

שביעי של פסח

It seems that at one time, at least, a person who needed some time of rest and recuperation after a difficult physical or emotional ordeal was sent to the seashore to regain his strength. Whether it was distancing from the pressures of 'regular' life or the calm and serenity that the seashore was able to provide, such a respite was viewed to be very important in contributing to the health of the infirm.

It is clear that such is not what occurred at *Yam Suf* when on the seventh day following the Exodus our ancestors were at the banks of that sea.

If during the days following the Exodus until their arrival at the sea our ancestors enjoyed a respite from the multi-century slavery in Egypt we don't know. We do know that for many¹, the episode of the sea was extraordinarily traumatic.

Among the verses that we read, are some that underscore the distress and threat that our ancestors experienced. We read (Sh'mos Perek 14/P'sukim 10-12):

וּפְרָעָה הַקְּרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲנִה מִצְרַיִם נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל ה': וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה הַמְּבֹלִי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר מֵהַזֶּאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם: הֲלֹא זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבַד אֶת מִצְרַיִם מִמֵּתְנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר:

Par'o drew near and B'nei Yisroel raised their eyes and behold Egypt was traveling after them and they were very fearful and B'nei Yisroel cried out to G-d. They said to Moshe, 'Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness; what is this that you did to us to take us out from Egypt? Is this not the matter that we spoke to you in Egypt saying,

¹ Although the P'sukim that we will bring shortly imply that there was a unified response of Israel, and perhaps that is how Rashi learns p'shat as well, the Midrash (Mechilta D'Rabi Yishmael Sh'mos Perek 14/Posuk 14) writes that there were four distinct groups, each with its own response to the imminent threat of the pursuing Egyptians.

‘Leave us alone and we will serve Egypt because it is better for us to serve Egypt than that we die in the wilderness.

Thus, this episode was anything but restful for our ancestors; the lack of serenity was total.

Yet, following the crossing of the Red Sea, and the final Posuk that will be read from the first Sefer Torah, we find the following (Perek 15/Posuk 26):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱמֹ שְׂמוּעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל ה' אֲלֵי...לְקִיב וְהִיָּשֶׁר בְּעֵינָיו תִּעֲשֶׂה וְהֶאֱזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתַי וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל חֻקָּיו כָּל הַמִּחְלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַתִּי בַּמִּצְרַיִם לֹא אֲשִׁים עֲלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי ה' רַפְאֵךְ:

Hashem said, ‘If you will surely listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d and do that which is straight in His eyes and hearken to His commandments and guard all His statutes, all of the illness that I placed against Egypt I will not place upon you; I am Hashem your Healer.

The seashore at the time of the crossing of the Yam Suf was not a resort at all. Yet, after all was said and done, the blessing of Divine healing was given following that harrowing experience of the doomsday threat of Egypt.

However, the wonderful promise of Divine healing did not occur immediately following the crossing of the Red Sea; it came a few days later.

What occurred in the intervening time? The Torah writes (P’sukim 22-25):

וַיִּסַּע מֹשֶׁה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵיַם סוּף וַיֵּצְאוּ אֶל מִדְבַּר שׁוּר וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם: וַיָּבֹאוּ מִרְתֵּה וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְשַׁתֵּת מֵיַם מְרָה כִּי מְרִים הֵם עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מְרָה: וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה נִּשְׁתֶּה: וַיִּצְעַק אֶל ה' וַיֹּרְהוּ ה' עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נֹסָהוּ:

Moshe led the people in travel from Yam Suf and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur and they walked in the wilderness for three days and they did not find water. They came to *Moroh* and they were unable to drink the water from *Moroh* because it was bitter; therefore they called its name *Moroh*-bitterness. The people complained against Moshe saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ Moshe cried out to Hashem and Hashem showed

him a piece of wood and Moshe cast it into the water and the water was sweetened; there Hashem placed for Israel a statute and a law and there He tested them.

