

Reveal What Is Hidden

Before the splitting of the sea, the Jewish people were in a place called Pi Hacheros, which opened up to the shore of the Sea of Reeds, the sea was raging and Pharoah with the whole Egyptian army was pursuing them, quickly approaching. Moshe said to them, "Have no fear, stand firm and witness the deliverance that Hashem will perform for you today, for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see again. Hashem will do battle for you, and you shall remain silent."

The Midrash says that there were four factions, four opinions of how to deal with their situation. One group said, "we should drown ourselves in the sea," anything but resume to be their slaves. The second group said, "we should return to Egypt," and be their slaves, at least we will live. The third said, "we should make war against them," perhaps we will win. And the fourth group said, we shouldn't do any of the first three options, but "we should cry out to Hashem," and He will surely help.

our verses was a refutation to all four factions. To those who said, "we should drown ourselves in the sea," Moshe said, "stand firm and witness the deliverance that Hashem will perform for you today," to those who said, "we should return to Egypt," he said, "for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see again." To those who said, "we should make war against them," he said, "Hashem will do battle for you," and to those who said, "we should cry out to Hashem," he said, "you shall remain silent."

Rather, what should they Do? Hashem said, "Speak to the children of Israel, and they should journey Forth." Continue on the path that leads to Mount Sinai, where you will receive the Torah, because that is the whole reason for the Exodus from Egypt.

It is hard to understand, how the answer to all of these four opposing opinions, could be in a single statement. They are so different, that some are diametric opposites.

"We should drown ourselves in the sea," is the diametric opposite of, "returning to Egypt." And both are, in a way, giving up, the diametric opposite of, "making war against them." All three are taking matters into their own hands, as opposed to "crying out to Hashem," which is putting it in Hashem's hands. So how can they all be swept away with one short statement?

The order of Moshe's answer is also difficult to understand. It would make sense to first respond to "return to Egypt," because that was the lowest of the four and the opposite of what they were doing, the Exodus from Egypt. Then the other three, each a step higher, drowning, war and prayer. Instead, he responded to "drowning in the sea" first. Why?

Another question. What was wrong with their recommendations, that they had to be refuted? True, drowning in the sea, is against our belief, one must not take his or her own life, and returning to Egypt is giving up, and as a Jew, one must never give up hope in Hashem. However, to go to war with them, is a noble gesture, standing up to our oppressors, and protecting our families. What is wrong with that? And what could be better than putting our total faith in Hashem, by turning to Him in prayer? Isn't that what we are meant to do in a crisis?

Finally, what are we meant to learn from this event?

Even though the Exodus happened seven days earlier, the Jewish people were not completely free until the splitting of the sea, as they were still being pursued by the Egyptians. It was only after they crossed the sea and the Egyptians drown, that the Exodus was complete.

This is one of the reasons that we mention the splitting of the sea in our prayers. Because we have an obligation to mention the Exodus every day, and according to some, one must also mention the splitting of the sea, the end of the Exodus, otherwise it isn't considered as if he mentioned the Exodus at all. Because until the splitting of the sea, we weren't completely free.

From this is understood, that in order to free ourselves from our personal Egypt, as we say in the Haggadah, "In every generation, a person is obligated to see himself, as if he came out of Egypt." And as it is explained to mean, "In every generation, and every day," we have to negate the first four opinions and act in the way of "journeying forth." In other words, there are two stages in the Exodus, first leaving Egypt, and second, the splitting of the sea.

Leaving Egypt is the first stage, in it we negate the confines and the servitude to the evil inclination and the animal soul, and we serve Hashem through accepting His yoke. Without which there is no freedom, because if he is not able to keep even one mitzvah, because of the hold the evil inclination and animal soul have on him, he is not truly free.

The problem he faces after entering this stage, is that since he is only serving Hashem through accepting His yoke, Pharoah and the Egyptians, the evil inclination and the animal soul, continue to chase after him and cover up the light of the G-dly soul that is in him.

However, when he enters the second stage, he starts to serve Hashem in a way that "turns the sea into dry land," he uncovers and reveals the G-dliness that is hidden in the world, he sees Hashem in everything, then he is truly free, the evil inclination and the animal soul can't bother him anymore. When he works on himself and reveals his true purpose, and follows the path that Hashem wants him to take, in other words, the path that allows him to "journey forth," then he is truly free.

The problem with the four opinions, is that they keep you from "journeying forth." The groups are in the order of worst to least encumbering.

