

The Path To Follow

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A Lost Opportunity

It is written, "Vayehi [It happened] when Pharaoh sent out the people, that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, for it was near" (*Shemot* 13:17). The Sages say that wherever we find the term *vayehi*, it indicates sorrow (*Megillah* 10b). What sorrow is the verse speaking of here? It cannot be referring to the suffering of the Children of Israel, and if it is referring to the suffering of the Egyptians, it has already been stated: "The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the land, for they said, 'We are all dying' " (*Shemot* 12:33). In other words, the suffering of the Egyptians ended once the Children of Israel left.

Furthermore, our Sages say in the *Mechilta*, "Vayehi beshalach Paro [It happened when Pharaoh sent out] – the root *shalach* always evokes escorting. Now from the fact that he escorted them, we know that he did not regret it."

There Where He Is

We may explain this as follows: Even if Hashem is fully aware that a person will sin before Him, He only judges him according to his present deeds. Thus where we find His greatness – since He knows everything – we also find His humility, for He acts with compassion towards His creations.

This is what we learn with regards to Ishmael, whom Hashem enabled to find water in the desert. At that point the ministering angels accused him by saying, "Sovereign of the universe, will You provide a well for one who will eventually slay Your children with thirst?" Hashem replied, "What is he now?" "Righteous," they said. "I judge man only as he is at the moment," said Hashem (*Bereshith Rabba* 53:14). Thus we read, "There where he is" (*Bereshith* 21:17). The Gemara also states, "Man is judged only according to his actions of that hour" (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b).

According to what we have said, we can understand the words of *Shemot* 13:17 in light of what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: "One more plague shall I bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; after that, he shall send you forth from here" (*Shemot* 11:1). The question is clear: We see that Hashem sent them numerous plagues by the sea, so why does it say "one more plague"?

An Opportunity to Repent

As we have explained, although Hashem knew that Pharaoh was going to pursue the Children of Israel, he still had the choice of yielding before Hashem during the plague of the firstborn. If he had been worthy, the Name of Heaven would have been sanctified by him at that time, just as it was sanctified by the sea, as it is written: "People heard, they trembled; terror seized the dwellers of Philistia" (*Shemot* 15:14). Our Sages have explained, "When the peoples heard that Pharaoh and his army perished in the sea, and that the kingdom of Egypt was no more, they judged their idols and began to tremble" (*Mechilta, Shira* 9).

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe: "One more plague shall I bring upon Pharaoh." It is because He would judge him according to the present moment only, and at that moment it was as if He was certain that Pharaoh would repent of his wickedness and allow the Children of Israel to leave Egypt. In that case, He would not need to send him plagues by the sea, for Pharaoh would

immediately sanctify the Name of Heaven, just as he was forced to do by the sea. Although G-d knew that this evildoer would pursue the Children of Israel, He wanted to give him an opportunity to repent, so as not to send him plagues by the sea. Hence the verse speaks of just one more plague, for G-d awaited Pharaoh's repentance in order not to send him more than one more plague.

Why did Hashem think that Pharaoh would immediately repent? It is because He sent him the plague of the firstborn – a tremendous blow, given that Pharaoh himself was a firstborn (*Mechilta, Bo* 13) – meaning that he would be so afraid of dying that he let them leave Egypt.

What eventually happened? *Vayehi beshalach* – *vayehi* always representing sorrow. That is, Pharaoh was tormented and preoccupied with having to send the Children of Israel out of his country. He did not send them out because he had recognized the power for Hashem, but because the Egyptians themselves sent them out, not being able to tolerate the plagues that overwhelmed them.

