



PASSOVER DAY 7

Pesach:

Does The Sea Split For Sinners?

April 26 2019

DOES THE SEA SPLIT FOR SINNERS?

HOPE FOR THE BROKEN HEARTED

ABSTRACT

Is there hope for someone who has had a setback and failed? Can we help the disenchanted and the disoriented?

In broader terms: When the Redemption comes, will all Jews be redeemed, or only the righteous?

The parting of the sea, which happened today and which we just read about, offers us a remarkable approach to dealing with people who have given up, and the anomalies that may not fit in

Did the sea split for all Jews, or only some of them? Even for the sinners, or only for the saints?

A fascinating unknown factoid about Dathan and Aviram, Israel's archetypal troublemakers, teaches us wonders and miracles about the splitting of the sea, and its invaluable lessons -- which are relevant today more than ever -- in how the "sea" can "part" and the impossible be achieved even for those that have lost hope.

Yes, you have to see this sermon to believe it.

1. A Hellish Neighborhood (Joke)

Gut yom tov! One week ago we left Egypt. This morning we crossed the split sea. We are well on our way to Mount Sinai and the Holy Land.

In the timeless Passover tradition, I want to begin with a question. However, in the just-as-timeless Jewish tradition, I want to introduce the question with a bit of humor.

After 180 years on this earth, selling properties and making people feel at home, for a price, a real estate agent dies and goes to heav... eh, hell. The devil greets the real estate agent and gives him a tour of hell, his new home.

They pass many different neighborhood, various torments, afflictions, and exiles. Each neighborhood is worse than the next. Each of these pits of hellfire are heavily guarded by evil angels, ensuring no one escapes their gated community.

Block after block, zip code after zip code, they pass pit of despair after hovel of depression. Each is heavily guarded.

Finally they come to mamash the worst of the worst, a neighborhood so bad you wouldn't wish it upon your worst enemy. There is however one mysterious anomaly. This neighborhood is completely unguarded.

“Won’t the sinners escape with no guards?” Asks the real estate agent to the devil.

The devil replies, “Ah, a wise question. You must have been one fine real estate agent. But you see, this neighborhood is filled with the worst of the worst. We call them the *nisht-farginers*, those who begrudge everyone everything. You see these *nisht-farginers* don’t need guards. As soon as one poor fellow manages to crawl out, the others pull him back in.”

In many ways, this is the worst type of sinner. He’s the opposite of a Shliach, the opposite of a lamplighter. When he sees someone trying to do better, he cannot stand it, he cannot *fargin*, and tries to pull him back into the pit of Egypt -- the constraints and enslavement of Mitzrayim (the Hebrew name for Egypt), which means limits and constraints of all sorts.

2. Does Pesach Free Those Who Aren’t Interested in Freedom?

Which brings us to our question:

On Passover/Pesach we celebrate and recreate the Egyptian exodus, which represents transcendence and freedom from all forms of constraints that trap and limit us. Pesach, *zman cheiruseinu*, the time of our freedom, opens up doors of opportunity to all of us, transmitting to us the energy of emancipation, allowing us to transcend our fears and inhibitions of our respective *mitzrayims*.

The parting of the sea, which took place today. the Seventh Day of Pesach, is the culmination of the Pesach freedom process, when all boundaries (represented by the boundary of water and land) part and split before us, and the entire Egyptian enemy drowned in the returning waters -- once and for all permanently ridding the Jewish people of their enemy.

Until the parting of the sea, the Jews kept on looking back over their shoulder, still under the effect of a slave mentality, having nightmares that Pharaoh would come after them. After the splitting of the sea the Jews had closure and could once and for all peacefully travel on their journey to Sinai and the Holy Land of Israel.

But here is the quandary: Does Pesach also free people who are in denial -- de-nile, like the river Nile -- or those who don’t want, are not interested or are unable to be free? Does the sea part only for the righteous Jews or also for the sinners, including the *nisht-farginers*?

And when Moshiach comes, may it be today, even before tomorrow’s Moshiach Seudah, will Moshiach redeem all Jews?