Rabbenu Bachye presents us with an overall view of these verses when he writes:

כי כל פעולה מפעולות המדבר היה נסיון גמור, והליכתם במדבר הגדול והנורא עם נשיהם וטפם ועמדם בלי מים שלשה ימים בזמן הקיץ אין בעולם נסיון כזה, וכאשר באו מרתה אמרו רז"ל: כי היו המים מתוקים ונמררו. והיה כל זה לנסיון וכענין שאמר: "ושם נסהו", וכאשר התפלל משה בזה והשליך דבר מר במים וחזרו למתיקותם היה כל זה לחזק הנסיון ולקבוע בנפשם המשכלת מדת הבטחון, ועל כן רצה להמתיקם בדבר מר נס בתוך נס...

Each of the events of the wilderness was a complete *nisayon*-test. Their going in the huge and awesome wilderness with their wives and children and existing without water for three days in the summertime – there is no comparable *nisayon*-test like this in existence. When they came to *Moroh*, Chazal said, ‘The waters were originally sweet and they became bitter.’ All this was a test, as it says, ‘there He tested them’. When Moshe davened about this and he cast a bitter object into the water and they became sweet again, this was to strengthen the *nisayon*-test and to affix within their ‘intellect-soul’ the attribute of *bitachon*-trust in Hashem. Therefore He wanted to sweeten the water with a bitter substance to make a ‘miracle within a miracle’.

It seems to be appropriate that the *nisayon*-test of the water here followed immediately upon the footsteps of the salvation at the Red Sea.

The events of the Red Sea were extraordinary. *Davka* because of the greatness of the threat before the salvation, the salvation itself could not be misinterpreted as anything else other than extraordinary.

The reading of the verses of the Torah themselves, without any elaboration that would clarify the *p'shat* make such a conclusion inevitable. If we add the interpretation of Chazal that we find in the Haggadah regarding the multiplicity of

miracles that occurred at the sea, then the events that we commemorate on the seventh day of Pesach loom even larger.

What type of impression do such events make? At the moment that they occur they are extraordinary. The extent by which the Hand of G-d was visible during the crossing of the sea is given expression by the entire *Shira* that Moshe and Israel sang and is emphasized in particular by an early verse in the *Shira* where we read (Posuk 2):

עֲזִי וְזַמֶּרְתָּ קִהַּ יְיָהִי לִי לִישׁוּעָה זֶה קִלִּי וְאֲנִי הוּא... לִקֵּי אָבִי וְאֶרְמָמְנָהוּ:

G-d is my strength and my song and He was my salvation; this is my G-d and I will praise Him, the G-d of my father and I will exalt him.

Rashi, citing the Midrash, comments:

בכבודו נגלה עליהם והיו מראין אותו באצבע, ראתה שפחה על הים מה שלא ראו נביאים:

In His glory He was revealed to them [at the sea] and they pointed to Him with their finger. That which the maidservant saw at the sea, even the prophets did not see.

The impression was profound. The question is the duration of the effect. Is it momentary and fleeting or of long duration and lasting?

It goes without saying that the Divine impression should be long-term and everlasting.

However, if the event described here immediately followed the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, it is apparent that the impression was one of a short-term effect only.

It is true that the test to which Hashem submitted them was extreme; but the salvation at the Red Sea was no less extreme. Would the extreme impact of that salvation stay with Israel when it would be confronted with an extreme event?

Here, at least, the answer was 'no'.

But, an examination of this unsuccessful test includes more than an episode of failure.

The nature of Hashem's salvation is repeated here in Marah as well because He revealed to Israel yet another miracle, one that had a special miraculous nature, as redundant as the words 'special miracle' may seem at first.

A miracle is a change in nature. Nature seems to be a 'fixed' entity that has an inner consistency. Of course nature itself is not 'natural' in the way that most perceive it and neither is it fixed.

Ramban's commentary at the end of Parshas Bo, one of the Torah readings for Chol HaMoed Pesach, states it most clearly. He writes (Shmos Perek 13/Posuk 16):

ומן הנסים הגדולים המפורסמים אדם מודה בנסים הנסתרים שהם יסוד התורה כלה, שאין לאדם חלק בתורת משה רבינו עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכלם נסים אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם, בין ברבים בין ביחיד, אלא אם יעשה המצות יצליחנו שכרו, ואם יעבור עליהם יכריתנו ענשו, הכל בגזרת עליון...