At that point, Pharaoh was like someone standing at a crossroads: Two paths stood before him, and he did not know which to take. He thought to himself, "If I yield before Hashem and readily send the Children of Israel out of my country, all the kings of the nations will mock me. Yesterday I said that I had created the Nile, and today will I yield before the G-d of Israel? Yet if I harden my heart, their G-d will come and seek vengeance!" As he was thinking, his pride got the upper hand, and he did not send them out willing, but through suffering. Hence the verse states *Vayehi beshalach Paro* – meaning that Pharaoh suffered. Since he did not yield and the Name of Heaven was not sanctified in the world when they left Egypt, the Holy One, blessed be He, hardened his heart. He then pursued the Children of Israel and drew more punishment upon himself, to the point that his entire army was drowned in the sea. Although he repented at that point, because of the fact that he did not repent from the outset, he provoked Amalek's attack upon the Jewish people, thereby dampening the impact of Israel among the nations.

Don't Learn From Him!

From here we learn just how much a person must watch his deeds. He must not do something that he will later regret, and which he cannot rectify. Even if he repents at that point, it will be too late, as it is written: "A twisted thing cannot be made straight" (*Kohelet* 1:15). Our Sages have explained, "From the time that a man diverts himself from words of Torah, he cannot make himself straight" (*Kohelet Rabba* 1:35).

Suppose that a person wastes his time in the Beit HaMidrash, and makes others waste their time there as well. In that case, even if he repents and begins to study, if others have seen him waste his time and emulated him without repenting, then his deeds cannot be rectified.

This is why a person must carefully weigh all his deeds, in order not to regret them later.

Then Moshe and the Children of Israel Sang

As the name indicates, *Shabbat Shira* is a Shabbat whose contents and essence constitute a song of praise and thanks to the Master of all for the success and deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egypt, in that era at this time. Incidentally, it is also a time to realize just how many aspects of this song crown the prayers of the Jewish people, a song by which we will merit the Final Redemption quickly and in our days.

We Can Resurrect the Dead

In every era, *chazanut* is a profession that is sacred; it is work that has been entrusted to G-d-fearing men. In *The Kuzari*, the Rav praises the wisdom of music: "It was given to the greatest among the people, the descendants of Levi – who sang in the Temple, that sacred place, at sacred times – and whose entire occupation was music."

Rabbi Israel of Shklov *Zatzal* recounts the following about his teacher, the Vilna Gaon: "He greatly praised music, saying that most of the *te'amim* of the Torah, the secrets of the songs of the Levites, and the secrets of the *tikkunim* of the holy Zohar cannot be understood without them. It can kill men with pleasure. And we can resurrect the dead by the secrets hidden within the Torah."

"Be Glad in Hashem and Rejoice"

Many are the fine characteristics that the Sages have listed among the custom of the Jewish people in regards to setting their prayers to beautiful melodies and raising their voices in song!

The Ramban notes that raising one's voice during prayer constitutes a form of thanks to Hashem and an acceptance of His sovereignty. *Responsa Michtam LeDavid* gives a reason for the melodies of our prayers: It replaces the sacrifices, and one part of the Temple service consisted of the songs of the Levites. This is why our prayers must also be recited with songs and melodies, without mentioning the simple fact that melodies awaken the soul of one who prays, creating a true bond with the contents of his prayer, a bond that is more pleasing and complete.

Many Variations

There is a melody of contemplation, which stirs up a desire for holiness and encourages the soul to draw closer to its Creator. There is a melody that awakens one to repentance, penetrating to the depths of the heart in such a way that it causes the eyes to water and opens the gate of tears. Above all, there is a melody of a joyous heart, making it resound with a powerful feeling of gratitude and praises for the Master of all, as King David said: "Serve Hashem with joy" (*Tehillim* 100:2).

It is in this regard that the author of *Sefer Chassidim* wrote: "Pray with a melody that you find pleasant and sweet. Then you will pray with concentration, for it will draw your heart to the words. When you are making a request, use a melody that prepares your heart. When you are praising G-d, use a melody that makes you happy, in order for your mouth to be filled with love and joy for the One Who sees your heart, and He will bless you with great love and joy" (*Sefer Chassidim* 158).

In Kabbalah, the *Tikkunei HaZohar* states that there is a special palace in Heaven that opens through song. It is also said that a

Shaliach Tzibur who sings during prayer makes the *Shechinah* ascend before the King on High, adorned with its seven companions, which are procured for it by supplications. When it ascends, several angels, camps, and souls ascend with it, which is why Jews sing in synagogue during Shabbat and the festivals (*Ma'avar Yabok*).