Today, in an increasingly fragmented “us and them” society, some may mistakenly think that the Redemption will only redeem the Tzadikim, the “religious,” the Jews who are 100% pure and holy. Firstly: is there anyone who is 100% pure and holy? Secondly: the majority of Jews today aren’t even familiar with the splitting of the

sea, nevermind the concept of Moshiach. When the Redemption comes, what will happen with the majority of Jews?

3. Three Case Studies Of Mitzrayim Constraint

To drive the point home, let me make this question more palpable and personally relevant by depicting three contemporary scenarios that affect us all one way or another.

Slavery, *Mitzrayim*, the constraints and constrictions of Egypt -- and the redemption from this trapped state -- could mean different things to different people.

Here are three case-studies of modern-day *Mitzrayim*.

Case Study #1: Neglect

A child named Michael is neglected by his family. Michael is shown no love, has never known warmth, has no healthy baseline by which to measure his relationships.

When Michael grows into an adult his *mitzrayim* consists of his many challenges due to his low self-esteem resulting from a lack of nurturing and validation. These limitations are especially acute when it comes to seeking love and finding a wholesome spouse and building a sound home and family.

Case Study #2: Rejection

Esther is a weak student who is rejected by her teachers and school. She is also bullied by some of her classmates. Maybe Esther is different and unique, maybe she is difficult, either way she is misunderstood, her talents remain unappreciated. She is not accepted by the system, and her rejection has become her *Mitzrayim*.

As an adult, Esther's rejection now constrains her potential, causing her to refrain from sharing her thoughts and expressing her talents and ideas.

Case Study #3: Condescension

Irving grows up in an assimilated Jewish home in America. With no Jewish background and education he is ignorant of Jewish tradition and lacks a strong Jewish identity. Irving travels to Israel as a teenager and a religious-looking fellow yells at him for dressing immodestly, instead of inviting him for a meal.

Irving has just entered into the *Mitzrayim* of holier-than-thou “religious” judgment and condescension. Will he ever be free of this negative stereotype? Will he always see religion in this demeaning light or will he be able to transcend this constraining experience?

With these three scenarios in mind, let us apply and rephrase the question I asked earlier: Is there hope for Michael, Esther and Irving? Can they be freed from their *mitzrayim* constraining experiences? Does Pesach also free these individuals? Does the sea part for them as well?

The same question can be asked of any *mitzrayim* situation we may find ourselves. I just cited three examples. But you can fill in the the blanks, and apply the question to any type of *mitzrayim* constraining experience, whether it be a health, financial or other type of crisis: Can you be freed from this constriction?

And even if they -- and each one of us -- can find a measure of freedom from their *mitzrayim* challenges and constraints, is it sustainable?

4. The Power of the Parting Sea

The life-changing answer to this vital question, my dear friends, is an absolute and unequivocal: YES!

Passover teaches and empowers us that we can be freed from any type of *mitzrayim* we are in. Just as the Jewish people marched out of their bitter and long *mitzrayim* 3331 years, so too are we given the strength and resources today to become free of any given challenge and constraint!

And the parting of the sea, which happened on the Seventh of Passover, teaches and empowers us that this freedom we achieved is sustainable. Just as the Egyptian enemy was utterly eliminated after the parting of the sea 3331 years ago, today too the energy of the 7th Day of Pesach has the strength to completely eradicate our negative past *mitzrayim* experiences.

This is no small feat. After leaving our *mitzrayim* constraints, our fears, inhibitions, habits, addictions — past forces that have kept us enslaved — we may still be haunted by their demons, and may feel at times weak and demoralized drained of the confidence to forge ahead

Comes the 7th of Pesach — at the conclusion of exodus (*yetziyas mitzrayim*) — and parts the sea for us, teaching us that when we are committed to moving forward, the impossible becomes possible. G-d gives us the strength to bridge the hidden (sea) and the revealed (land) resources -- allowing us the ability to achieve all our dreams and aspirations, and in the process to eliminate the inner and outer enemy once and for all.

5. Does the Sea Part for the Broken Hearted?

But the question we asked earlier remains: Does the sea part for all of us -- even for those that are still trapped in a *mitzrayim*/constraint mentality?

Does the sea split only for the righteous and deserving? How about for Michael, Esther and Irving -- and for all those broken hearts and lonely souls plagued by past demons, those that have been neglected, rejected, or judged -- does the sea part for them and free them permanently from their *mitzrayims*?

