

Psychological Warfare – Beshalach

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וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פְּרָעָה אֶת הָעָם, וְלֹא נָחָם אֱ-לֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא, כִּי
אָמַר אֱ-לֹקִים פֶּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִמָּה. (שמות יג, יז)

Our parsha begins describing the route that Bnei Yisrael traversed in their Exodus from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael.

If you were in Raamses today (which is located about 2km north of Cairo, according to researchers) and set your WAZE™ or Google Maps™ to plan a route to Jerusalem, the shortest way, it would undoubtedly take you north-east to the area of Port Said, following the Mediterranean coastline, into the Sinai Peninsula and up through Gaza (which is referred to in the passuk as אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים). At the time of the Exodus, the Suez Canal did not yet exist, Egypt and the Sinai Peninsula were joined and the entire journey would have been *over land*. Instead, HKB"H sent Bnei Yisrael south-east, to cross over the Red Sea, into the Sinai Peninsula and then head north-east, inland, to *bypass Gaza* from the east.

The passuk states the reason - פֶּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִמָּה, that Bnei Yisrael would encounter war, which would weaken their resolve and make them return to Egypt. If the passuk would have said that the purpose for the detour was to allow for the miracle of splitting the Red Sea and drowning the Egyptians, we would have understood – that is a great reason to make a detour! However, the reasoning given in the passuk seems 'problematic' - "if they encounter war". Even *with* the detour, Am Yisrael still encountered war – with Amalek, with Sichon and Og. Why did *these* military encounters not weaken their resolve and make them want to go back to Egypt? Did Bnei Yisrael really need the fear of war as a pretext to make them want to go back to Egypt? Numerous times in the Midbar Bnei Yisrael complained and expressed the wish to return to Egypt, which had nothing to do with war. After the death of Aharon, they in fact backtracked eight stops with the intention of returning to Egypt and if not for the Tribe of Levi stopping them, they would have backtracked further (מִדְרַשׁ אֲגָדָה, כד: כג:).

The Mefarshim address this question.

The Rashbam says that the passuk above refers to the wars with the inhabitants of Canaan – the seven nations - which were conquered in the time of Yehoshua. If straight after leaving Egypt Bnei Yisrael would have been called upon to wage war with them, they would not be mentally ready for it. Instead HKB"H gave them more time to consolidate their new reality as a nation.

R' Bachyei quotes Rabbeinu Chananel as saying that HKB"H wanted Bnei Yisrael to experience all the miracles in the Midbar, the splitting of Yam Suf, the Mann, the Well of Miriam, etc. to elevate their bitachon in HKB"H before being faced with the test of war.

The Abarbanel, quoting Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer and also the Targum Yonatan, give an entirely different reason, which I would like to explore in this shiur - it was all because of בְּנֵי אֶפְרַיִם.

What was the story with the sons of Ephraim?

HKB"H told Avraham in בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים that his descendants would have to go down to "a foreign land" (Egypt) for 400 years (יג, בראשית טו). Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were trying to figure out when the 400 years had ended. They were pretty much doing back then what many people are doing today – trying to calculate the date when Mashiach is going to come!

The Midrash (שמות רבה כ, יא) tells us that the sons of Ephraim did their own calculation. According to their calculation the 400 years were up – and their calculation was *correct*. However, the passuk (מ, שמות יב) in last week's parsha says that Bnei Yisrael were in Egypt for 430 years - HKB"H added an *additional 30 years* of slavery because of Bnei Yisrael's sins in Egypt.

So, going with their calculation, the sons of Ephraim decided to leave Egypt 30 years before Moshe returned to Egypt on HKB"H's command. The rest of Am Yisrael did not join them, the sons of Ephraim left on their own. Indeed, they took the shortest route, up through Gaza, where they encountered the פְּלִשְׁתִּים. Since they did not have "HKB"H's protection", they were massacred by the פְּלִשְׁתִּים, 300,000 people perished and their bones were piled up all over the area. The Rambam, in his אגֶרֶת תִּימָן, says it was not the פְּלִשְׁתִּים who killed them, but the Egyptians.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 92b) tries to explain the "Dry Bones" prophecy of Yechezkel (יחזקאל לו). According to the opinion of Rav, these were the bones of the sons of Ephraim mentioned above. When Moshe led Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt 30 years later, HKB"H did not want to send them the same route that the sons of Ephraim took, so that Bnei Yisrael would not see the piles of their bones, which would weaken their resolve and make them want to return to Egypt.

In other words, according to the Abarbanel above, it was not necessarily encountering war that would weaken Bnei Yisrael's resolve – they in fact did encounter war (with Amalek, Sichon, Og, etc.) and this did not result in them returning to Egypt. It was *encountering defeat* – the psychological effect of seeing piles of their brothers' bones from their defeat in war, would cause the Exodus to fail.