The Chazan

The style of melody brings forward the appropriate emotions, the proper intentions needed for prayer. Among the great *chazanim* who understand prayer, we can hear the meaning of the words in their singing. The *chassidim* recount that a certain *tzaddik* would read the *Megillah* with such an interesting and moving melody that his listeners understood the explanations that the Sages gave to the words he recited!

A *chazan* aspires, above all things, to enable the faithful not to have to think of anything other than prayer. There are some *chazanim* who prevent the faithful from thinking of prayer because of the beauty of their voices and the sophistication of their melodies. There are other *chazanim* whose voices are so unpleasant that the faithful cannot think of praying as they should. Few are the *chazanim* who can bind the faithful to the progress of their prayers. By the merit of their beautiful singing, which corresponds exactly to prayer, they emphasize each word. Happy are they and happy is their lot.

The Makama

Music is one of the seven wisdoms that exist in the world, and it comprises seven notes (do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si). Every melody in the world is comprised of these notes or half-tones, or fourth- or eighth-tones. A melody can be composed from each note, ad infinitum. The Gemara states that in the future, the Holy One, blessed be He, will reveal an eighth note that will be above nature, at which point all music will change (*Arachin* 13b).

The source of all melody is the *Makama*, a range of sounds that comprises numerous combinations and permutations of all kinds of melodies. It is the foundation for songs of prayer, combining known melodies to a given prayer, as has always been done in all Jewish communities.

Guarde Your Tongue

Be Careful in the Future

We clearly see that a person who listens to *Lashon Harah*, even if he has no intention of believing it, helps the speaker simply by listening. In fact if the speaker realizes that his words are being heard, he will not stop speaking, and on the following day he will say even more things to disparage the subject of his contempt and play tricks on him. However if the speaker were to be told, "I don't want to listen to something that I haven't seen for myself," or his listeners were to demonstrate their displeasure, he would be more careful in the future not to disparage others. This is because he would realize that his words generate nothing but scorn, prompting others to consider him as someone who speaks *Lashon Harah*.

A Wise Merchant

It is written, “Moshe took the bones of Joseph with him” (*Shemot* 13:19).

Here the Midrash states, “Concerning him it says, ‘The wise of heart will take *mitzvot*’ [*Mishlei* 10:8], for when all of Israel were busily occupied in collecting gold and silver, Moshe was occupied with collecting the bones of Joseph” (*Shemot Rabba* 20:19). The commentators have objected to this, stating that the Midrash should have described Moshe as pious, upright, or something similar. Why does the Midrash call him “wise”?

In the book *Torat HaParasha*, Rabbi Aharon Zakai *Shlita* explains this as follows: When a wise and informed merchant is given the option of purchasing merchandise, he will not be swayed by its outward appearance, even if its beauty is blinding. Instead he will think about one thing only, namely his ability to sell it at a higher price in the future. Thus after he weighs all the issues, he will decide whether to buy it or not.

Moshe was like a great merchant in regards to the *mitzvot*, meaning that he did not allow himself to be blinded by the spoils of Egypt. Instead, he was wise and knew that the only merchandise worth purchasing is Torah and *mitzvot*, since man receives a great reward for them. Hence of Moshe it is said, “The wise in heart will take *mitzvot*.”

Day and Night

It is written, “Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire” (*Shemot* 13:21).

In the account of Creation, precedence is given to the night, which is followed by the day, as it is written: “There was evening, and there was morning” – the night being mentioned before the day. Yet here, when the Children of Israel were leaving Egypt, the day is mentioned before the night: “Hashem went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire.”

In his book *Yismach Israel*, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* states that all this is meant to tell us that Hashem personally went before them day and night. He did so by the merit of the Torah they would receive, which was written by Hashem like black fire on white fire.

The pillar of cloud alludes to black fire, and the pillar of fire to white fire. Hence the pillar of cloud, which was present during the day, is mentioned first, for it represents the Torah that was written with black fire. The pillar of fire, which was present during the night, was the backdrop against which the Torah itself stood out.