The worst of all, is "we should drown ourselves in the sea." This is the attitude of one who cuts himself off from the world. He isn't interested in taking care of anybody but himself. He throws himself into the sea, the sea of Torah, the sea of Tefillah and the sea of teshuva. And when you ask him, "What about the world? What about another

Jewish person?" He says, "let someone else do it! Why should I mix into Hashem's affairs?!" It is cold in the exile, so he puts on his coat and he is warm. He could warm up others, but he says, "I can't warm up the whole world" it is beneath his dignity to do a small amount, if he can't warm up the whole world, he will do nothing. So he puts on his coat and he is warm. Very nice.

The problem with this way of thinking, is that it goes nowhere.

The next faction said, "we should return to Egypt," and be their slaves. This is the person who is stuck. He feels the burden of the Torah, the burden of Judaism, but it is a burden. He keeps the Torah, but he has no enjoyment in it. He serves Hashem through accepting His yoke. It is honorable to serve Hashem this way, but accepting His yoke is only the beginning of serving Hashem, ultimately, one has to understand and find pleasure in his service. But what should he do? It is difficult to be a Jew. Nebach.

The problem with this way of thinking, is that he is stuck in the jail of his mind, in perpetual servitude, and because of that, he can't move forward.

The third faction said, "we should make war against them." This is the person who sees the Torah and its holiness as fighting the forces of evil. He is leading the charge.

The problem with this way of thinking, is that Hashem wanted us to go to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai, and this is a distraction from the task at hand. Plus, how does he know that it is coming from the right place? Perhaps it is just his nature to like to fight. Did he ask Moshe if it's what Hashem wants?

The fourth faction said, "we should cry out to Hashem." This is the person who is at a very high level, he puts his total trust in Hashem. The problem with this, is that he does nothing, but Hashem wants us to put in our effort and use our abilities to serve Him.

We as Jews live in a dichotomy, on one hand, we have to trust in Hashem that He will take care of us, and at the same time, He wants us to use our abilities to the fullest. On one hand, we are meant to believe that everything that happens is from Hashem, and therefore, totally good, even if we don't see it that way. And at the same time, we are meant to ask for revealed good, and trust that He will grant us what we are asking for.

This way of thinking is totally valid and praiseworthy, it is the essence of a Jew. Why do we have this dichotomy? Because Hashem is able to have polar opposites within Him, and we are one with Him, therefore, we have this ability, this dichotomy, as well.

I see this in my own life. It is so hard for me, and it is so difficult and heartbreaking for my wife and children to live this life. On one hand, we know that this is Hashem's will, and we know that he has a good reason for giving me ALS. We do our best to be happy, and we try to use our challenge to do good, lift others up, and teach the ways of Hashem. On the other hand, we pray every day, for this test to come to an end, that we see revealed good, total health and function, and we expect it to happen. I know it's crazy, but that is who we are, Jews, and that is truth at the highest level, when you are who you are.

What is the path that we are meant to follow? The way of Hashem, to "journey forth," to head towards the destination that will accomplish what Hashem wants. To make this world into a home for Hashem.

The common denominator of the four opinions, is that they were all opinions based on human intellect, which is at best, flawed. And since they share this common link, they were refuted in the same short statement.

How do you figure out which path Hashem wants you to take?

It is the path that you know is correct, but it is also the one that you want to follow the least. The mitzvah you have the most difficulty with, is the one

that you need to do the most. Because the evil inclination puts up a fight, when it comes to what is most important for you to do.

May we journey forth on the path that Hashem wants us to, even though it is a struggle. This struggle will uncover the G-dliness within us, and the G-dliness that is in the world. Just as following Hashem's path split the sea for us and completed the redemption from the Egyptians, so too, by following the path that Hashem wants us to, and not what is easy, we will once again split the sea, reveal the G-dliness that is hidden in the world, and Moshiach will come. The time has come.

Fleeing From Our Personal Egypt

In parshas Beshalach we read, "The king of Egypt was told that the nation (of Israel) has fled." Rashi explains that Pharaoh sent officers along with the Jewish people when they left Egypt, because they said that they were going for three days. When they continued on after the third day, the officers returned to Pharaoh and reported that "the nation has fled."

During the plague of the death of the firstborn, Egypt was willing to do anything to have the Jewish people leave. Why didn't they just say that they are leaving for good? What is the deeper meaning of the Jewish people fleeing from Egypt?

