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מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Beshalach

Actions Performed Out of Excitement do Not Last

The *parasha* begins (13:17-18), "And when Pharaoh sent out the Nation, Hashem did not lead them by way of the land of the *Plishtim*, for it was close. For Hashem said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt'; So Hashem turned the Nation towards the way of the desert to the *Yam Suf*. And the Jewish people were armed when they went up from the land of Egypt."

Questions:

- 1- The *Chafetz Chayim* asks why Hashem did not shorten the way for the Jews and lead them through the land of the *Plishtim*, which was an inhabited land. If He would have done so, there would not have been a need to provide sustenance for 600,000 Jews in the desolate desert.
- 2- Furthermore, the *parasha* (15:22) later states, "And they went three days in the desert, and they did not find water..." The Jews complained about the lack of water. Afterwards it states (16:2), "And the entire congregation of Israel complained ..." This time they complained about the bread. After Hashem wrought such miracles and wonders in Egypt and on the *Yam Suf*, how were such complaints possible?
- 3- It is furthermore difficult: Our Sages teach that when the Jews sang, "This is my G-d and I will exalt Him," they pointed with their fingers at the *Shechina*. They state that a maidservant saw more by the sea than Yechezkel ben Buzi. In other words, they reached the highest level of prophesy. Therefore, how could they have issued such complaints afterwards?
- 4- R' Chayim of Brisk asked why our Sages state that "a maidservant saw etc." It would seemingly have been more fitting to write that even a young girl became a prophet?

The Way of the World

Generally, when the world sees or hears something shocking or inspiring, it makes an impression in those moments. In the minds of those who see or hear it are decisions and conclusions that they have drawn for themselves as a result of the incident. Take for example, an individual who is in a heart rendering car accident. In those moments, he is stunned and filled with emotion over what has happened. This is to the extent that he thinks about just how dangerous it is to drive a car, and how it is man's responsibility to drive more carefully. He thinks about how an individual should not drive impatiently, because it may cost him his life. Individuals who take a driving course are shown how, because of a momentary lapse of concentration – for example, because of speaking on a cell-phone, or all the more so, because of dozing off behind the wheel – a terrible and frightening accident could occur. However, practically speaking, after a few days the impression and inspiration has worn off, and he returns to his previous state. In our generation, "the generation of *teshuvah*, repentance," we are witness to this. Many grow inspired to do *teshuvah* because of a certain lecture they heard or because of a specific incident. They then commit to drastically changing every aspect of their lives. There are those who leave their jobs without thinking about how they will provide for their families. Then there are those who grow unkempt beards and *peyot* which look unpleasant, and they do not think about the feelings of their wives and families. There are those who don clothing worn by kabbalists, thinking that by doing so, they are similar to angels. Yet they do not think about how their families will acclimate to their behavior. There are those who force their wives to wear black shawls and to be different from their friends, without considering the results. There are innumerable other examples as well, as each man can see with his own eyes. However, after a short while, when the inspiration wears off, the individual arrives at a conclusion that he is not as capable as he thought he was. Many times, there is a total reversal, until he once again throws off the yoke of religion. We must understand why this is so, and how we can draw lessons for the future.

Inspiration From Seeing a Miracle is Not Permanent

From here we can explain the questions we posed on the *parasha*. The Torah teaches man to recognize his abilities and to know his strengths. He must realize that he is made from the dirt of the earth which influences his



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actions. He should not fool himself into thinking that he can easily change himself. This is because the inspiration he feels presently is momentary, and it will not be long before the body returns to its normal routine. Therefore an individual should use the inspiration to draw realistic conclusions and to accept things upon himself that are within his abilities. He should continue this practice, until it becomes habitual, and turns into a permanent spiritual acquisition. However, that which he does at the moment of inspiration is not done by first weighing the matter in his mind nor because he has permanently acquired it. Now we can understand why Hashem lengthened the Jews travels in the desert, despite the fact it would result in the great difficulty of sustaining an entire nation in the desert, which lacks water and agriculture. In the desert, the Jews would be dependent upon miracles each and every day. This is as opposed to taking them through the land of the *Plishtim*, which was a settled land with water and food. This is because Hashem wished to teach us an approach to Divine service. The Jews were in Egypt until they had sunken to the 49th level of impurity. Indeed, they had left Egypt by way of great miracles which aroused awe and wonder in the heart of every Jew; they experienced the splitting of the sea, during which even a maidservant saw more than the prophet Yechezkel ben Buzi. This was to the extent that they pointed at the *Shechinah* and said, "This is my G-d, and I will exalt Him"; they also stood by *Har Sinai*, when they reached the level of Adam HaRishon before his sin; at that point, the pollutant that the primordial serpent had injected into Adam disappeared. Despite all of these things, the inspiration did not become permanently ingrained in them. This was to the extent that they could still easily fall back to their previous ways. Evidence to this was that they complained about the lack of water despite all that they experienced. This was because the inspiration eventually passes, and man is left with his former spiritual level. This is why the *pasuk* stated that Hashem did not lead them through the land of the *Plishtim*, lest they see war and return to Egypt. In other words, it would still be difficult for them to stand firm in the face of a trial, and they could easily stumble. Therefore it was necessary to make them travel in a roundabout way through the desert; for they would not be able to triumph in trials until they acquired the faith and trust as independent and permanent acquisitions. Similarly writes R' Chaim of Brisk, our Sages are teaching us this lesson by being specific with their words. They stated that a "maidservant" experienced prophecy by the sea, but did not state that a "prophetess" did so. This is because it is possible for an individual to reach the level of prophesy and yet remain a maidservant, without acquiring the title of prophet. This can occur when the individual is affected by a great event but does not permanently ingrain it within himself. Therefore it requires wisdom for man to strengthen himself with things that are within his power to accomplish. This way, he will grow gradually, with Hashem's help, and his inspiration will bear fruit and endure. However, the initial excitement is not guaranteed to continue.

