



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

A project of CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH • Parshas Shemos 5768

Sefer Shemos opens with the emergence of the Jewish People as a nation. The *psukim* graphically portray Pharaoh as a murderer of Jewish children and torturer of their parents. The Torah then describes Pharaoh's death, which is immediately followed by the initial stages of redemption.

“And it was... (that) the king of Egypt died, and *B'nai Yisrael* cried out from their bondage...and Hashem heard their cry, and Hashem remembered His covenant...” (2:23-24).

The *possuk* presents a patent difficulty. Why would the Jews first cry out to Hashem when the king of Egypt died? *B'nai Yisrael* had been enslaved for over seventy years by that point; they should have been crying out decades before Pharaoh's death!

Furthermore, Pharaoh was the arch-enemy of the Jews, chief architect and director of the entire enslavement policy with all its torturous details. The news of his demise should have been met with jubilant celebrations! Yet, the Jews reacted with tears. Why?

In his commentary on the Haggadah, Rabbi Asher Weiss proffers Rabbi Itzeleh Volozhiner's insightful explanation:

People who find themselves in desperate situations have a natural tendency to ascribe their suffering to outside factors. If a person's business is failing, for instance, the simplest thing for him to do is blame it on the economy; an approach that allows the businessman to hope that as soon as the economy picks up a bit, his business will follow suit.

The pitfall to this approach is obvious: by attributing failures to natural causes, one may easily become incapable of recognizing the true Source of suffering—and, by extension, the true Source of salvation. In a word, one may forget the Master of the Universe, Who is truly running the show.

During Pharaoh's lifetime, a time punctuated by indescribable suffering, the Jewish people clung to the belief that their afflictions were the result of the whims of one particularly nasty ruler. *As soon as this meshuganer is out of the picture, they reasoned, someone more rational will take over, and life will return to normal.*

When Pharaoh died, the Jews probably initially felt hopeful. In short order, however, their euphoria gave way to bitter disappointment, as the new monarch upheld the agonizing policy of slavery.

Seeing that their situation remained unchanged, the Jewish people came to the realization that their salvation was not dependent on this, or that, or any Pharaoh. For the first time, the Jews recognized that their fate was in the hands of the Almighty alone. And so, for the first time, they cried out to Him for help. Finally, as a result of those sincere, prayerful cries, the wheels of the redemption were immediately set in motion.

A similar idea is reflected in the Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (3:8), which describes the miraculous events surrounding the war with Amalek detailed in *Parshas Beshalach*. Each time Moshe lifted his arms, the Jews triumphed; when he lowered them, the Amalekites gained the upper hand:

לזכר נשמת ר' ישראל בנימין ב"ר יהואל מאיר וזוגתו מרת רויזא רבקה בת ר' שלמה קאמנער ע"ה

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מרדכי בן משה ע"ה

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his Neshamah.



**MISHNAS
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משנת חיים

וְהָיָה בְּאֶשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגִבֹּר יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגו' (שמות יז), וְכִי יָדָיו שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה עוֹשׂוֹת מִלְחָמָה אִזְּ שׁוֹבְרוֹת מִלְחָמָה. אֲלֵא לֹא לֹמֵר לָךְ, כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהָיָה יִשְׂרָאֵל מְסַתְּפִלִּים כָּל־פִּי מַעֲלָה וּמִשְׁעַבְדִּין אֶת לִבָּם לְאַבְיָהֶם שְׂבִשְׁמִים הָיוּ מִתְגַּבְּרִים. וְאִם לֹא, הָיוּ נֹפְלִין.

“Could Moshe’s hands (really) create success in war or cause defeat in war? Rather, (this phenomenon comes) to teach you, that as long as the Jews would gaze Heavenward (to where Moshe was pointing) and subjugate their hearts to their Father in Heaven, (then) they would prevail; and if not, (then) they would falter.” (Rosh Hashanah, 3:8)

As long as the people followed Moshe’s directive and kept their focus on the true Source of their deliverance, Hashem reciprocated by granting them success. However, when they relied on other factors, such as their military capabilities, they suffered defeat.

Rabbi Weiss illustrates this concept of *bitachon* with a very poignant story involving the illustrious Rebbe of Tzanz, the Divrei Chayim. A poverty-stricken woman once approached the famous *tzaddik* with tears in her eyes, begging him for a blessing for her deathly ill son.

To the woman’s astonishment, the Rebbe uncharacteristically answered, “Bring me 1,000 *groschen*; only then will I promise that your son will merit a full recovery.”

1,000 *groschen*?! There was no way in the world that this woman could collect anything even close to that sum! The mother pleaded with Rebbe to have mercy and waive this “fee.” The Divrei Chayim, however, was adamant.

“If you procure the full sum,” he declared, “you’ll receive the blessing. But if you’re even one cent short, I can’t guarantee a thing!”

At this point, the shocked and despondent mother could contain herself no longer. “If the

Rebbe does not wish to help me.....well, then, Hashem Himself will!” she cried.

Suddenly, the Divrei Chayim’s demeanor changed, as his habitual compassion resurfaced. “Ah,” the Rebbe exclaimed, “that is exactly what I was hoping to hear! As long as you were relying on flesh and blood for help, the Heavenly Gates of Mercy were closed to you. Now that you came to the realization that only Hashem can help you, I can guarantee that your needs will be filled.” Shortly thereafter, the woman’s son fully recovered.

We, too, have the ability to strengthen our *bitachon*, just like our forefathers in Egypt. If we try just a little bit harder to fully recognize that our lives are orchestrated by Hashem alone, perhaps we too will be *zocheh* to witness the ultimate Redemption.

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