To understand this, let us look at another Pesach law.

At the Seder, in order to fulfill our obligation of eating matzah, we have to have lechem oni, bread of affliction, which means that it only has two ingredients, flour and water.

However, there is another kind of matzah, called matzah ashira, rich matzah, which is made with wine, oil, honey or other fruit juices, so that it has a good taste. Also, as long as it doesn't have any water mixed into the dough, it will never become chametz (leavened), but if any amount of water is added to the mix, it will rapidly become chametz,

quicker than flour and water alone. One cannot fulfill the obligation of eating matzah, with matzah ashira.

The reason for this is because when it comes to the mitzvah of eating matzah for future generations, the verse says, "You shall not eat (the Pesach offering) with chametz, seven days you must eat matzah, lechem oni (bread of affliction), because you went out of Egypt hastily." Since it says, "lechem oni," we know that it can't be matzah ashira, and because it says, "You shall not eat (the Pesach offering) with chametz," we know that it has to be able to become chametz, in other words, it has to have water in the mix, and we have to be careful that it doesn't become chametz.

The reason that the verse gives for both (that it has to be able to become chametz and that it has to be lechem oni), is "because you went out of Egypt hastily." This is the same as fleeing Egypt, "the nation (of Israel) has fled."

This is all with regards to the Pesach of later generations, but by the first Pesach Seder, before leaving Egypt, there was the possibility of having matzah ashira, because it doesn't say "lechem oni," but it had to be able to become chametz, as it says, "and you should guard the matzahs," meaning, that you should not allow it to become chametz. However, at the actual time of the Exodus, they only had lechem oni.

This is all with regards to the Exodus from Egypt. However, when Moshiach comes we will not flee, as it says, "You will not go in haste."

What is the symbolism of matzah ashira and lechem oni?

Lechem oni doesn't have much flavor. It is symbolic of serving Hashem by accepting the yoke of serving Him. This is done through hard work and effort, submitting yourself to His will, even though you may not be there spiritually, going against your own desires, forcing yourself to do what Hashem wants.

Matzah ashira, on the other hand, has flavor, it symbolizes serving Hashem through understanding. This is pleasurable because you want to do it, because through your understanding you become in sync with Hashem's will, until it becomes your own.

When leaving Egypt they had to flee, because "The bad in the lives of (the people of) Israel was still prevalent," they were not yet in sync with Hashem's will. That would only happen later, after much work, by the giving of the Torah. And this is true about our lives now. Whenever we are in a negative spiritual phase, an Egypt of our own, we must force ourselves to do what is right, and flee from the negative. Only later will we be able to become in sync with Hashem.

When Moshiach comes, we will be in perfect sync with Hashem's will, so we won't have to go in haste, we won't have to flee.

Yet we see an interesting thing. The verse that tells us about the mitzvah of matzah for future generations continues, "in order that you will remember the day that you left Egypt all the days of your life." In the Haggadah we read, that this means "including the days of Moshiach." You may ask, why do we have to remember the Exodus when Moshiach comes? If we will be in sync with Hashem's will, what kind of Egypt will we have to break free from?

The answer is, none. But there will be one aspect of the Exodus from Egypt that we should continue, in line with accepting Hashem's yoke, that we should put in the effort and hard work in our service to Hashem.

On the other hand, by the Exodus from Egypt it says, "And I will raise you also raise." Why does it say "raise" twice? The first is the Exodus from Egypt, and the second is the coming of Moshiach, because at the time of the Exodus, there was also an aspect of Moshiach that we had to be cognizant of, and this is true about any personal Egypt. We have to know, that our hard work will eventually lead to becoming in sync with Hashem.

This is also why after the splitting of the sea, in the Song of the Sea, there are allusions to the coming of Moshiach. Because that was the conclusion of the Exodus from Egypt.

Laying here in my bed, unable to move or speak, unable to hug or kiss my precious children, I am in a physical Egypt. However, I know in my heart, that Hashem has put me here for a reason, to uplift people through my writings, my heart and my smile. That is why I work so hard writing these Dvar Torahs with my eyes.

I know that eventually I will go out of my Egypt, and be able to teach Torah with my mouth, and write these Dvar Torahs with my hand. I will be able to do father and husband things for my wife and children. Either by cure, by miracle or with the coming of Moshiach.

