



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Beshalach

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ישיבת מעלות

פרשת בשלח

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The Strength to Stand on Our Own Two Feet

Kriat Yam Suf and Shirat Hayam were two of the most spiritually uplifting events that occurred throughout the history of Am Yisrael. Chazal explain¹ that Bnei Yisrael reached such a lofty level at Kriat Yam Suf that even a simple maidservant was able to have prophetic visions higher than those of the Nevi'im. The revelation of Hashem's presence elevated the nation to indescribable levels.

Upon finishing singing Shirat Hayam, Bnei Yisrael began to take their first steps as a free nation. The Torah says²: "And Moshe took Bnei Yisrael from Yam Suf and they went out towards Midbar Shur. And they went three days and they did not find water. And they came to Marata and they could not drink the water from Mara for it was bitter; therefore it is called Mara. And the nation complained to Moshe saying 'what will we drink?'" Rashi explains that Moshe took Bnei Yisrael against their will. He explains that this was because the Egyptians decorated their chariots with gold and precious stones, and Bnei Yisrael would stand next to Yam Suf and collect these treasures.

The question that arises from this is obvious. Merely a few moments have gone by since what was one of the greatest Godly revelations of all time, and Bnei Yisrael busy themselves picking up booty from drowning chariots? After attaining such high levels of prophecy Bnei Yisrael don't have any faith that there will be water, and they complain? Do such spiritually uplifting experiences not have long term effects? What's the point of such revelations if immediately after, the nation falls to such low levels? The answer to all of these questions lies in the fact that falling is not a sign of weakness. Rather, it is a sign of growth and development.

As the sea was split, Bnei Yisrael were uplifted to the highest heights; they were carried on the wings of the revelation of the Shechina. This wasn't the natural state of Bnei Yisrael; it was a level that was far over their heads. Therefore, when the Nation returned to the regular pace of life, the people also began to fall. The fact that Bnei Yisrael fell was a sign that they could now begin to walk on their own two feet. They were now able to start moving independently towards greatness, *especially* because of the fact that they had fell.

¹ Mechilta deRebbi Yishmael, Masechet Shira, 3

² Shemot 15, 22-24

If this is so, then why was Bnei Yisrael lifted to such high levels at Kriyat Yam Suf? The revelation that occurred and the closeness that Bnei Yisrael felt to Hashem serve as goals for all of Klal Yisrael. Through hard work, by striving for inner wholeness, Am Yisrael can return to the level that they attained as they were lead through the sea on dry land. Yet when Am Yisrael returns to this level, it will be because they achieved it through hard toil and not because it was given to them as a present.

This serves as a vital lesson for our generation. There are periods in a person's life which uplift and exalt him. At these times, a person finds within himself inner strength; he is given the power to perform above and beyond what he is normally capable of. Yet when the dust settles, one returns to his natural state of being. A person falls back into the regular habits and mannerisms of everyday life. When a person tries to bridge the gap between these two periods of time, he usually stumbles and falls.

What is true about the individual is also true about Klal Yisrael as a whole. Rabeinu Bechayei writes³ that a story is told of a certain chasid who saw an army of men return victorious from a heavy battle. With them they brought all the riches that the enemy possessed. The chasid said to them "As you come back from the small battle you take with you plunder, yet prepare yourselves for the big battle which is to come. And what is that battle? It's the battle of the Yetzer Hara." War is a time in which a person finds within himself strength that is beyond his regular level performance, and quite possibly beyond normal human nature. Yet because of this, there are many people who after experiencing war have great difficulty living within the framework of day to day life. Living a regular routine is of no less importance and is no less heroic than fighting a war or waging a battle.

There are also times in which an entire nation is elevated to levels above and beyond their regular norm. The first and second Aliyah were characterized by acts of strength and heroism- drying up swamps, settling the country, and building a homeland. Since Medinat Yisrael was formed and the Jewish population was more solidified and rooted, a new type of strength is needed. Klal Yisrael needs to live life as a nation within its own homeland on a level of greatness, while coping with enemies and other difficulties. Not always is it possible to live up to this mission, yet one must understand and internalize that falling is a sign of maturity. Am Yisrael is learning to walk on its own two feet. Now, anything that Klal Yisrael attains is something that it has toiled for, not something that it received as a result of being uplifted or elevated. The achievements have been earned by hard work, and now Klal Yisrael can take the next step forward. The great periods in an individual's life and in the life of Klal Yisrael are goals which are to be attained through routine, perseverance and pushing forward.

³ Chovat Halevavot, Sha'ar Yichud Ha'maseh, ch. 5