

People. While they had witnessed varied miracles in Egypt, the miracles that accompanied *Krias Yam Suf* (*Yalkut Meam Loaz* enumerates fifty miracles) had a compelling effect on the Jewish spiritual mindset. *Horav Asher Weiss, Shlita*, relates the story of a father and his young son at the *Seder* table. The father was extolling the miracles connected with the Splitting of the Red Sea, when suddenly, his young, wise son interjected with a question. "Tell me, Father, why are we so impressed with the Splitting of the Red Sea? If Hashem created the sea – certainly He is able to split it in half!"

Although impressed with his son's level of perception, the father maintained his composure and proceeded to answer the question with a parable. An expert sculptor once made an image of a horse that was so incredibly perfect and so lifelike that it was almost impossible to discern the difference between the sculpture and the real thing. The sculptor proceeded to take his sculpted horse outside where people could see and admire his work.

When a few days passed with no one stopping to admire his handiwork, the sculptor became anxious. How could anyone walk by his extraordinary piece of art and ignore it? How could they walk by without complimenting the brilliance of the sculptor? Unable to hold in his feelings, the sculptor stopped a passerby and asked, "Why have you not taken notice of the amazing horse that appears so realistic?" The man replied, "Exactly for the reason you mentioned. Since your sculpture looks so real, it does not capture anyone's interest. The street is filled with horses. What is one more horse?"

The sculptor accepted the reason with some reservation. "If that is the case," he thought out loud, "why did I spend so many hours of precious time to make such a brilliant sculpture? It looks so real. Yet, no one appreciates it. Why did I spend years in school and hours upon hours of practice to achieve a sculpture that no one appreciates?"

Hearing him muse out loud, a wise man who happened to be walking by, stopped and said, "Let me give you a bit of advice. Cut your horse in two parts and place the two halves next to one another. This image will certainly capture the attention of anyone walking by. Who would not want to see this 'real' occurrence of a horse cut into two parts?"

This is the idea which the father sought to convey to his son. If we would have the proper insight to be impressed by the wondrous creation of the sea and, indeed, all of nature, the synchronized daily miracles which we accept as natural, there would be no need for Hashem to split the sea. Since, however, we suffer from the disease of complacency, whereby we get used to seeing miracles, they become habit-forming. Since we are no longer aroused by nature, it was necessary to "get their attention" by splitting the sea, so that they be inspired by both the large and small miracles. *Krias Yam Suf* is an incredible miracle made necessary because we have become "spoiled" by miracles, thinking that we are entitled to them.

Va'ani Tefillah

תקנו בשופר גדול לחרותו – **Teka b'Shofar gadol l'cheiruseiu.**
Sound the great Shofar for our Freedom.

Horav Levi Yitzchak, zl, m'Berditchev, was known as *Clal Yisrael's* advocate, their defender who viewed everything through a positive lens. One *Rosh Hashanah*, following his *derashah*, lecture, preceding *Tekias Shofar*, he turned around, his back to the congregation, his face facing the *Aron HaKodesh* – and he began to cry bitterly. The congregation obviously waited patiently for their *Rav* – despite his incessant weeping, which seemed to go on and on. No one could think of a reason why specifically now, of all times, he was crying so passionately.

Suddenly, he stopped crying and spoke softly to Hashem, like a son speaking to his father, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, You commanded us in Your Torah to blow *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. According to *Halachah*, we are able to fulfill the *mitzvah* with merely nine *tekios*, blasts. Yet, we blow 101 blasts. This is all because of one single *mitzvah* which You gave us. Furthermore, we are not the only ones doing this. Every congregation, in every city in the world, under all conditions, each and every year – year in and year out – has been doing this for thousands of years. Millions of *tekios* have been blown – all in Your honor, to glorify You. All that we ask of You is one single *tekia*, one solitary blast, that will herald our Redemption. *Teka b'Shofar gadol l'cheiruseinu!*" The *Rebbe* concluded his supplication and once again burst into bitter weeping. What an incredible story to think about when we recite the tenth blessing of the *Shemoneh Esrai*.