May we break free from our personal Egypts, and become in sync with Hashem, whether it be a physical, spiritual, emotional or psychological Egypt. Our personal redemption will lead to the ultimate redemption, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

The Greatness Of Jewish Women

The Haftora for parshas Beshalach, Shabbos Shira, is about our Shofetes Devora Hanavia (our leader/judge Devora the prophetess).

She summoned her general Barak, to wage war against the mighty Canaanite general Sisera and his army. Barak insisted that Devora go with him to battle, which she agreed to do, but she told him that he wouldn't be credited with the victory, rather a woman would have that honor.

They went to war and completely destroyed the Canaanite army, but Sisera got away. He ran to the tent of Chever the Kenite, thinking that he would be safe there, being that there was a good relationship between him and the Canaanite king. Chever's wife was Yael, a courageous woman. She hid him in her

tent, giving him a false sense of security. He asked for some water, and she gave him milk, which made him sleepy. As he slept, she took a tent peg and a hammer and drove the peg into his temple and he died.

Yael is the woman who was credited for the victory, as she put an end to Sisera and an end to the Canaanites.

Devora sang a song to commemorate the victory, and there was peace for forty years.

The connection to our parsha is that the parsha tells of the splitting of the sea, when we were finally free from the Egyptians, and the song we sang on that momentous occasion.

The Song by the Sea was sung by both the men and the women, why is the Haftora about women, and about a song of a woman, Devora?

When we look at the parsha. We see that there was a difference between the way the men sang and the way the women sang. All the men did was sing, however, when the women sang, it says, "And all the women went out... with tambourines and dances." Why was there more joy by the women than by the men, not only did they sing, but they had tambourines and danced as well? And why did they have tambourines?

"According to the pain, so is the reward." So to, according to the suffering, so is the joy that follows, when the suffering is gone. All the Jewish people suffered in Egypt, but the women suffered more. Seeing their newborn babies being thrown into the Nile, was worse than the hard labor the men suffered. Although it affected the men as well, what happens to a baby has more of an affect on a mother.

Now that they were finally free of Pharaoh, the joy was so great, not only did they sing, but they danced and played their tambourines as well. And because the women's joy was greater, we read the Song of Devora, a woman.

Our great sages tell us, that "In the merit of righteous women our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt, and in the merit of righteous women we will be redeemed in the future." The parsha and the haftorah highlight three women, Miriam, Devora and Yael, because we can learn from them, about the righteousness of women. The parsha also mentions "all the women," Because there is a lesson to be learned from them as well.

When it mentions Miriam, the Torah calls her "Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister." Why not Moshe's sister? Because it is referring to the time before Moshe was born. The name Miriam comes from the word mar, which means bitter, since she was born around the time that the bitter servitude began. As a little girl, she witnessed Pharaoh's evil decree, that "Every boy that is born should be thrown in the river." She prophesied, that her parents would give birth to the savior of the Jewish people. She had complete trust in Hashem, that this prophecy would come true. And when Moshe was put in a basket, in the river, the Torah tells us, that she "stood at a distance to see what would become of him." And she continued to wait for the next eighty years, knowing that it would surely come to pass. She suffered bitterly and felt the suffering of her people. And now as they crossed the sea, and they were free at last, she witnessed with great joy as her prophecy had come true.

From Miriam we learn of the great trust righteous women have in Hashem. This is also seen in all the Jewish women of the time, as they prepared tambourines, trusting that Hashem would redeem them. These are the tambourines they took with them, as they left Egypt, into the desert, trusting that they were in Hashem's hands, soon to be free.

We know that the women suffered terribly as their babies were being thrown into the Nile. There is a lot of symbolism here. The Nile was Egypt's god, it was the river that sustained them. In other words, they worshipped making a living. We, on the other hand, serve Hashem, and know that our sustenance comes from Him. More than not, most children spend more time with their mother than their father, this means that the mother's influence,

is so important. Some make the grave mistake of throwing their children into the river of making a living, to the sacrifice of a proper Jewish education. Because the culture demands it, and because "what will my friends say?" However, the strong Jewish mother puts Hashem first, knowing that our sustenance is from Hashem. She saves her children from the Nile, and makes sure to give her babies the best Torah education, so that they will grow up in Hashem's way. This is the greatest nachas a parent could have.

The Haftora calls Devora the wife of Lapidus, the word Lapid means a flame, because she would make the wicks for the Mishkan in Shiloh. Her wicks would light up the Mishkan, and from there the light would spread to the whole world.

