon's power and honor were stripped away from him. "Homon" has the same letters and 'ha'mon' – the Jews in the desert similarly wanted everything – no restrictions – not even the 5 foods that the mon didn't taste like because it wasn't good for them. They couldn't appreciate everything that had been given to them because of these tiny restrictions.

Klal Yisroel are now approaching Eretz Yisroel. They want to check it out first. Hashem has told them how wonderful it is and how easy it will be to conquer it.

The concept of bitochon is often misunderstood. People think that bitochon means thoroughly convincing yourself that Hashem is going to do something you really want – like someone wiring 100 million shekels mysteriously into my bank account. Or that I can climb out the window and not crash to the ground. It will just happen if I believe it strongly enough, since Hashem can do anything you ask. Such a person is a fool.

Here we have something completely different. Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu in a nevuah that Klal Yisroel will be able to conquer Eretz Yisroel supernaturally – without having to fight conventional warfare. It doesn't make any sense, but it doesn't matter – since all Klal Yisroel were nevi'im and Hashem was guaranteeing in advance that He will do open miracles for them. Their obligation in this situation is to have bitochon in Hashem's promise to them, and not be worried at all about how they will manage to beat far more powerful armies.

At the bris bein habesorim, Avrohom Ovinu asks Hashem – how can these promises of giving rise to an entire nation be fulfilled – we can't have children! Soroh is physically incapable of giving birth! Hashem says you have to stop thinking in physical, pragmatic terms. Hashem can do anything and you will have a child. Avrohom had bitochon in Hashem's promise, and he was rewarded for doing so.

Klal Yisroel were assured by Hashem that they will have no trouble conquering the land. They know they are currently living above the limitations of nature. But they are still worried about the future. They cannot think outside of the box and they need bigger reassurances. How big are the grapes, how much juice do they make? They don't want to rely on Hashem and have Him take care of everything – they feel boxed in and limited in their options. They have to check it out for themselves.

The meraglim come back and report that they will not be able to conquer the land within our natural abilities. They are afraid of Amoleik in the south. But they dealt with Amoleik when they left Egypt! They saw that their ability to win or lose was dependent on the level of their connection to Hashem.

The Gra in his commentary in Mishlei says that to the degree you believe another human being has power over you, you are actually

giving that person power. But when you believe that Hashem controls everything that happens to you and no human being has independent power, then that person will have no power. Hashem will decide what that person will do.

At the end of Sefer Devarim we read how the kohen rallies the Jewish army before battle. He prepares them by saying if you think the enemy has power, you are giving them power. But when you believe Hashem is running the world and you maintain your military camp as a place of kedushoh, then Hashem will fight all your battles for you.

The meraglim thought that Hashem interacts with Klal Yisroel on a higher, supernatural level only in the desert, and things will be very different in Eretz Yisroel. So we need to fight natural wars. But Hashem taught them through preserving the mon for all future generations, that even in a world of natural law, Hashem is still behind everything and still totally in control of what happens. Hashem took care of all their physical needs miraculously in the desert, and Hashem will continue to take care of them centuries later, even when they are working for their parnossoh.

The generation of the midbor should have realized this, but failed to do so. Hashem could not let this generation build the society that Hashem wants to build in Eretz Yisroel. There has to be a new generation who will understand that Hashem is going to be among them fighting their battles and giving them parnossoh even when living in a world of natural law.

People don't understand the significance of the scale that Shmittah was observed last year. In the late 1880's, the Jewish settlement of Eretz Yisroel was just starting to get off the ground and keeping Shmittah presented a serious challenge to the frum farmers who wanted to keep it. Some said this is the land of the Torah and we have to keep Shmittah. Others argued against it and said we have to use a heter mechiroh. They tricked poskim into giving a heter, and there has been a struggle about Shmittah ever since. This past Shmittah, for the first time since the time of amoraim, a majority of the farm land in Eretz Yisroel was allowed to remain uncultivated. It is an unbelievable milestone that people don't appreciate.

The ultimate statement of emunoh and bitochon in Hashem is to refrain from working the land for an entire year. At certain times in Jewish history, refraining from working at your job every Shabbos was a powerful statement of emunoh and bitochon that Hashem is in control of parnossoh. People have to appreciate the kind of elevated life that keeping Torah and mitzvos demand of us. It requires a very different way of thinking about Hashem and His direct interaction with the world than how the non-Jews think. Sometimes this interaction is more obvious and sometimes it is less obvious.

Then there is Korach.

The reason Parshas Shlach is put before Korach, even though it happened later, is because there is a very strong connection between the lessons of Behaaloscho and the lessons of Shlach. It is one continuous theme of properly relating to Hashem's level of involvement in our lives.

Korach's mindset is extremely puzzling. We all stood at Har Sinai and heard Hashem talk to Moshe. The posuk says Hashem wanted Klal Yisroel to see that Hashem talks directly to Moshe and that only Moshe is the perfect vehicle for transmitting the Torah to Klal Yisroel. Korach was there, Doson and Avirom were there. Everyone knew that Moshe Rabbeinu was on a completely different level of nevuah than every other novi. This lesson was also made clear when Miriam got tzoraas. But now comes Korach and claims Moshe made the whole thing up! How can he openly deny what everyone knew?

Korach was an intelligent man. But he let his jealousy and ego cloud everything that he knew.

Everything was handed to Klal Yisroel on a silver platter – they have Moshe Rabbeinu and the Shechinoh, and everything going for them to enter Eretz Yisroel on the highest possible level. But Klal Yisroel don't appreciate what they have been given. They resist any restrictions that Hashem imposes on their petty desires and egos and they cannot maintain their lofty madreigoh. This is the tragedy of the generation of the midbor.

There is a Mechiltoh in Parshas Beshalach which I quote all the time which asks why Hashem kept Klal Yisroel in the desert for 40 years. What were they doing all day for year after year, if they had the mon and the be'er and the ananei hakovod and didn't have to do anything to care for their physical needs? The answer is that they only learned Torah, day-in day-out. You can only allow the Torah to change the human personality and think in the way the Torah thinks when the ideas of the Torah are absorbed into your very being. It is sometimes very difficult for a human mind to absorb the way the Torah thinks. It comes only when a person invests a long time and much effort trying to align his thought process to the Torah's thought process.

We are living in very unique times in the history of the Jewish people. The level of wealth and security of the Jewish community is nearly unprecedented. We have been given an opportunity to learn Torah in relative comfort on a massive scale that is unheard of. Do we appreciate the opportunities that Hashem gave us? Do we use it to the maximum?

The tragedy of the dor hamidbor was not appreciating the gifts Hashem gave them, so there was no point to allow them to continue. Hashem let them pass away and waited to raise a new generation who sat and learned Torah for 40 years until they were able to build a proper society based on Torah in Eretz Yisroel.