The Midrash (שמות רבה כ, יא) brings a mashal. A king went in search of a wife. His shidduchim quest took him to a foreign land where he found his "bashert". The two were ceremoniously married in the bride's country, after which the king decided to return with the new queen to his own kingdom. They packed up all the queen's belongings in an ornate carriage and departed. Before they reached the king's homeland, the wife died and the king buried her just outside the border of his country. Years later, the king travelled abroad again and married her sister. Returning with her to his palace, the king decided to take a different route, so that she would not see her sister's grave, have second thoughts and go back to her own country.

Similarly, HKB"H did not lead Bnei Yisrael the same route that the sons of Ephraim took, so that the rest of Bnei Yisrael would not see their bones strewn on the road and want to go back to Egypt. What did HKB"H do? He took the blood of the sons of Ephraim and dipped His clothes in it, kiveyachol, as it says (מְדוּעַ אָדָם לְלִבּוֹשׁוֹ, וּבִגְדֵיךָ כְּדֶרֶךְ בְּגַת (יִשְׁעִיהוּ סג, ב). HKB"H said "I will not be comforted until I avenge the blood of the sons of Ephraim", as it says in the passuk above וְלֹא נָחַם אֶל-לֵקִים.

The reason I brought this perush of the Abarbanel is to provide some perspective for the contemporary (actually not so contemporary – it is 166-years old) dispute between the anti-Zionist factions in the Charedi world and the rest of Am Yisrael.

Firstly, I will present the view of the anti-Zionist Charedi factions (predominantly Satmar and Neturei Karta).

They equate the Zionist movement to the בְּנֵי אֶפְרַיִם. They say that just like the sons of Ephraim left Egypt before the Mashiach (Moshe) arrived, so too did the Zionists rise up and try to redeem themselves (enter Eretz Yisrael) before Mashiach has been revealed. Just as the sons of Ephraim rebelled against HKB"H and delayed the Geulah in Egypt by another 30 years, so too are the Zionists now delaying the Geulah.

According to them, the method employed by the Zionists has never been based on the word of HKB"H, the Torah, but is reliant on כְּחֵי וְעֶצֶם יָדַי, establishing a state, wars, army etc.

They claim that the Holocaust was divine punishment for the Zionist movement's attempt to make Jews rebel against the Torah.

Their view is that the fact that so many Jews have died in the numerous wars and terrorist attacks since the establishment of the State of Israel is proof that the Zionists do not have divine protection. According to them, the approximately 30,000 Jews who have died in Israel between 1860 and now, in

wars and terror attacks, bears uncanny resemblance to the number, ל' רבוא, of the sons of Ephraim.

They quote a Gemara (Ktubot 110b) where it states that HKB"H made Am Yisrael swear two oaths. A. שְׁלֹא יָעֲלוּ בְּחוּמָהּ, that we will not return to Eretz Yisrael en masse during the galut and B. שְׁלֹא יִמְרְדוּ בְּאֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם, that while we are still in galut we will not rebel against the authority of the goyim. In addition, HKB"H made the goyim swear an oath מְדֵי יוֹתֵר מִדֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהֵן בִּישְׁרָאֵל יוֹתֵר מִדֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל, that they would not overly persecute Am Yisrael. These are referred to as the שְׁלוֹשׁ הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת. They claim that the Zionist movement is in direct violation of these oaths.

They view the State of Israel as an evil scourge that needs to be erased before the Mashiach can appear and that as long as it exists, the Mashiach will never arrive. They use this as a pretext to align themselves with the State of Israel's arch enemies – Iran and Hamas, with whom they frequently meet and join in protests on their behalf. By doing so, they believe they are hastening the Geulah.

It is not a secret that the vast majority of Am Yisrael and even the Charedim, today do not subscribe to this view. Most of Am Yisrael are revulsed when they see members of these anti-Zionist Charedim participating in pro-Hamas protests or meeting with top Iranian officials.

The Mishna says וְדַע מֶה שֶׁתִּשְׁיַב לְאַפְּיִקוֹרוֹס (אבות ב, יד) and in this vein I would like to address their claims one by one and show how *factually* they are all false.

They equate Zionists with בְּנֵי אֶפְרַיִם, and in so doing, seemingly imply that "just as HKB"H hated the בְּנֵי אֶפְרַיִם and wiped them out, He hates the Zionists who need to be wiped out!" To answer that claim we need to answer the question "Does the fact that the בְּנֵי אֶפְרַיִם perished, mean that HKB"H hated them?" From the Midrash above, it is clear that the opposite is true. The Midrash says וְלֹא נָחַם אֶלְלֵיָּהּ that HKB"H will not be comforted until He has *avenged their blood*. If they were evil people who rebelled against HKB"H, then why is HKB"H still unconsolable over their deaths and why does He feel the need to avenge them?