Based on the great and obvious miracles that one experiences, a person will acknowledge that there are 'hidden' miracles that are the foundation of the entire Torah. A person has no connection with the Torah of Moshe Rabbenu until we believe that all that occurs and all happenings are miracles. There is no 'nature' and 'the way the world goes', whether for the multitudes or for the individual. If one does Mitzvos then his reward will bring him success and if he transgresses commandments then his punishment will cut him off; all is by Divine decree.

It is not apparent that when one goes without water there has been a Divine decree. There are geographical locations where water is hard to find and climatic situations that do not allow it to rain, or so it seems.

Here, Israel was placed in a most difficult situation – they were without water and when they finally came to the water that they were seeking, it became bitter.

How ridiculous it could have seemed to try to sweeten bitter water. How impossible it could have seemed to sweeten water with an object that itself was bitter.

Hashem enabled Israel to see the נס בתוך נס, the miracle contained within a miracle, in order to emphasize this principle that Ramban espouses.

In fact, according to Ramban 'nature' is that which we are used to experiencing and used to seeing. It has no inherent truth, it is only that to which we are habituated.

Perhaps none of the events that occurred to the terribly impoverished Rabi Chananya ben Teradion that we learn in Masseches Taanis are more emphatic about this idea than what we read there (25 a):

חד בי שמשי חזייה לברתיה דהוות עציבא, אמר לה: בתי למאי עציבת? - אמרה ליה: כלי של חומץ נתחלף לי בכלי של שמן, והדלקתי ממנו אור לשבת. - אמר לה: בתי, מאי אכפת לך? מי שאמר לשמן וידלוק הוא יאמר לחומץ וידלוק. תנא: היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו, עד שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה.

One Erev Shabbos close to sunset, he saw that his daughter was sad. He said to her, 'My daughter, why are you sad?' She said, 'I mixed up the vinegar vessel with the oil vessel and I lit the vinegar for Shabbos [and it will certainly be extinguished]. He said to her, 'My daughter, why do you care? He Who said to oil that it should light, He will say to the vinegar and it will light.'

The Braisa taught that the light stayed for the entire Shabbos until they used the fire for Havdalah.

Bitter and sweet are traits that were Divinely imbued in particular materials. The same decree that makes one object bitter and the other sweet can be reversed if that is what HaKodosh Boruch Hu wishes.

B'nei Yisroel had crossed the Yam Suf. They saw an event that was 'supernatural'. Water does not split; horsemen are not thrown to and fro and

remain attached to their animals and the dozens more² ‘unnatural’ events that occurred.

And thus, with Yam Suf followed by Marah, HaKodosh Boruch Hu instructed Israel that He performs miracles that are incontrovertible as such as well as ‘everyday’ events that are wondrous.

To be part of *Toras Moshe Rabbenu*, one must see that the everyday events are no less miraculous than those which are גדולים ומפורסמים, large and obvious.

In this inaugural period of our ancestors as a People, HaKodosh Boruch explicitly demonstrated this principle by splitting the sea for them, followed by experiencing the pain of extreme thirst and then by rearranging nature to demonstrate that He creates nature no less than all else that exists.

But the purpose of this section that immediately follows the splitting of the Red Sea and the *Shira* is not only a lesson in the complete Providence of HaKodosh Boruch Hu. It has another purpose as well, or better, that purpose is a compounded one. The first part of the compound is what we have learned – Hashem’s *hashgachah* is upon everything.

The second part of that compound is our obligation to Him. That second part was expressed clearly at the Burning Bush as we read in Parshas Sh’mos (Perek 3/Posuk 12):

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים...לְקִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה:

Hashem said, ‘Because I will be with you and this a sign for you that I have sent you: when you take the people from Egypt you shall serve G-d on this mountain.

What does the phrase:

תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים...לְקִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה:

² The Haggadah teaches that there were 50 miracles at the Red Sea that each had 4 or 5 sub-miracles yielding a total of 200 or 250 miracles there.

You shall serve G-d on this mountain

mean?

