

Beshalach, Rabbi David Mahler

In the mid-1950's, the great American singer and songwriter, Carl Perkins, proudly sang, "You can take the boy out of the country but you'll never take the country from me". Since then, there have been countless variations of his line. My mother often boasts, "you can take the girl out of The Bronx, but you can't take The Bronx out of the girl".

I've long been puzzled by the opening *pasuk* of our *parsha*. The *Torah* (13:17) states that "It happened when *Paroh* sent the people.....". Coming off the heels of *Parshas Bo*, this formulation seems awkward at best. Thrice in this very chapter (*pesukim* 3, 14 and 16), we are taught that *Hashem* took us out of Egypt with His mighty hand. Why does our *parsha* seem to attribute our people's freedom to the Egyptian king's sending us out of his country? The structure of the *pasuk* seems to be wrong, and worse, undermine the entire point of the miracles *Hashem* performed on behalf of *Am Yisrael*. *Hashem* deserves the credit because He alone is responsible for our liberation. As we recite on *Seder* night, "*Ani v'lo malach*" – I, and not an angel took you out of the land of Egypt.

Let's ask a more general question as well. Why did there need to be the episode of *Krias Yam Suf*? Obviously, once the Egyptians began chasing *Bnei Yisrael*, we needed *Hashem* to orchestrate another miracle, but why wasn't leaving Egypt enough? *Hashem* could have made *Paroh* give up after our exodus. Why did *Krias Yam Suf*, the climax of *Beshalach*, need to take place? The second stage of *Paroh* chasing the Jews and *Hashem* splitting the sea seems unnecessary.

The *Da'as Sofrim*, Rabbi Chaim Dov Rabinovitch, posits that there needed to be two separate stages because each accomplished a unique goal. *Bnei Yisrael's* initial exodus from the land of *Mitzraim* was the Jewish People physically being taken out of Egypt. Once they left the borders of the land, they were physically free. However, Egypt and *Paroh* still needed to be taken out of them.

Until the sea was split, and they saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore, *Am Yisrael* felt emotionally subservient to *Paroh*. At the very beginning of our *parsha*, *Bnei Yisrael* still felt under the hand of *Paroh* as they felt that *Paroh* had sent them out. This is proven when a few days later, as the Egyptian army is gaining on them, they tell *Moshe* that they should never have left because the desert is a scary place and they'd like to go back to being slaves. Their slave mentality was still present within them (14:11-12).

It was only after they safely crossed the *Yam Suf* that they saw themselves as free people. Egypt had been taken out of them. They had purged their self-conscious view of themselves and finally became mentally and emotionally liberated. They were no longer subservient to *Paroh* but rather to *Hashem*.

And that is why their celebration of *Az Yashir*, led by *Moshe* and *Miriam*, is so magnificent. It's raw and unadulterated because there's nothing better than freeing oneself of servitude and indebtedness. They had reached the pinnacle of their faith in G-d.

The past year has been one where we have all felt "out of control". The realization that we control very little has been experienced again and again. That feeling, that I am not the master, is unnerving.

Many *parshiot* do not have a clear theme. *Parshas Shofitm* centers on leadership but most have a theme that's more difficult to pin down. Most have many different themes intertwined. *Beshalach* is different because it certainly has one. *Beshalach* is the *parsha* of *Emunah*. When studied, the theme is apparent.

When a person puts one's faith in G-d, an indescribable calm sets in. *Emunah* allows a person to ignore, to an extent, one's external surroundings and feel free internally. Our outside circumstances do not define us but rather only how we see ourselves defines who we are. We should view ourselves, unpretentiously, as nobility. We have been hand-selected as agents of *Hashem* to accomplish special things. We are His messengers and must hold in our minds the image of free men living to accomplish our mission of bringing sanctity to the world. Only when we are internally free can we make an impact externally.

Our relationship with *Hashem* allows us to transcend the noise, the voices in our heads attempting to belittle and convince us that we're insignificant. That noise and those voices are purged by the intimacy of our connection with G-d. We are not slaves to others nor are we subservient to any ceiling the world attempts to place over us.

Thankfully, *Hashem* took us out of Egypt. Moreover, we are grateful that He took Egypt – the feeling that we are insignificant and inconsequential – out of us.

The world is our oyster. Let us continue to great things.

Shabbat Shalom