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For a yearly subscription or Parsha sponsorship, please contact:

In Cleveland – Rabbi L. Scheinbaum (216) 321-5838 Ext. 165

Outside of North America – E. Goldberg +972 2-569 5185

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Parashas Beshalach

תשע"ה

פרשת בשלח

יהי בשלח פרעה את העם

It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people. (13:17)

Finally, after 210 years of brutal slavery, the Jewish People were free! The Exodus is among the most seminal experiences of our collective Jewish history. Every year we devote an entire festival to commemorating our freedom, our liberation from servitude. *Zeicher l'yetzias Mitzrayim*, "In remembrance of the exodus from Egypt" is a critical part of many *tefillos*, prayers. It has been over three thousand years since that auspicious moment of mass exodus from a tyrannical monarchy bent on destroying our people – and we still commemorate that moment. We must, however, sit back for a moment and ask ourselves: Have we always been free? I think that, if we were to study Jewish history, we would note otherwise. Perhaps we lived in freedom until the destruction of the first *Bais Hamikdash*, but what followed after that? The Greeks and the Romans were followed by the Crusaders and the Arabs, the barbarians of Western Europe whose anti-Semite pogroms went on for a thousand years until the Nazis completed the cruelty they had initiated. The Russians certainly had nothing to be ashamed of in terms of their ability to persecute the hapless Jew. All in all, I would not posit that these last three thousand years have been idyllic.

We reiterate the question: How could the Jewish People have celebrated their freedom during these thousands of years of exile? Furthermore, we have celebrated this freedom in the most unfree places and circumstances. My parents celebrated the *Pesach* "Seder" running from burnt-out house to burnt-out house in the Warsaw Ghetto – and they were certainly not the only ones! Russian Jews celebrated *Pesach* under the tyrannical, brutal Communists. We all have celebrated *Pesach* and its message of freedom, but how do we do so amidst oppression, brutality and genocide?

The *Maharal m'Prague* asks this question (*Gevuros Hashem* 61) and offers an answer which defines our People, post – Egyptian exodus. We make the mistake of thinking that *yetzias Mitzrayim* was a one-time event during which slaves who had heretofore been subjected to cruel bondage were now released and free to go as they pleased. Wrong. *Maharal* explains that the Exodus created within the Jewish psyche a freedom mindset. We were no longer slaves; we had become free men. Freedom became part of our essence; no longer would the Jew be subservient to another nation. We rise above servitude. It goes against our grain.

Veritably, throughout the millennia, we have been conquered, reviled, abused, oppressed, hunted and

murdered. Despite all of the travail, we have never altered our mindset. We are free men, subservient only to Hashem. Despite the suppression, our minds have remained free. Never have we acquiesced to the abuse. It is almost as if we have been sprayed with a Teflon coating of "freedom" which protects us from becoming tainted by the tyranny that has often been our lot.

Those of our People who sadly do not understand this concept continue to wonder why we did not fight back during World War II. Why did we go like "sheep to the slaughter"? This has become the catchphrase for all of the self-loathing, myopic Jews who do not understand the true meaning of freedom. The Jew will always be free – regardless of his situation and circumstance. We are a nation that was granted freedom by the Creator of all men, and, with His help, we will remain free throughout time. It is up to the individual Jew to maintain the spiritual integrity, the courage and the strength, to see to it that our minds remain unshackled and that we each remain a citadel of freedom and a beacon of hope to our People and to all mankind.

Having said this, we ask why it is that there are so many of our brethren who lack this sense of freedom, who feel enslaved, who cringe when the word "anti-Semite" is mentioned, who will do anything to be accepted by a world whose envy of the Jew precludes the ability to see his G-dliness. I think the reason is that a sense of freedom mandates a sense of responsibility. No longer can a person hide behind the veil of travail. He has no valid excuses. The shackles are off. We are free! The *Baal Shem Tov* was wont to say, "You are where your will is." If one wants to be free – he is free. The one who fears freedom remains a slave.

