

PARSHAS BESHALACH

תשפ"ד

Parshas Beshalach is a very important transition parsha. Klal Yisroel have left Egypt and are on their way to Har Sinai. This parsha is the interim period between yetzias Mitzrayim and Har Sinai. It begins in an interesting way. It emphasizes that Klal Yisroel were thrown out from Egypt by Pharaoh. He couldn't take keeping them there anymore.

If the goal of leaving Egypt was simply to get to Eretz Canaan, then obviously the most efficient way would be to travel up the Mediterranean coastline from Egypt through Gaza. But Hashem took Klal Yisroel out of Egypt in order to get the Torah at Har Sinai first, before going to Eretz Yisroel.

The location of Har Sinai is still a mystery. Chazal don't give us any clue. It was of no interest to them. Christians found a hill in the Sinai desert and for some reason declared it to be Mount Sinai. But they have no mesorah for it, and because there is no mesorah for it, it becomes an irrelevancy for us.

Hashem has a policy to minimize miracles and break nature only when necessary. Hashem could have taken us right through Gaza and used miracles to avoid any military confrontations. There certainly would have been battles, since Gaza and the Plishtim have a long history of making trouble for Klal Yisroel. But Hashem would prefer not to make miracles, so if Klal Yisroel would have gone up the coast, they would have been confronted with battles and would have wanted to turn back to Egypt.

The bottom line is that instead of taking the direct route to Eretz Yisroel, Hashem took us through a circuitous route through the Sinai desert.

But the Mechiltoh asks a peculiar question. Why did Klal Yisroel spend 40 years in the desert and not go to Eretz Yisroel right after receiving the Torah? The Mechiltoh does not give the obvious answer – that it was because of the sin of the meraglim. Instead, it gives an answer that I review every year when speaking about this parsha because it is so fundamental.

The midrash explains that had Klal Yisroel gone straight to Eretz Yisroel right after receiving the Torah, each Jew would have immediately become preoccupied with settling the land and farming crops and Torah study would be sorely neglected. So Hashem saw to it that Klal Yisroel would stay in the desert for 40 years with all their material needs taken care of, so that they would be free to completely immerse themselves in limud Torah until the Torah was absorbed in their bones. This way, when they would finally come to settle Eretz Yisroel, learning Torah would be an automatic part of their daily life and they wouldn't neglect it – even as they became involved in settling the land and pursuing their livelihood.

Chazal are telling us a very important fact of life. Life is full of challenges and distractions that pull people in different directions. In the daily routine of life, the Torah can easily recede to the background of your mind. How do you make Torah stay in the forefront of your mind throughout the day? Chazal are telling us that you have to learn and learn until the Torah is absorbed into the fiber of your being and it becomes who you are. It becomes your natural thought process and your identity. It isn't something to do on the side. When you are in yeshiva for a year, learning isn't just to fill up the day in between chesed projects and tiyulim.

When Klal Yisroel were in the desert, there was nothing for them to do

besides learn Torah day-in, day-out. They had food supplied on a daily basis, their clothes never wore out, and they never got sick. So there was no need for shopping or going to the doctor, no distractions. In the morning there was a shiur from Moshe Rabbeinu and in the afternoon, there was chazara shiur from Aharon HaKohen. Day after day for 40 years! So Torah was absorbed so deeply that when they set up normal society in Eretz Yisroel, the Torah remained a part of them. This is the formula for everyone who wants to stay a ben Torah after they leave the beis midrash.

The morning after Makkas Bechoros, Moshe Rabbeinu had a lot of things to do – He was in charge of leading millions of people out of Egypt, and talking to Hashem on a regular basis. He had a lot on his mind. But while everyone was busy running around, "borrowing" the gold and silver and clothing from their Egyptian neighbors and lining their pockets, Moshe Rabbeinu was busy trying to figure out how to keep Klal Yisroel's promise to Yosef and get his coffin out of Egypt. Moshe didn't delegate this task to anyone else. He did it himself.

Klal Yisroel traveled in a strange route from the eastern tip of the Nile Delta at Succos due south! They are supposed to be going north! They wind up on the eastern coast of the Suez. Hashem tells them to go back over to the western coast. This is the southern border of Egypt. Pharaoh suddenly gets nervous when they get close to Pi Hachiros near Migdol by the idol of Baal Tzefon. Why?

When Pharaoh took over the massive fortune that Yosef had amassed, he didn't feel secure leaving it inside Egypt. He sent it to the southern border to a place called Pi Hachiros and set up a military camp called Migdol to protect it, and erected Baal Tzefon which is the idol of the god of money. During Makkas Bechoros, all the idols of all the gods in Egypt were destroyed – except for one. Baal Tzefon. The last power people cling on to, when all else has failed them, is the power of money.

So when Klal Yisroel travel to this southern border when they are supposed to be going north, Pharaoh realizes that they are going for his treasure! This is what motivates Pharaoh so strongly to pursue Klal Yisroel after they left. Who does Pharaoh take with him? Where does he get all these animals from to chase Klal Yisroel? From the yorei d'var Hashem! But it is perfectly consistent. When their property was in danger from Makkas Borod, they feared Hashem and protected their animals by taking them inside. Now when their property again was put in danger, they do whatever they can to protect it and give their animals to Pharaoh!