Certainly the rendition of Targum Onkelos faithfully conveys the meaning of the words. He writes:

תפֿלחון קדם ה' על טורא הדין:

You shall serve (or worship) G-d on this mountain.

However, since we know that the service of G-d at Sinai was an inaugural event, not one that was limited to that particular time and place, we understand that the less literal *Targum Yonoson ben Uziel* conveys the extended message of this idea when he writes:

תפֿלחון קדם ה' דתקבלון ית אורייתי על טורא הדין:

You shall serve (or worship) G-d when you will accept My Torah on this mountain.

The service of G-d began at Sinai began with the giving of the Torah but it was foreshadowed at Moroh as we read in this section:

שם שם לו חק ומשפט ושם נסהו:

There Hashem placed for Israel a statute and a law and there He tested them.

Why did the Torah have to write שם-there? If laws were given there, I know the place from the context of the verses. What does 'there' add?

I believe that 'there' is written to emphasize the combination of Divine Providence and Divine Lawgiving. G-d took us out of Egypt to serve Him.

That is the understanding of the words of Chazal in regard to Mattan Torah in Masseches Shabbos (88 a):

ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם.

G-d said to them, "If you accept My Torah, good. If not, there will be your burial place.

Part and parcel of Divine Providence is that He commands us. The commandments that we receive are not a punishment nor are they a hardship.

The Mishnah at the end of Masseches Makkos (23 b) writes:

רבי חנניא בן עקשיא אומר: רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא לזכות את ישראל לפיכך הרבה להם תורה ומצות, שנאמר: (ישעיה מב/כא) ה' חפץ למען צדקו יגדיל תורה ויאדיר.

Rabi Chananya ben Akash'ya says: Hashem wished to provide Israel with merit therefore He increased for them Torah and Mitzvos as it says, 'Hashem desired for the benefit of His righteousness – He will make Torah great and will strengthen it.

As a prelude to Mattan Torah, Hashem chose to prepare Israel at Moroh by presenting them with the combination of His Providence and His Mitzvos.

There are a number of opinions regarding which Mitzvos³ were given at Moroh. Rashi writes:

שם שם לו - במרה נתן להם מקצת פרשיות של תורה שיתעסקו בהם, שבת ופרה אדומה ודינין:

There He placed for the People – at Moroh, G-d gave them some of the sections of the Torah for them to be involved in it: Shabbos, *Poroh Aduma*-the Red Heifer and civil law.

There is wholeness with these two components of Providence and Mitzvah-observance. These two components represent the covenantal relationship between G-d and His People. It is because of the Providence that He commands us and it is our recognition of that Providence, our understanding and belief that Hashem gave us the Torah and its commandments as part of that enduring

³ In addition to telling us the Mitzvos given at Moroh, the commentators deal with their derivation from the verse and why these particular Mitzvos were given.

relationship that leads us to join in the covenant and observe His Mitzvos. We enjoy His protection and His healing when we maintain our relationship with Him⁴.

However, the implicit, if not explicit, challenge of that relationship is its converse.

What happens when we do not fulfil His Mitzvos? Of course, that is a time of exile, whether geographically, spiritually, or both. הסתר פנים – His face is hidden from us. That is the face that we pray about (B'midbar Perek 6/Psukim 25-26) and recite:

יָאֵר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֵינוּ וְיַחַנֵּן: יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֵינוּ וְיִשֶּׂם לָךְ שְׁלוֹם:

Hashem should make His Face shine upon you and give you favor. Hashem should raise His Face towards you and give you *shalom*.

Except.

Except that despite הסתר פנים we are here. We are here and celebrating the Yom Tov of Pesach, זמן חרותנו, the season of our freedom. We do not ignore all that is difficult and tragic. We are not unaware of the visible signs of הסתר פנים.

However, at the same time we cannot ignore that we are here!

We cannot pretend to know how G-d runs His world. Nonetheless, He does run it and despite His being hidden from us, we enjoy His bounty all of the time.

Do we have a glimpse of how things work?

⁴ We will not deal with the issue of theodicy – that there are those who prosper when they willfully negate and despise His Mitzvos and there are those who suffer terribly despite their righteousness.