Freedom is an intrinsic part of the soul of the Jewish People. It is, thus, wholly understandable that the leaders of many of the "movements" and "isms" who have spoken out against repression of any kind were Jewish. Sadly, though, their outspokenness was not against spiritual tyranny, but for social advancement. Likewise, children should be encouraged to express themselves. Often our children are suffocated by peer pressure, parental fears and media messages which demand that they conform to the society around them, so that they will not be excluded, disliked or even hurt.

The boy or girl who has "questions" about religion should not be stifled. Obviously, the person giving the answers should be erudite and blessed with an inordinate balance of common sense and compassion. What is it about the young student who does not fit into the prefabricated mold that the individual religious community has adopted? Should he/she be shunned? Is he/she a sinner just because he/she is exercising the individual gift of self-expression? If we suppress the

children's innate sense of freedom of expression, they might be forced to go "elsewhere" – like the others who attribute their alienation from religion to having their religious inquisitiveness either ignored or suppressed. Questions should be encouraged, so that the child can learn to understand and appreciate the beauty of Judaism. Obviously, he should reach a point in which he accepts, through a leap of faith, what his limited mind cannot comprehend. One must be led to faith upon the building blocks of understanding. This only occurs once he has been inspired and encouraged to respond to his inner-calling, his inherent Jewish DNA, the yearning for freedom. When there is a will, there is a way.

וחמשים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים

And Bnei Yisrael went out from the land of Egypt, (well) armed. (13:19)

What benefit did the Jewish slaves – now turned free men – have from the weapons which they brought with them from Egypt? The commentators interpret *chamushim* as armed. This then provides proof positive that when *Bnei Yisrael* battled Amalek they had weapons to use against the enemy. Having weapons and knowing how to use them are quite different matters. Perhaps by the time Amalek attacked them, they had already trained somewhat in weaponry and battle. What would men who knew nothing but slavery for 210 years do with weapons? Why did they take something with them that they did not know how to use?

We must, therefore, conclude that armed has a different meaning. The faithful Jew is acutely aware that success or failure has nothing to do with physical prowess or state-of-the-art weaponry. It is all in the hands of Hashem. If we merit – we triumph. If we do not merit – or Hashem feels that this is not a time for success – we do not triumph. *Klal Yisrael's* weapons were their faith in Hashem. True, they required the Giving of the Torah and a forty year sojourn in the wilderness, completely relying upon Hashem's beneficence for survival, to achieve the pinnacle of faith which guided their lives when they entered *Eretz Yisrael*. *Hashgachah pratis*, Divine Providence, for those who faithfully obey His *mitzvos*, was capable not only of saving them from destruction, but also of ensuring their day to day survival – no matter what challenges they might have encountered. The spiritual education garnered through forty years of wandering in the Wilderness provided them with the curriculum for this successful transition from slave to independent member of *Klal Yisrael*.

Bnei Yisrael did not enter the wilderness spiritually bereft of faith. They had "weapons"; they had proven in Egypt that they were capable of rising to the challenge of the wilderness. They had manifest faith in Hashem while still in Egypt. This was their weaponry. It is related (*Haggadah Chashukei Chemed*) that every year on the *Seder* night, the saintly *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, would raise his voice and say to his children the following: "My children and grandchildren, listen carefully. Prior to the Exodus our People experienced two *nisyonos*, tests, and these two tests will (also) be the final two *nisyonos* prior to the ultimate Redemption, with the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.

"The first *nisayon* was one of money/wealth/material abundance. During the plague of *choshech*,

darkness, *Klal Yisrael* was exposed to the enormous wealth of their Egyptian oppressors. Needless to say, they became obsessed with a burning desire to grab whatever they could as a form of revenge against these miserable, cruel despots, who had mercilessly persecuted them for over two centuries. What held them back from losing it? What prevented them from ransacking the Egyptian homes? Their faith in the Almighty, their belief in His promise that, in the end, they would leave this miserable country with tremendous treasure.