The midrash tells us that Klal Yisroel didn't cross over the Yam Suf. Rather, they went in and came out the same side further up – like a semi-circle.

After it was all over, no Egyptian survived. Everyone went in after Klal Yisroel and drowned – those chasing them from Egypt, and those who were in the military camp. Klal Yisroel are all alone, sitting on the massive fortune of Yosef Hatzaddik. This was the bizas hayam that was promised to Avrohom Ovinu.

Remember that Klal Yisroel had been slaves in Egypt for many decades and they were working on raising their madreigoh the entire year of the makkos. Now at kriyas Yam Suf, they shot up and became nevi'im at the highest level and even a lowly maid saw a vision on par with the novi Yechezkel! They saw with absolute clarity how Hashem runs the world, but the midrash tells us that at the same time, some of the

people were taking pesel Michoh with them in their luggage. Just in case...

Then Klal Yisroel come to Moroh where they get water and Moshe Rabbeinu teaches them about Shabbos, Dinim and Kibbud Ov v'Em. They now have some Torah to be occupied with. Moshe makes a takonoh that Jews cannot go three days straight without limud Torah. This is established at the very beginning of their identity as a nation. For people who will leave the beis midrash later in life, they should remember this takonoh.

Klal Yisroel start to receive mon and come to Refidim and Amoleik strikes. Yes, Hashem is running everything, but now that they have Torah, they need to earn Hashem's protection through constant limud haTorah. We are going through a difficult point in our history. We just had a tragic event of 21 Jewish soldiers killed in one battle.

When Avrohom Ovinu was getting ready to fight the Four Kings to recue Lot, Chazal say Avrohom and his servants spent the night before the battle pouring over a sugya as preparation – not making strategies or battle plans. They learned Torah to get the zechus of Torah. And to get the maximum zechus of Torah, you need to achieve a deep understanding of Torah. Yehoshua did the same thing before battle. He was לן בעומקה של הלכה – he pushed himself to get a deep understanding of the halacha to ensure victory in battle. When Sancherev was wreaking havoc in Jewish communities and threatening to conquer Eretz Yisroel, King Yoshiyahu and Yeshayah HaNovi went around to make sure everyone was leaning Torah. True, some people have to fight, but the rest have to sit and learn. And the learning has to be with the maximum clarity to be able to pasken sheilos. We always need the zechus of Torah in times of war – Chazal see it throughout Tanach till the times of Chanukah. We say it very clearly in Al Hanissim that the many, mighty Greek warriors fell in the hands of a few pure tzaddikim who were learning Torah.

Why did Amoleik come all the way from the south of Eretz Canaan to attack them after kriyas Yam Suf? After all, we know when the spies came to Rochov in Yericho, to get a sense of the mood of the Canaanim, she told them that everyone became terrified once they heard about kriyas Yam Suf. Their hearts melted with fear. So how did Amoleik feel confident to fight Klal Yisroel? Because Klal Yisroel became weak in their Torah learning. Hashem protects us when we represent Him in this world through our dedication to Torah. Once we neglect that and

we don't reflect Hashem with Torah, we become vulnerable.

When Amoleik came, Moshe told Yehoshua to select a specific kind of special forces to fight – gibborim and yirei cheit. Moshe is going up to the hill to raise his hands in tefillah. But the Mishna in Rosh Hashono asks, how can Moshe's lifted hands win the war and his lowered hands lose the war? The answer is that Moshe was directing the hearts of the soldiers – while in battle – to look heavenward to dedicate themselves to Hashem. That is how they win. If they don't look to Hashem for help, they will lose. Don't look to your advanced weapons and your tactics to win the war for you. From the very first war Klal Yisroel fought, we are taught that it is all from Hashem.

Every generation has a war with Amoleik because in every generation there is a nation with an agenda to eliminate Klal Yisroel. The founding document of Hamas is a pledge to kill every Jew on the planet. Why? Because Jews represent Hashem in this world. People who don't want Hashem to have a real presence in this world need to eliminate Klal Yisroel. The Sifri explains that every war against Klal Yisroel is a war against Hashem because we represent Hashem. Our enemies are Hashem's enemies.

It is interesting that the greatest hatred of Jews today is from those whose lifestyle is the furthest from Torah. We are Hashem's representatives in this world. When we act our part, we win. When we don't, we get into trouble. When the zechus haTorah goes down, we are vulnerable. And the biggest form of zechus haTorah is the deepest understanding of Torah. We are all one people – and the zechus of everyone's learning protects all Jews everywhere. Everyone who puts extra effort to better understand a Rashi, a Tosfos, a Rambam, is helping the war effort.

Yes, Hashem took measures for Klal Yisroel to avoid confronting the Plishtim in Gaza right after they left Egypt. Klal Yisroel would have panicked and would turn back to Egypt. They need 40 years for the Torah to be absorbed into the core of their being before they are ready to confront Og and Sichon. Then they will have the zechus of Torah and will be victorious.

These issues go very deep. People go on different paths in life. You may come to a spiritual desert with no ruchniyus and everything is working against you to bring you down. You need to spend time in yeshiva – as long as it takes to have Torah absorbed into your very being. Then you will keep Torah in the forefront of your mind and remain a Ben Torah in every situation.