

Parshas Tzav 5772

GLORIOUS REVOLUTION?

History is replete with rebellion and revolution. This often takes the form of a popular uprising featuring a population that is fed up with an oppressive and tyrannical government. These events can be quite dramatic, wherein a ragtag group of common folk come together armed with crude weapons or pitchforks, and they end up standing down the more formidable establishment, overwhelming their superior military and initiating their own, new republic. (It doesn't always work out that the new order is an improvement over the old, but that is a different matter.)

Compare this description with the situation of B'nei Yisrael in Egypt. Moshe and Aharon appear before their oppressed brethren with a Divine message of hope. Addressing the elders of Yisrael, they bear tidings of Hashem's announcement that the *Ge'ulah* (Redemption) from their brutal Egyptian taskmasters is finally at hand. The "movement" certainly seemed to be picking up steam: "And the nation believed, and they heard that Hashem had remembered B'nei Yisrael and that He saw their oppression; and they knelt and bowed" (*Shemos 4:31*). Led by Moshe and Aharon, the entire procession begins their march to the evil Pharaoh to issue the time-honored declaration: "Let my people go."

But what happens when they arrive at Pharaoh's palace? Moshe and Aharon turn around to discover that all of the elders, one by one, had lost their nerve and dropped out along the way (*Rashi, ibid. 5:1*). Alone they issue their demand, but instead of immediate capitulation and relief for the enslaved nation, Pharaoh turns them away and then increases the workload and suffering of his subjects (by mandating them to procure their own straw for brick-

making). The people then meet their "deliverers" with recriminations. It certainly does not appear to be the most glorious of revolutions.

MODEST BEGINNINGS

R' Shimshon Pinkus, *zt"l*, who raised the aforementioned issue, makes another poignant observation. We are all familiar, of course, with the principal characters of the Exodus story: Moshe, Aharon, Miriam, Amram (Moshe's father), Yocheved (his mother), etc. Of note, however, is how they are first introduced in the Torah (in the second chapter of parshas Shemos): "And a man went forth from the House of Levi, and he took a daughter of Levi... And she bore a son... And she placed (him) amongst the reeds by the riverside... And his sister stood from a distance..." There is something glaringly absent from this narrative: the mention of any names! "A man" marries "a woman," they have "a child," and this child has "a sister." It isn't until much later, in the next *parshah* (*Va'eira, chapter 6*), that most of these people are identified!

In fact, the identity of Moshe himself is treated in a somewhat obscure fashion. Chazal tell us (*Vayikra Rabbah 1:3*) that, in reality, Moshe had six names: Yekusiel and Avigdor, among others. Yet he is initially introduced merely as "a son" or "a child." The Torah first refers to him by name when he is already somewhat grown. And that name — the one granted him by his adoptive mother — is itself somewhat nondescript: "Moshe" — "For I drew him from the water (פי מן-המים משיתוהו)" (*Shemos 2:10*). R' Shimshon compares this to the Yiddish name "Fishel" — (a fish) — connoting one out of many identical compatriots (as per the familiar adage: "There are plenty of fish in the sea").

In short, this is how the picture of the initial stages of the

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“Great Redemption” emerges: A somewhat anonymous leader, emerging from an anonymous background, heads a procession to demand liberty from the monarch — only to find that his entourage has bailed out before the movement has even started. And then the opening confrontation is not only unsuccessful, but ends up making matters much worse.

Hardly a storming of the Bastille, is it?

KNOW YOUR LIMITS

R' Shimshon explains that, in fact, this situation provides one of the most crucial and powerful lessons of the entire Pesach episode. This arrangement was quite purposeful and came to demonstrate unequivocally Who was behind the *Ge'ulah* process. Moshe Rabbeinu's spiritual stature — his humility, his righteousness, his prophetic abilities — is certainly unmatched. As such, he was tasked with providing the people with communications from the Almighty, fulfilling

certain signs and becoming the ultimate *rebbe* for the entire Klal Yisrael. But regarding the actual Redemption, this was orchestrated solely and entirely by Hashem.

This notion is well-known to us from the Haggadah: “Not through an angel, nor a *seraph* (fiery celestial being), nor through an agent — only at the Hand of the One and Only Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself.” The Mishnah (10:5) in Pesachim expresses the sentiment succinctly:

לְפִיכֶם אֲנַחְנוּ חֲזָבִין לְהוֹדוֹת... לְמִי שֶׁעָשָׂה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ אֶת כָּל הַנִּסִּים הָאֵלֶּה, הוֹצִיאָנוּ מֵעֲבָדוֹת לְחֵרֶת, מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה, וּמֵאֲפֶל לְיוֹם טוֹב, וּמֵאֲפֶלָה לְאוֹר גְּדוֹל...

“Therefore, we must offer praise... to the One Who wrought for our forefathers and for ourselves all of these miracles. He extricated us from a state of bondage to one of freedom; from anguish to joy; from mourning to festivity; and from darkness to light...”

The *Iyun Ya'akov* points out that this passage contains four phrases, which correspond to the four expressions and gradations of the *Ge'ulah* (to which the four cups of the Seder likewise correspond). By purposefully “playing down” the identities of the people involved in the events and recognizing the initial inability of the “uprising” to get off the ground, the essential truth becomes quite glaring. When it comes to rescuing the Jewish people, there is no inclusion of (*l'havdil elef v'alfei havdalos*) a George Washington or Simon de Bolivar-type figure to lead the charge on a dashing white stallion. All phases of the *Ge'ulah* were possible and indeed carried out only through One Source.

Indeed, this theme is repeated and reflected through the most basic practices governing the entire Pesach period. The *Netziv* explains that this idea is reinforced each time we partake of matzah. This particular delicacy is unique amongst foods in that it is a product of extremely minimal human effort; no outside agent was added to effect any substantial change to its form and substance. This is an essential notion we can take with us from this Yom Tov: whatever activities and steps we must take in our daily lives, ultimately, it is solely through Hashem's intervention — not our own power — that we can succeed (*Ha'amek Davar, Devarim 16:8*).