"The second *nisayon* was one of fear. On that night, the Jews hiding in their homes heard blood-curdling screams, shrieks of pain and misery, emanating from the Egyptians who witnessed their firstborn sons dying before their eyes. The Jews were unaware of the nature and source of these screams: were they only from Egyptian homes, or were Jewish homes also being affected by the plague?

"Nonetheless, in spite of their fear, they listened to Hashem's command and did not leave their homes until the morning. They believed and trusted in Moshe *Rabbeinu's* word that the chilling screams which they heard were the result of – and reaction to – the deaths of the Egyptian firstborns.

"*Am Yisrael* withstood these tests because of their faith in Hashem and Moshe *Rabbeinu*. These two tests will also appear in the days preceding the advent of *Moshiach*. Just as the Jewish People were saved in Egypt because of the merit of their faith in the leaders of their generation, so, too, will their descendants be spared and redeemed because of the faith and trust they will place in the leaders of their generation."

Klal Yisrael had these weapons of faith when they left Egypt. This constituted their armor that protected them from the enemy. It was upon this foundation of faith that they built their growing relationship with Hashem during the next forty years.

וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם והנה מצרים נסע אחריהם

***Bnei Yisrael* raised their eyes and behold! – Egypt was journeying after them. (14:10)**

Klal Yisrael saw the united Egyptian Army coming after them. The word *nosea*, traveling, is written in the singular, rather than in the plural form, *nosim*. *Rashi* explains that the Egyptians came after the Jews *b'lev echad k'ish echad*, "with one heart, like one person." In a similar exposition in *Parshas Yisro*, *Rashi* comments concerning *Klal Yisrael's* coming to *Har Sinai*. *Vayichan sham Yisrael*, "and *Yisrael* camped there" (*Shemos* 9:2). *Vayichan* is singular, as opposed to *vayachanu*, which would be the proper plural conjugation form. *Rashi* expounds, *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, as one person with one heart. Notably, concerning *Klal Yisrael's* description of their unity, *Rashi* places *ish*, person (*echad*), prior to *lev*, heart; unlike, concerning the Egyptians, it was the heart first, *b'lev echad*, followed by *ish echad*, one person. Was there a difference in the relative types of unity?

In a well-known exposition, *Horav Yitzchak Hutner*, *zl*, explains that Egyptian unity is based upon a common cause, not a common attribute. The Egyptians have only one characteristic in common with one another: their hatred of the Jews. This is what unified them. Otherwise, they were each self-serving, lacking any allegiance to one another. Thus, they were *b'lev echad*, one unified heart/cause, which

made them into *ish echad*.

The Jewish People are different. They are *k'ish echad*, all compared to varied components of one body. All aspects of the body work together as *lev echad*. Their *lev echad* is the result of being an *ish echad*. The Jews, by definition, are one unit bound by their collective body. When one organ of the body is in pain, the entire body suffers. *Klal Yisrael* does not require a common cause to unite us. We are one unit, because we are all components of one body – *Klal Yisrael*.

We derive from here an important principle with regard to unity. One type of unity is synthesis unity, which is a composite of varied forms, people, elements to form an amalgamated front, position, stand. While this works under most conditions, the individuals involved are committed to a common goal – not to one another. In a symbiotic unity, a blending, a cooperative relationship exists between two persons or groups, whereby the two focus on unity among themselves in such a manner that the two become one.

We have as of late been plagued by movements who have positioned themselves with a common goal to undermine traditional Orthodoxy, to modernize *halachah* by transforming it to state-of-art status. The individuals involved each have his/her own personal agenda, but are united by a common goal. Such unity is like the Egyptian unity which was a synthesis of variant persons united under a common banner. Such unity, because it involves various personalities and egos, each devoted to no one other than him/herself, will not endure. Unity must be symbiotic, whereby everyone not only works for a common goal and under a common banner, but each individual component abnegates him/herself to focus first on self-unity before addressing the issues.