The answer to this question as well, my friends, is an unequivocal yes!

And we derive this from a most unlikely place: The parting sea's reaction to two of Israel's greatest sinners, Dathan and Aviram.

6. Dathan and Aviram

Today's Torah reading foretells Pharaoh's reaction when he will hear that the recently freed Jews are retreating back toward Egypt:

ואמר פרעה לבני ישראל נבוכים הם בארץ סגור עליהם המדבר

And Pharaoh will say about the children of Israel: They are trapped in the land. The desert has closed in upon them'.

Every verse in the Torah has 70 faces², 70 different ways of interpreting it.

Rashi interprets the verse, *v'omar Paroh l'Bnei Yisrael* — “*And Pharaoh will say about the children of Israel:*” one should not read it “*to the children of Israel,*” but rather as if it stated *al Bnei Yisrael*, “*regarding the children of Israel.*” Otherwise the verse would seem not to make sense. How could Pharaoh talk *to the children of Israel* if they're all already outside of Egypt?

Targum Yonatan, authored by the famed Tannaic scholar Yonatan ben Uziel, a student of Hillel after whom the Hillel Sandwich is named (a true “hero” sandwich), reads this verse differently:

The verse is telling is that Pharaoh was actually speaking to the children of Israel -- namely to Dathan and Aviram: *v'omar Paroh l'Bnei Yisrael* — And Pharaoh said to Dathan and Aviram, the children of Israel who remained in Egypt, “Look at the nation of Israel who are trapped in the land, haunted by Tzephon³ the ruler of the desert.”⁴

Dathan and Aviram were two Jews who remained in Egypt even after all their brethren had left during the

¹ Exodus 14:3, and Rashi's explanation of it.

² Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15.

³ See Rashi to Exodus 14:2.

⁴ To Exodus 14:3.

Exodus. Those two famous troublemakers who, many years earlier, forced the then 20-year-old Moses to flee Egypt for Midian, chose to not be freed from *mitzrayim*.

But this begs the question: We will later learn how much heartache Dathan and Aviram would cause Moses, Aharon, and the entire nation throughout the 40 years in the desert. They were the antagonists behind virtually every calamity, from the Golden Calf, to the spies, to the rejection of the Manna, to the mutiny of Korach.

If these two no-goodniks remained in Egypt, how did they come to wreak such havoc on the Jewish people throughout the 40-year journey?

7. The Sea Parting for Sinners

Explains the Midrash: When Pharaoh had a change of heart and decided to mobilize his army and pursue the Jewish people (because he saw that they were retreating and were *trapped in the land*), Dathan and Aviram decided to go along with him.

When Dathan and Aviram then saw the sea split and save the Jews and kill the Egyptians, their hearts were inspired and they desired to reunite with their Jewish brethren.⁵

The 19th century Chassidic work, *Be'er Mayim Chayim* by Rabbi Chaim ben Shlomo Tyrer, adds a powerful point in this story.⁶

The Torah verses describing the splitting of the sea seem to be redundant. We read in verse 22:

ויבאו בני ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה והמים להם חומה מימין ומשמאלם

Then the children of Israel came into the midst of the sea on dry land, and the waters were to them as a wall from their right and from their left.

And 6 verses later, in verse 29, we read:

בני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים והמים להם חומה מימין ומשמאלם

But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the water was to them like a wall from their right and from their left.

Why this redundancy?

Also: there are two differences between the two verses: Verse 22 states, **בתוך הים ביבשה**, *into the midst of the sea on dry land* and the word **חומה**, “wall” is spelled with a *vov*. While in verse 29 it is written **בתוך הים ביבשה**, on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the words for “wall” is spelled **חמה**, without a *vov*.

⁵ Midrash Sechel Tov ad loc (p. 188).

⁶ To Exodus 14:29. See also Tzfonot 5749 no. 3, Nissan.

Why are the orders of “into the sea” and “dry land” reversed in the two verses, and why is one spelled *chomah* with a *vov* and the other without?