Unaware

It is written, “Pharaoh will say to the Children of Israel, ‘They are trapped in the land’ ” (*Shemot* 14:3).

Who are these “Children of Israel” to whom Pharaoh said, “They are trapped in the land”? Targum Yonatan translates this as, “Pharaoh said to Dathan and Aviram, who remained

in Egypt.” If so, why did Dathan and Aviram not die during the three days of darkness, as the other evildoers among Israel had died?

In the book *Edut BiYehosef*, it is explained in the name of Rabbi Yokel *Zatzal* that the evildoers who did not want to leave Egypt died. Yet such was not the case with Dathan and Aviram, who did not know that the Children of Israel had a chance to leave Egypt permanently, for they thought that they were leaving for only three days. As the Alsheich writes on the verse, “Please speak in the ears of the people” (*Shemot* 11:2), this was said secretly in order for Dathan and Aviram not to know that they were leaving for good.

This is why they were not punished, nor did they die, during the three days of darkness, for they had not learned that the Children of Israel were leaving Egypt for good.

What Merit?

It is written, “G-d is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation” (*Shemot* 15:2).

This verse is nicely explained by Rabbi Shimon Habiliou *Zatzal*.

He states that in the Midrash, we find Egypt’s guardian angel asking the Holy One, blessing be He: “What merit do the Children of Israel possess, such that You perform all these miracles for them?”

He replied, “They will receive the Torah, which is power.” The guardian angel of Egypt said, “But they will later say, ‘This is your god, O Israel’ What is the use of having receiving the Torah?” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Moshe will say that this command was addressed to him, not to them.”

Therefore, said Rabbi Shimon *Zatzal*, the verse states: “G-d is my strength and song, and He has become *my* salvation.”

The Goal

It is written, “All the diseases that I placed upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you, for I am Hashem your Healer” (*Shemot* 15:26).

Rashi writes, “And if I do place them, they will be as though they had not been placed, ‘for I am Hashem your healer.’ ”

This is surprising: At first the verse promises, “All the diseases that I placed upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you,” and then: “and if I do place them...I am Hashem your healer.”

When a physician wants to heal a wound, he sometimes has to cut away living flesh to prevent infection from spreading to the entire body. When he does this, he is not torturing the patient, but healing him. He is a “healer,” and the patient’s pain serves to heal him.

However if somebody cuts away living flesh in order to make a person suffer, he is called a torturer.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, brought diseases upon Egypt, it was with the goal of making them suffer. However for the Children of Israel, diseases are a form of healing, their goal being to bring about healing, to erase their sins.

Dry Fruit and Wet Worms

The Sages established Shevat 15 as the new year for trees, and we prepare for it several weeks in advance by collecting a large variety of fresh and dry fruit. In fact the custom on this day, in the best tradition, is for Jews to decorate their dinner table with all kinds of fruit, including those which are the glory of Eretz Israel, in order to thank and honor the Creator. It is also a fitting time to focus on a special and very important chapter in the vast field of *kashrut*, in order not to bring to the table small creatures whose presence is not wanted and can even be dangerous. We are speaking of insects and worms that are found in most dry fruit, which can be very infested at this time of year. A popular newspaper in Israel initiated a laboratory inspection of dry fruit, and its clear and unambiguous conclusion was adopted by Mr. Daniel Reichman, the director of the Food Control Administration of Israel's Ministry of Health: "The inspected fruit was deemed to be unfit for human consumption."

A Sad Reality

The newspaper reported: "The dry fruit that were inspected were purchased from four large distribution chains in Israel. From each one, we purchased a similar quantity of fruit: Figs, apricots, dates, prunes, and raisins. In instances where there was more than one kind to choose from, we selected the most expensive, in order to inspect what was considered to be the finest fruit.

"The results showed that insects were found in every sample. Dead insects were found in one part of the samples, while live insects were found in another part. Both dead and living insects were found in the majority of the samples. The majority were found in figs, which were the most heavily infested of the dry fruit.