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ד' במצרים

***Yisrael* saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt. (14:31)**

"Great hand" is explained by the *Chafetz Chaim*, *zl*, as far-reaching. At times, years could go by before we see the great hand. Things happen; some (apparently) positive, and others which appear to be negative. We do not understand why, but we maintain our faith that these are not haphazard occurrences. Everything is a piece in Hashem's Divine Plan; everything has its assigned place. When we will be privy to the complete big picture, we will see with clarity how everything fits neatly into the puzzle of reality.

Klal Yisrael suffered cruel and bitter persecution at the hand of the Egyptians. Surely, they must have had questions during those 210 years of servitude. They waited 210 years to see their oppressors perish in the Red Sea, while they were spared in the greatest miracle of all time. We, too, have questions, but we wait patiently for that glorious day when they will all be answered, when we will see the great hand of Hashem. What keeps us going? What preserves our faith? The great hand. The knowledge that, at times, the path to the explanation is a long one, and, until we reach the end of the road we will really not understand. In retrospect, we understand that everything has taken place at the perfect time.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, *Shlita*, relates the story of Reuven and Shimon (fictitious names), who were the best

of friends. They both took an accounting course and completed it successfully. Reuven immediately landed a job at a company and did well there over the years. At one point, the company was in the market to fill another accounting position. Reuven mentioned the name of his good friend, who eventually impressed his boss so much that he was hired.

Years went by with Reuven and Shimon growing in stature at the company. When the position of director opened up, they both submitted their resumes – since such a prestigious position would help ease the financial challenges each one had endured as their individual families grew. Indeed, the director's position paid over three times what they were presently earning.

Since Reuven had seniority, he was certain that he would be selected for the position. How shocked and dismayed he was when Shimon was picked for the position over him. The dismay soon turned to anger – first at management, and then at Shimon, who, through no fault of his own, had become his competitor. Reuven was upset, but he internalized his feelings. He could have lashed out, but he kept it to himself. Nights went by that he did not sleep. Many a dinner with his wife and children was disrupted by these negative internal feelings, but, to the best that he was able, he shored up his faith in Hashem, trusting that eventually things would smooth themselves out. After all, whatever comes from Hashem has to be good. We might not see it right away, but, eventually, it all comes together.

Time does not stop for anyone. Reuven's children grew up, and his oldest son was now of marriageable age. He had an enviable reputation both as a scholar and a *yarei Shomayim*, G-d-fearing. A *shadchan*, marriage broker, approached Reuven and suggested a *shidduch* with an outstanding young woman, whose reputation appeared to be a perfect fit. The *shadchan* added that he had taken the liberty of mentioning the boy's name to the girl's family, and they were very receptive, to the point that they are prepared to give the "couple" a four-room apartment in Bnei Brak.

Reuven seemed fine about the whole thing until he enquired regarding the girl's family. When he heard that it was none other than his old friend, Shimon, he was floored. The *shadchan* reiterated that the girl's father was ready to give his entire savings to have such a fine young man as a son-in-law.

A few weeks later Reuven and Shimon – once best friends – now celebrated the engagement of their children. Now, let us ask ourselves: What would have happened had Reuven lost his cool and lashed out against Shimon when he was appointed director of the firm? Both Reuven and Shimon would have lost out, since the *shidduch* probably would not have materialized. Patience, forbearance, silence in the knowledge that we are all part of Hashem's Divine Plan proved determinative. Who understands the inspired life of a boy growing up in a home knowing that his father accepts Divine decree with complete equanimity?

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ד' במצרים... ויאמינו בד' ובמשה

***Yisrael* saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt... and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe. (14:31)**

Krias Yam Suf, the Splitting of the Red Sea, left an indelible impression of faith in Hashem on the Jewish