

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Beshalach for your Shabbos Table
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Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger as a zechus for a refuah shleima for Chaya Esther Tehila bas Arielle Tsiporah and lilui nishmas Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Am Yisrael's Weapon

In the beginning of Parshas Beshalach (13:18), the Torah tells וחמושים עלו בני ישראל מארץ מצרים – that *Benei Yisrael* left Egypt חמושים. According to one interpretation brought by Rashi, this means that the nation was armed.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, the Rosh Yeshiva of Brisk, explains that this should not be taken literally, to mean that *Benei Yisrael*, who had just been freed from centuries of slavery, had weapons with them. Rather, this description of וחמושים must be read in conjunction with the next *pasuk*: ויקח משה את עצמות יוסף עמו – Moshe took Yosef's remains (literally, "bones" – עצמות) with him out of Egypt, in fulfillment of the promise that Yosef's brothers made to him, that they would bring his remains to *Eretz Yisrael*. The word עצמות can be read as עצמיות – Yosef's essence. When *Benei Yisrael* left Egypt, they brought with them the inspiring model set by Yosef, who was taken to Egypt as a slave at the age of seventeen, and yet managed to retain his piety, his commitment to his beliefs and ideals. Yosef serves as an inspiring example of resilience, of strength, of resisting temptation and negative influences, of unshakable devotion to Hashem. This essence of Yosef accompanied *Benei Yisrael* as they left Egypt, and this has remained with our nation throughout the millennia ever since.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that this is the "weapon" that *Benei Yisrael* took with them from Egypt. The greatest weapon in our national arsenal is the עצמות יוסף, the steadfast faith and commitment which Yosef displayed, as did countless generations of righteous Jews throughout the ages.

Of course, we need to take appropriate measures for our physical safety. We need, love, support and pray for

the brave soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces. At the same time, however, our most powerful "weapon" that has enabled us to survive for thousands of years is the עצמות יוסף, the essence of Yosef, our unbreakable *emuna* and unwavering commitment to Torah.

Running Away From Egypt

Pharaoh changed his mind, yet again, after allowing *Benei Yisrael* to leave, and he mobilized an army to chase them. The Torah tells, וירדפו מצרים אחריהם – "Egypt pursued them" (14:9).

It is perhaps worth noting that the Torah speaks not of the Egyptians (מצרים) pursuing *Benei Yisrael*, but rather of "Egypt" (מצרים) chasing after them. Surprisingly, the Torah mentions the country, the nation, rather than the Egyptian troops.

I would humbly suggest that the Torah might be alluding to an additional threat that *Benei Yisrael* faced at that time. They were pursued not only by Pharaoh's army, but also by "Egypt," by everything the country represented – its paganism, its moral depravity, its debased lifestyle. After having spent over 200 years in Egypt, *Benei Yisrael* needed to break themselves free from this influence, from the values and beliefs in which they had been submerged for generations. And so as they left Egypt, they were chased by מצרים, by the culture and lifestyle to which they had grown accustomed.

Baruch Hashem, we are not "pursued" by people. Even with the troubling rise of anti-Semitism in recent years, we generally live in peace and security, without anybody threatening us. We are, however, "pursued" by the United States, by American culture, by our society's beliefs, values and norms. Even as committed, observant Jews, the influence of "מצרים," of the surrounding culture, threatens to distort our priorities and lead us to compromise our principles. The Orthodox Jewish world is plagued by many of the

same ills that affects the rest of American society, such as the obsession with materialism, superficiality, superstition, and so much more. We must be wary of the values and lifestyles that are “chasing” after us, and always remember that we are to abide by the Torah’s principles and ideals, without ever abandoning them in favor of those of American society.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

When the Path Before Us Isn’t Clear

Benei Yisrael were saved through the miracle of קריעת ים סוף – the splitting of the sea, which allowed them to cross safely to the other side, while God brought the waters down on the Egyptians, drowning them.

We find different depictions among the commentators of the way in which this miracle unfolded. Rabbeinu Bechayei writes that the water did not split all at once. Rather, with each step forward that *Benei Yisrael* took, the water right in front of them split, allowing them to proceed one step further. Rabbeinu Bechayei explains on this basis the description in Tehillim (114:3), הים ראה, וינס – “The sea saw and retreated.” The sea “saw,” so-to-speak, each step that *Benei Yisrael* took, and then responded by retreating a bit further.

To explain the reason for this gradual progression, Rabbeinu Bechayei draws an interesting comparison to the manna, of which the Torah tells later in this *parsha*. Each person received just a single portion of manna each day. Rather than provide *Benei Yisrael* with a year’s worth, a month’s worth, or even a week’s worth of food at a time, God gave them manna in daily rations, such that *Benei Yisrael* went to sleep each night with absolutely no food in their cabinets. They could not go to Costco to stock up; they received only a single day’s ration. This system served to develop their trust and faith in Hashem, as they had no choice but to look to Him as their source of sustenance each and every day. By the same token, Rabbeinu Bechayei writes, *Benei Yisrael* walked through the sea with the waters raging in front of them. With every step, they were performing a profound act of *emuna*, placing their fate in Hashem’s hand and trusting in His deliverance, thus engendering within themselves a strong foundation of faith.

The *Sifsei Kohen* disagrees, claiming that Hashem would not have done this to *Benei Yisrael* – having them fear throughout the process of crossing the sea that they would drown. Rather, the *Sifsei Kohen* writes, the entire sea split all at once, such that *Benei Yisrael* had a clear path in front of them.

It occurred to me that these two perspectives may reflect two different realities that we sometimes face over the course of our lives. Sometimes, Hashem sets

a clear path before us. For example, some people’s careers follow a smooth, straight trajectory, as they build and advance without much difficulty. But at other times, the path before us is far from clear. We cannot see how we will reach our destination, how the problem will be solved, how the money will be raised, how the health condition will be cured, and so on. In such situations, Rabbeinu Bechayei’s depiction teaches, we need to focus on taking the small steps that are necessary right now. Even if we cannot see the end, we need to continue moving forward, one step at a time, trusting in Hashem to bring us to the destination that we so desperately want to reach.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

Bitter Waters and Bitter People

After crossing the sea, *Benei Yisrael* journeyed for three days without finding any sources of water. Finally, they arrived in Mara, where they found water – but they were unable to drink it, כי מרים הם – because the waters were bitter and foul-tasting (15:23). God then commanded Moshe to throw a certain branch into the water, whereupon it became drinkable.

The Kotzker Rebbe offers a remarkable insight into this story, boldly suggesting that when the Torah says, כי מרים הם, it is referring not to the waters, but rather to the people. They could not drink the water of Mara because they themselves were “bitter,” viewing things from a negative perspective. When a person is bitter, then everything he tastes is bitter. If our attitude is negative, then everything we see and experience is bad and worthy of a complaint and protest.

The recently-coined term “Missing Tile Syndrome” refers to the natural human tendency when walking into a room to immediately notice and focus upon the missing tiles. Even though the vast majority of the tiles are in place, our attention is instinctively drawn to the spots on the wall that are missing tiles, rather than the rest of the wall. One of the most common obstacles to happiness and contentment in life is this tendency to see only what is wrong, instead of appreciating all that is right. We too often suffer from “bitterness,” fixating on the “missing tiles” in our lives, rather than seeing all that is wonderful, all the many “tiles” that are sitting perfectly in place.

The story of Mara, then, should motivate us to transform our “bitterness” to “sweetness,” to change our perspective, to stop focusing our attention on what is missing, and to instead feel grateful and gratified over all the blessings that we have been given.