Look at the lashon of the mashal in the Midrash לְמַה הִדְבֵּר דְּוָמָה לְמֶלֶךְ. שֶׁנֶּשֶׂא אִשָּׁה וּבִקֵּשׁ לִילָךְ לְמַדִּינָתוֹ, הוֹשִׁיבָהּ בְּאַפְרַיִן. The mashal of the king taking a wife is referring to HKB"H "marrying" the first wife - the sons of Ephraim. HKB"H "married" Ephraim and wanted to return to Eretz Yisrael, i.e the sons of Ephraim left Egypt and go to Eretz Yisrael *on the King's request*, HKB"H's request. The king placed his first wife (Ephraim) in an אֶפְרַיִן, which is a euphemism for the Beit HaMikdash (in fact the Mikdash lies in the inheritance of Binyamin, in between Yehuda and Ephraim).

When HKB"H tells Avraham לָךְ לָךְ, where were the first two places Avraham went in Eretz Yisrael? Shechem and Elon Moreh (בראשית יב, ו), to make a קִנְיָן on the land. These are two of the main cities in the inheritance of Ephraim.

Ephraim is HKB"H's dear son (ירמיהו לא, יט).

Does this interaction between HKB"H and Ephraim in the specific mashal (and in general) sound like HKB"H hates Ephraim? *Exactly the opposite!*

Could it possibly be that Ephraim were the first to answer the call of the Geulah, because they *loved HKB"H so much* they wanted to spearhead the Exodus? Could it be that since the rest of Bnei Yisrael chose to not join them, that they were *punished with an extra 30 years of slavery*? Is it not possible that HKB"H sending Moshe 30 years later was as a *result of the sacrifice* and mesirut nefesh of the sons of Ephraim? Is it not possible that if the rest of Bnei Yisrael would have joined the sons of Ephraim and left Egypt 20 million strong, that neither the Egyptians nor the פְּלִשְׁתִּים could have stood in their way? Is it not possible that if they had done so, the four fifths that died in מִכַּת חֲשָׁדָה would not have died, but would have left Egypt?

Even if we assume the worst-case scenario, that the sons of Ephraim indeed *made a mistake*, they miscalculated the schedule - it was not to rebel against HKB"H chas veshalom, it emanated out of a deep, inner yearning to hasten the Geulah. Even if we claim that the Zionist movement made a "mistake" and their methods were not conventional (or even "acceptable") - they did not return to settle in Eretz Yisrael to *rebel* against HKB"H, they did so out of a deep, inner yearning to return to their ancestral land. If they wanted to rebel against HKB"H they could have accepted the offer to establish a Jewish State in Uganda. But, no, they *insisted* on Eretz Yisrael – is that rebellion against HKB"H?

Was the establishment of the State of Israel by the Zionists, before Mashiach arrives כְּחַי וְעֹצֵם יָדַי? If you say yes, then you have to accuse the Vilna Gaon of כְּחַי וְעֹצֵם יָדַי in equal measure. The גר"א encouraged his talmidim to settle in Eretz Yisrael (before the appearance of the Mashiach) and thus hasten the Geulah. Would the Satmar Chassidim dare accuse the Vilna Gaon of being a רָשָׁע? Not all the Zionists were secular and rejected the Torah. Many, many Zionists were big gedolim, like the Kalischer Rov, R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, R' Yehuda Alkalai, R' Kook, etc. Can you dare call them רָשָׁעִים? How do they explain that at the time of the establishment of the State of Israel the Jewish population in Eretz Yisrael was approximately 600,000 – the same number of Bnei Yisrael who left Egypt?

As for the claim that the Holocaust was punishment for Zionism, if the rest of the Torah world would have followed the Vilna Gaon and the Zionist pioneers and gone to settle in Eretz Yisrael in the 1800's as they did, it is unlikely that the

Holocaust would ever have happened - there would have been no Jews in Europe to slaughter. This claim is perhaps the vilest and perverted of all. If the entire Torah world would have joined the Zionists in settling Eretz Yisrael, is there any doubt that the State of Israel today would have been a Torah State? If, instead of vilifying the Zionist movement, the anti-Zionist Charedim would have assumed *leadership* over Am Yisrael, the demographic and spiritual reality in the State of Israel today would be radically different – we might already have the Beit HaMikdash.

Regarding the claim that there are so many dead from wars and terror attacks in Israel, because the State of Israel does not merit divine protection, like the sons of Ephraim who perished. According to the shita of Rav in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 92b) above, the neshamot of the sons of Ephraim were resurrected in the time of Yechezkel. If we compare them to the four fifths of Bnei Yisrael who died during מִכַּת חֶשֶׁךְ because they did not want to leave Egypt and embrace the Geulah, the neshamot of those four fifths were *lost forever*. The 30,000 neshamot who sacrificed their lives protecting Am Yisrael and reviving Eretz Yisrael since 1860 are Kedoshim and their blood will be avenged, as it says in the Midrash above.