The Be'er Mayim Chaim explains that verse 29 actually refers to a second splitting of the sea, a splitting that happened for Dathan and Aviram after the main splitting that happened for all the Jews

Verse 22 describes the general sea splitting, while verse 29 describes the second splitting for Dathan and Aviram.

And the nuanced wording and spelling hints at this.⁷ At the general splitting, in verse 22, first the Jews jumped into the midst of the sea with Mesirat Nefesh and only after did it become dry. But when Dathan and Aviram walked through, it was first already dry and only because it was dry first were they ready to enter the midst of the sea.

So too the *vov* of *chomah*. *Chomah* with a *vov* spells “wall”. Without a *vov*, **חמה** could also read *cheimah*, “rage”. The sea raged with anger when Dathan and Aviram crossed, for they knew that nature was being suspended for two transgressors who would cause much havoc and pain.

And despite that fact that they were such sinners, the sea split for them anyway!

This contains an extraordinary message for us: That the power of redemption -- and sustainable redemption -- is for all the Jewish people, even for those that initially refuse to leave their *mitzrayim* constraints and may continue to try disrupting G-d's plans.

One may think that the parting of the sea is only for the righteous and deserving. Not those that remain trapped in their *mitzrayims*. Comes this chapter with Dathan and Aviram and teaches us that it's never too late for anyone. There is hope for everyone. Even if the sea may rage, it parts to open up doors and channels of opportunity even for the wayward.

8. Conclusion: We Are All Righteous

Who knows the mysterious inner workings of the hearts of man? As wicked as Dathan and Aviram were, it seems that they had a moment of true inspiration when they witnessed the splitting of the sea. Or perhaps they had other intentions.

Either way one thing is certain: the sea split for Dathan and Aviram! Perhaps it was against the seas will, and perhaps the sea was even angry, but it split nonetheless.

And herein lies the fundamental Jewish ethos: The splitting of the sea does not discriminate, it split for every single Jew, even the two archetypes of “bad” people, Dathan and Aviram.

Redemption, by definition, isn't redeeming some or most Jews, but redeeming all Jews. If one Jew remains enslaved,

⁷ See here and sources cited at length. ([link](#))

is that truly freedom?

The lesson is very profound and quite clear: if this is the case with Dathan and Aviram, *al achat kamah vkamah*⁸, how much more so does the sea split for every single Jew in today's day and age.

The prophet Isaiah says: **ועמך כלם צדיקים**, *And your people, all of them righteous*.⁹ After all that we have endured we are all Tzadikim. Today, when a Jew does a Mitzvah it's a *chidush*, a miracle, a wonder.

Who would have imagined a Jew, after 2000 years of exile, eating Matzo? Is it logical for a Jew today to don Tefilin and light Shabbat Candles? The Jews in Moses' enlightened age (*dor de'ah*)¹⁰, who saw and experienced open miracles, had their challenges in listening to G-d. They even built a golden calf...

By contrast, today, there are no revealed miracles, and we are not enlightened souls as they were -- indeed. most Jews today are *tinokos she'nishbu* (children born in spiritual captivity). And yet, we are still committed and trying to do a mitzvah -- that is a miracle even greater than the splitting of the sea! No wonder Moses stood humble before our generation.

Dathan and Aviram were sinners, true scholars with real knowledge, who nevertheless chose to intentionally oppose Moses.

Compared to them, every single Jew today is a saint. We have not seen G-dly miracles, experienced the Ten Plagues, or seen with our eyes the splitting of the sea.

If the sea split for them, how much more so for us!

We are all *nisht-farginers* — we all cannot stand it when another Jew suffers, is in pain, is in Egypt. We cannot *fargin*, we cannot stand by when even one Jew has not yet crossed the sea.

And every Jew, regardless of background and experience, will indeed be redeemed in the final redemption.

It is our job to ensure that each and everyone of us, the person to our right, the person to our left, walks hand in hand through the *yam suf*, to Sinai, to Eretz Yisrael with the coming of Moshiach right now! Amen.

Chag Kosher Vesameach — A Happy and Kosher Passover!

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⁸ See Likkutei Sichot vol 28, pp. 103.

⁹ 60:21.

¹⁰ See Midrash, Vayikra Rabba 9:1. Bamdibar Rabba 19:3.