Kabbalat HaTorah

Similarly, at Har Sinai, the Jewish Nation reached the level of Adam HaRishon before his sin and the pollutant of the serpent left them, as previously stated. Nevertheless, much to our sorrow, right after this great spiritual ascent, the Jews stumbled by sinning with the golden calf, and said, "This is your g-d, Israel." We see, then, that the inspiration and excitement does not turn into a permanent acquisition until an individual works on himself to draw practical lessons in wisdom. This is what can enable him to strengthen himself until it becomes a spiritual acquisition.

The Death of Nadav and Avihu

We also find this idea with the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu. On the day of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*, they were tremendously enamored by the event. This caused them to bring an alien fire on their own accord. By doing so, they brought tragedy upon themselves. This is because when an individual acts on his inspiration, he does not contemplate his actions to see that they are being performed properly. Therefore, a claim was leveled against them and they were punished.

The Novelty in the Way Yitro Heard

This is also the *pasuk's* intention when it states, "And Yitro heard." Did not everyone hear? Rather, indeed, many heard but did not come as a result. Despite the fact that they were excited by all the miracles, however they did



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not work on themselves to turn it into an independent acquisition. They therefore, remained the way they were. However, Yitro heard and came. This is because he contemplated the miracles and refined himself and his character traits. R' Yisrael Salanter said that even if the opening of *Gehinom* was on one side and the opening of *Gan Eden* on the other, man would still not triumph in the face of a trial, since it all comes down to breaking one's normal way of acting.

The Opening of Yeshivat Volozhin

It is told that when R' Chayim of Volozhin wished to open the yeshiva of Volozhin, he asked the advice of the Vilna Gaon, who dissuaded him. He did so, because he recognized that R' Chayim was acting out of enthusiasm over the new idea. The Gaon knew that acting on such excitement would have no lasting results. Only some time later, after R' Chayim extensively considered the matter and returned to the Gaon, did the Gaon approve of his idea to open the yeshiva. R' Chayim asked the Gaon why the first time he refused, yet the second time he agreed. He responded that the first time he was enthused, and when something is done out of a burst of inspiration it does not last. However, the second time, after he thought over the matter, and was ready to act after having internalized the idea, then it would endure. Therefore, he agreed.

Rabbeinu Ovadiah Yosef zt"l

I once heard an allusion from *Rabbeinu Ovadiah Yosef zt"l* on the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (92:14), "Planted in the house of Hashem, in the courtyards of Hashem they will flourish (יפריחו)." He explained that many times a person is found in the house of Hashem and hears a fine, inspiring *derasha*. However, much to our dismay, right after they leave the *beit hamidrash* and are already in "the courtyards of Hashem – *yafrichu*," the ideas fly out of his head [*yafrichu* can also mean to fly away].

"Take Words With You and Return to Hashem" (Hoshea 14:3)

Similarly, did the *Chafetz Chayim* explain the words of the *Navi* (*Hoshea* 14:3), "Take words with you and return to Hashem." All the commentators explain that the "taking of words" in the *pasuk* refers to the words that follow in the *pasuk*. But the *Chafetz Chaim* explained differently. He compared it to a pauper who met a wealthy man and requested a loan from him. The wealthy man answered that he should come to his house at a specific time, and he would give him what he requested. Ultimately, the pauper did not arrive. He again met the wealthy man several more times after that and repeated his request. The wealthy man answered that he had previously waited for him a number of times in order to grant him his loan – "Why, then, did you not come?" he asked the pauper. "It must be," he exclaimed, "that you do not truly need the money. Indeed, you are asking, but you do not sincerely mean it. Proof of the fact is that you are too lazy to take a few steps and come to my house." The *Chafetz Chayim* explained that if we contemplate the matter, we will see that we act the same way with Hashem. We ask each day in the blessings of *Kriat Shema*, "Our Father our King... so should You have mercy on us and teach us... have mercy on us and put in our hearts the ability to understand and to be wise... illuminate our eyes with Your Torah." We also pray in the *Shemonah Esrei*, "Grant us from You wisdom, understanding, and knowledge." Certainly, Hashem agrees to grant these requests and says, "Would they only come to My house and study My Torah. I would certainly illuminate their eyes with the Torah. I would open their hearts to understand the Torah." This is as our Sages state (*Shabbat* 104) "One who comes to be purified is assisted." Sadly, however, what actually happens is that, usually, immediately after going from the *beit hamidrash* to his house, he does not think about what he spoke and requested from Hashem. This is the *Navi's* intention, "Take words with you..." These refer to the words that you spoke before Me in prayer – take them with you and remember them. Then you will certainly return to Hashem. In other words, even though an individual is inspired in prayer and prays intently, but when he concludes his prayers and leaves, he forgets what he asked Hashem for.

Words of Mussar

We have learned from our holy Torah just how much an individual must use the inspiration to pave a way for himself in *avodat Hashem*. However, he must not forget that man is made from dust and this effects his actions. The wise man contemplates how he can strengthen himself, change his bad habits, and habituate himself to



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following his commitments. This way, they will become his permanent acquisition. Only then will he know that his actions have been effective and that he has rectified his soul. He will then be able to stay strong when trials come his way. He will never act simply on momentary enthusiasm without thinking about his surroundings and his true abilities.

Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,
Rav Mordechai Malka