This is one of the issues that Moshe Rabbenu sought to understand from HaKodosh Boruch Hu as we read in Masseches B'rachos (7 a). Moshe asked before Hashem:

רבנו של עולם! מפני מה יש צדיק וטוב לו ויש צדיק ורע לו, יש רשע וטוב לו ויש רשע ורע לו?
Master of the World – why is it that there is a righteous person for whom this world is good and a righteous person for whom this world is bad? Why is it that there is an evil person for whom this world is good and an evil person for whom this world is bad?

I believe that the Posuk that we are studying contains the answer.

Let us revisit it:

וַיֹּאמֶר אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמַע לְקוֹל ה' אֶל...לִקְיָה וְהִישָׁר בְּעֵינָיו תַּעֲשֶׂה וְהֶאֱזַנְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתַי וְשָׁמַרְתָּ כָּל חֻקָּיו כָּל הַמַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַתִּי בְּמִצְרַיִם לֹא אֲשִׁים עֲלֶיךָ כִּי אֲנִי ה' רֹפְאֶךָ:

Hashem said, 'If you will surely listen to the voice of Hashem your G-d and do that which is straight in His eyes and hearken to His commandments and guard all of His statutes, all of the illness that I placed against Egypt I will not place upon you; I am Hashem your Healer.

Do we sense the tension in this verse, its paradox? If Hashem promises that He will not place illness upon us, why do we need Him to be our Healer? If we require healing that means that illness has befallen us.

Based on this question, Or HaChaim HaKodosh reminds us that there are two types of maladies. One type is natural and the other is afflicted upon us by mankind.

Regarding that which is natural, Hashem says *כל המחלה לא אשים עליך* - I Hashem will not place illness that stems from natural causes upon you.

However, if you are injured by others, then I Hashem will be your Healer.

Rashi does not learn *p'shat* that way and his understanding of the Posuk, with elucidation by his supra-commentators, will give us a path to understand the question we have raised – how do we survive in an era, thousands of years long, of *הסתר פנים*?

Rashi writes the *midrash* of the verse:

לא אשים עליך - ואם אשים הרי היא כלא הושמה, כי אני ה' רופאך:

I will not place upon you – And if I will place it, it will be as if it wasn't placed because I am Hashem your Healer.

Sifsei Chachamim explains:

דקשה ליה דאם לא ישים למה אמר אני ה' רופאך לכן פירש ואם אשים וכו' והכי פירושו אם שמוע תשמע וגו' אז לא אשים אבל אם לא תשמע רצה לומר (קוהלת ז/כ⁵) כי אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב וכו' אז אשים עליך אבל הרי הוא כלא הושמה וכו':

Rashi finds the verse difficult because if He will not place [the illness], why does it say 'I am Hashem your Healer'? Therefore Rashi explains 'if I will place...'

This is the explanation: 'If you will surely listen' then 'I Hashem will not place [illness upon you].' But if you do not listen, because there is no one righteous in the land who does [only] good, then I will place illness upon you but [since Hashem is your Healer] it will be like it was not placed.

Isn't it remarkable? Inherent in this forceful phrase, the one which will conclude the reading of the crossing of the Red Sea, Hashem makes an everlasting commitment to us, despite our lack of complete loyalty and fealty to His Word.

When we lack that loyalty and fealty we will be vulnerable but Hashem promises to be there and 'pick up the pieces'.

If we are looking for serenity and calm we should visit the sea. The sea on our itinerary is the Yam Suf and we need to propel ourselves backwards in history 3329 years ago exactly and renew our sense of G-d's promise of Providence for us.

Then, we need to return ourselves to our own reality and internalize what we saw and experienced more than three millennia ago.

There were astounding miracles in Egypt, the Haggadah tells us, but the ones on the sea were even greater.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא:
Because there is no righteous man in the land who does good and does not sin.

They were greater because they did not conclude at the water's edge so many years ago; they are still with us today.

Let us be inspired by that promise and dedicate ourselves so that promise we received following the crossing of the Red Sea will reverberate within us far after the temporal Yom Tov of Pesach has concluded.

If we do not deserve to be exempt from the ills of the world, let us remember that it is Hashem Who can heal them for us.

Chag Sameach

Rabbi Pollock