This is the calling of all Jewish women, to fill their own Mishkans, their homes, with the light of Shabbos candles, which has a profound impact on her family. It is symbolic of the atmosphere, which she sets in her home, as she has an effect on her husband and her children, making her home a dwelling place for Hashem and His blessings.

Devora would judge the people sitting under a date palm. Why? Because a date palm's fronds are high up on the tree and don't really give shade. She did this out of modesty, not to be alone with other men, as she judged and advised them. In Devorah's song, she blesses Yael, to be "Blessed among the women of the tent." Which refers to our matriarchs, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, who were known for their modesty. The tent also refers to the home, which means her commitment to her spouse.

I am amazed by the greatness of Jewish women, especially because I can see that they sense and feel the pain of the exile, more than us men do. When I see how much my wife Dina endures, with such grace. Despite everything, she takes the time to be there and lift the spirits of others, I am at a loss of words. Jewish women are simply amazing.

These noble traits of Jewish women, is what brought the redemption from Egypt, and these

same traits will bring the future redemption, the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Dedicated to my wife Dina, a truly great woman, in honor of our 21st anniversary, which is this Shabbos, Tu B'Shvat.

When All Hope Is Gone

In this week's parsha, Beshalach, we read about the manna that came down from heaven. On Friday they went out to collect the manna, they collected the same amount as they usually did, but found that they had a double portion. Moshe explained, that tomorrow is Shabbos, there will be no manna to collect, this double portion is for today and Shabbos.

This is the first time Shabbos is mentioned in the Torah, by the manna. What is the connection between Shabbos and manna? What lesson can we take from this for life?

Logic dictates that if you don't work, you won't have. Keeping Shabbos, is putting trust in Hashem that he will take care of you, despite logic.

The same was true about the manna. Except for Shabbos, the manna lasted for one day. Every morning they put their trust in Hashem that he would send manna to sustain them.

Shabbos and manna, are all about trust in Hashem. It is this trust that is the source of the sustenance we are blessed with. It is also the catalyst for blessing in general. When we put our trust in Hashem, it opens the spigot of blessing in our lives.

I remember when we received my diagnosis of ALS, it felt like our whole world was falling apart. Dina shared with me advice she received from a friend. At times like this, let go and allow Hashem to take over. It was the best advice. Hashem sent his blessings in the form of good, kind, and loving people, who we are so grateful for. This advice has carried us through all our difficulties.

Hashem is there for you. When there doesn't appear to be any answers, when all hope seems lost, put your trust in Hashem. When there seems to be nobody, Hashem is there for you.

Finding Strength In Impossible Situations

In this week's parsha, Beshalach, Hashem has the Jewish people turn around and backtrack. Now they find themselves stuck between the raging sea and the nearing Egyptian war machine. They turn to Moshe and he turns to Hashem in prayer. Hashem says to Moshe "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them journey forth."

What lessons can we take from this?

We have been in exile for two thousand years. Our ultimate purpose is to transform this world into a place where Hashem's presence can dwell openly. That will happen with the coming of Moshiach.

Sometimes it feels like we are in an impossible situation, the whole world seems to be against us and we are backed against a raging tide.

At times like these, we need to realize that it is Hashem Who turned us around and put us into this situation. He wants us there. There is a purpose that can only be realized through this difficult situation.

Will we complain? Will we cry out to Hashem? Of course. Then we must lift our heads and forge ahead obstacles notwithstanding. When we do that Hashem splits seas for us.

For the past three years I have been in a difficult predicament which seems to only get worse. Do I pray? Do I cry out to Hashem that He heal me? Yes, all the time. However, the illness has not broken my spirit because I know that Hashem put me here and that He wants me here. I don't like it,

but I continue to do what I can to bring Moshiach, through my difficulties and even more, using my difficulties as a platform to lift others up.

¹The main thing, is to use our strengths, talents and situation to accomplish our mission.

You can do it, don't be afraid, Hashem is with you.

This is written in memory of Rabbi Ariel Rav-Noy.
May Hashem comfort his family.

¹ In the original, I connected this with Yud Shvat, the day the Rebbe became Rebbe, since it commonly falls in the week of Parshas Beshalach.

What does this have to do with Yud Shvat?

Yud Shvat is all about solidifying our connection with our Moshe, the Rebbe, and to commit ourselves to the mission he laid out for us. The Rebbe, the Moshe of our time, gave us clear marching orders. Bring Moshiach now! In other words, it is in our ability to bring Moshiach. Specifically to use our strengths, talents and situation to accomplish the mission.