"In other samples, we found a live moth larva and a dead worm in a package of dates, as well as three dead adult weevils. In a sample of figs, we found an infestation rate greater than 50%, with 13 of 21 figs being unfit for human consumption.

"Furthermore, we found a live moth larva and a dead worm in the package. In another package, 6 of 22 fruit were found to be infested, the infestation consisting of a live moth larva, five dead worms, four adult weevils, four dead weevils, and a dead blastophage [small wasp]. In two other packages of figs, all the fruit were infested, with not a single edible fruit among them. In one of the packages, another five adult weevils were found, six moth larvae, and a dead moth larva."

Not Everything is Forbidden

We have before us a collection of *halachot* drawn from the book *Bedikat Hamazon KaHalacha* by Rav Moshe Vaye *Shlita*. There it states that after the appearance of the Chafetz Chaim's book on *Lashon Harah* and slander, he met someone who told him: "Rabbi! Now I can no longer open my mouth, because it's practically forbidden to speak!"

The Chafetz Chaim replied with a smile, "On the contrary! Up to now, you didn't know what was permitted or forbidden to say. You were therefore obligated to close your mouth, lest you transgress the prohibition against speaking *Lashon Harah*. Yet now that the book has properly explained what is permitted and what is forbidden, you can open your mouth."

Insofar as we are concerned, the goal of studying *halachot* and their adoption by the public is to present permitted ways of benefiting

from the food that Hashem has given us, without transgressing the prohibition against eating insects. They allow us to know what we need to inspect, and how to inspect them, for "it is possible for someone to carefully inspect a product several times without finding the insects that are inside," as Rav Vaye says in his book.

In order to verify the presence of insects more efficiently, we divide food into two broad categories:

1. Food that can easily be infested, such as figs and cabbage, harbor insects most of the time. There are some foods in which we sometimes find insects, such as figs, rice, and beans (less frequently).
2. Food that is not usually infested, such as watermelon, coconuts, and sugar. These are generally clean and devoid of insects, which are only sometimes found in them. We are not obligated to verify such food before eating. Nevertheless, the Sages advise us to verify everything.

In the case before us, food that is usually considered clean, if we find three worms in it, it becomes our responsibility to verify it. For example, a package of powdered coconuts must be inspected if three insects have been found in it.

It is forbidden to eat food that must be verified and cannot be fully cleaned, such as cauliflower bulbs and broccoli, grown in the usual way. Hence in regards to fig leaves, the Acharonim have said "some Sages wanted them banned because they have to be repeatedly inspected, and after numerous incidents they concluded that they were full of small, fine worms that were almost impossible to completely remove, which is why inspecting them was useless" (*Machazik Beracha*).

In such cases, says Rabbi Vaye in the name of the great *poskim*, if someone has food that is difficult to inspect, or it appears revolting because worms have left traces in it, he may throw it out. It is not considered as wasting food.

In the Light of the Parsha

Prayer is Always Useful

It is written, "The Children of Israel went up armed" (*Shemot* 13:18). What does this teach us, since it was already said: "It happened that on that very day, Hashem took the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their legions" (*ibid.* 12:51)? Further on we read, "The Children of Israel raised their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were pursuing them and they were very afraid. The Children of Israel cried out to Hashem, and they said to Moshe: 'Were there no graves in Egypt, that you took us out to die in the desert?'" (*ibid.* 14:10-11).

This teaches us that a person may sometimes grow in the service of his Creator until his soul reaches a lofty level. At that point, what does the Satan do? It will try to make him fall from his level and infuse his heart with hopelessness. Thus the Children of Israel said, "Were there no graves in Egypt, that you took us out to die in the desert?" The Torah says: Be careful when the Satan tries to infuse you with hopelessness. Don't listen to it! If you say, "It took away all the spiritual levels I attained, so how can I serve Hashem," the Holy One, blessed be He, replies: "I have a beautiful gift called prayer. Even if you cannot serve Me because the Satan made you fall from your spiritual level, then content yourself with crying out. Even if you fail to pray correctly, just cry out and I will hear."