Finally, as to the claim that the Gemara (Ktubot 110b) and the שְׁלוֹשׁ הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת conflict with Zionism, most Gedolei Yisrael reject these claims, including the Vilna Gaon, R' Chaim Vital, etc. who regard them as Midrash Aggadah and not halacha lema'aseh (they do not appear, neither in the Rambam, nor in the Tur/Shulchan Aruch) and most are of the opinion that they are not relevant in this time. As for the issue of שְׁלֹא יַעֲלֶי בְּחוֹמָה, the Vilna Gaon says this refers to rebuilding the Mikdash (that we should not try to physically rebuild the Mikdash before Mashiach arrives), it does not refer to settling in Eretz Yisrael. As for not rebelling against the goyim, this is dependent on the goyim upholding their side of the oath. If the goyim violate their oath and persecute Am Yisrael, then Am Yisrael is freed from their oath to not rebel against them.

Thankfully today, most of Am Yisrael do not hold of the opinion of these fanatic anti-Zionist groups. Most of the Charedi world accepts the State of Israel as a fait accompli, although the majority are still not prepared to go as far as the Vilna Gaon's shita that we are already living in the beginning of the Geulah. Most of the Charedi world enjoys and is to a large degree responsible for the "explosion" of Torah study in Eretz Yisrael, which is unprecedented in scale to any other period anywhere in the last 1950 years of galut.

While these anti-Zionist Charedi groups are fringe in Am Yisrael, one cannot discount the fact that many were and are immense talmidei chachamim in Torah and that many important chidushei Torah have emanated from them. We can also not totally discount their claims that the State of Israel is not run totally according to the laws of the Torah and that there are fanatic factions in the State

of Israel today on the other end of the spectrum, trying to eradicate Yiddishkeit in Am Yisrael.

One can only imagine, however, what would be the reality if instead of closeting themselves "in peltz", segregating themselves from the rest of Am Yisrael, they would instead be more like Moshe and Aharon HaKohen in Egypt, the *true* tribe of Levi, who tried to unite Am Yisrael instead of dividing it. The true tribe of Levi assumed the responsibility of leadership, they did not concern themselves only with their own Olam Habah, like Noach, who the Zohar calls רַעֲיָא שְׂטָנָא, a false shepherd.

Thankfully the vast majority of Am Yisrael does not lie on either of the fringes, but is positioned solidly in the sane, moderate core of our nation.

Beyond the שְׁלוֹשׁ הַשְּׁבוּעוֹת in the Gemara (above), R' Levi added two others. שְׁלֹא יִגְלוּ אֶת הַקֵּץ, that we should not try predict the date when Mashiach will arrive and שְׁלֹא יִרְחֲקוּ אֶת הַקֵּץ, that we should not consider the Geulah so distant in the future, that we lose hope.

We must take care not to listen to all those who say they know when the Mashiach will arrive (whether they actually have true powers of prophecy, or pretend to). The Torah commands us (דְּבָרִים יח, יג) אַל-לִקְיֹד (תְּנַמִּים תִּתְּהֶיָה עִם ה' אֵל-לִקְיֹד), we must live our lives every second expecting the Geulah and not trying to second guess HKB"H. When the Geulah arrives, it will be כְּהֵרָף עֵין - when HKB"H is good and ready. Meanwhile, we must each do our maximum hishtadlut to make ourselves worthy of it and believe it can happen at any time.

This Shabbat we will all sing Shirat HaYam in shul. The Zohar (שְׁמוֹת,) says that anyone who recites Shirat HaYam with true kavannah, will merit singing it in Olam Habah, all their sins will be forgiven and they will be saved from all the evils that afflict the world. What an opportunity! Let us all joyously sing Shirat HaYam this Shabbat, picturing vividly in our minds that it is *we* who are actually crossing the sea, that is we who are being *redeemed*. B"H we have had so many signs from HKB"H in recent times that this is indeed so, like this week – the final body of our hostages returned.

Until two years ago, our enemies almost defeated us, Rachmana litzlan, not with their military might, but with *psychological warfare*, tricking us to believe that there was no way to defeat them. B"H their psychological warfare has failed and all the illusions we once had are beginning to crumble.

Let us celebrate Tu Bishvat next week, rejoicing in the beauty of Eretz Yisrael and its bounty and let us all fervently pray that HKB"H will give us an extra special Purim miracle this year and eradicate the gilgul of Haman and Amalek from the world.

אַמֶּן כֵּן יְהִי רָצוֹן.

Shabbat Shalom

Eliezer Meir Saidel

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