

Parshat Bo, Rabbi David Mahler

My family and I had the good fortune to spend a few days away at an Airbnb in Palm Springs. Though our three days in the desert were spent in similar fashion to many lazy Sundays during the past few months, something was different. We hiked, swam, read, learned, biked, played games and went for runs but the new surroundings were a welcomed break from the monotony of similar days.

I'd like to share two thoughts based on our short getaway.

The *Rambam* speaks of three ways to do teshuva: *shinui ha-shem*, a change of name; *shinui ma'aseh*, a change of our actions; and *shinui makom*, a change of place. A change of place reorients a person. It helps to refocus and recalibrate one's thinking, one's role, one's longing and aspiration. Though we were engaged in many of the same activities as we are at home, everything felt different. *Shinui makom* creates a freshness that is crucial to mental health and mental well-being which animates every other area of life. Seeing the wisdom of *Chazal* is such an inspiring experience for me.

Though there has been less rush and less hustle and bustle this year, vacations are markedly different. The calmer and slower-paced vacation days stand in contradistinction to this week's *parsha* (12:11) where we memorialize the fact that *Bnei Yisrael* were rushing to bake the *matzos* and then the following morning when they left Egypt. It seems as though the entire night of the 15th of *Nissan* is characterized by *chipazon*, rushing.

However, rushing is not thought of as a virtue. Often, people make mistakes when going too fast. Details and other important things are missed when rushing. Why is recalling the haste of our ancestors important? What exactly was so wonderful about their rushing?

One idea was made well known by the *Arizal*. He taught that when *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt, they needed to do so because if they left a moment later they would have dipped down to the 50th level of *tumah*, impurity, from which they would not have been able to recover. Their rushing was for their benefit and we recall that great *chesed* of *Hashem*.

But why did *Hashem* wait until that very last second? Why did He not choose a time a bit earlier to have them leave the land? If He would have, they would not have needed to rush? And isn't rushing frowned upon?

Furthermore, if *Hashem* would have waited another minute or second, would the Jews have fallen to the 50th level of impurity immediately?

In his opening essay on *Pesach*, *Rav Yitzchak Hutner* explains that in life, there are two different types of rushing, of which both are central to our lives.

The first type is one where time pressures you. For example, a deadline at work, *Shabbos* candle-lighting or whenever your flight is scheduled to leave. This type of rushing is important because it forces us to get things done, to accomplish and execute. As a self-proclaimed and celebrated procrastinator, the first type of rushing is one in which I am well-acquainted.

The second type is more praiseworthy. We hurry towards things that are very important to us. This type of rushing is more of an alacrity or zeal.

When leaving *Mitzraim*, *Bnei Yisrael* were not pressured by the clock. They had been slaves for 210 years. They had experienced the plagues and now they were told they could exit the land. They could now become a people solely under the authority of *Hashem*. Their leaving in haste fell under category #2. They were at the 49th level of decadence and they grabbed the opportunity to leave *b'chipazon*, quickly and without delay. If they would not have shown that enthusiasm, they would have fallen another level. This is the rushing we are implored to remember. This is the type of haste we should strive to emulate.

This idea is proven from the Rabbis' teaching that the words "*mitzvah*" and "*matzah*" are analogous. *Chazal* state, "*mitzvah she'haba'ah leyadcha al tachmitzena*, when a *mitzvah* comes your way, do not allow it to ferment". When the opportunity to do a *mitzvah* arises, do it quickly – not a quickly triggered by checking it off my to-do list, but quickly in the sense of embracing an opportunity. This teaching applies the urgency of baking our matzos with alacrity to all *mitzvos*. The Jew is expected to conquer time, to live beyond time, to associate his life with G-d, Who is timeless and eternal. Time is holy and precious. It is a commodity and we do not let timeless opportunities ferment. *Mitzvos* must be important to us.

What am I rushing towards? Where am I going? Where am I heading? What do I value? What is important to me? What excites and animates me?

Contemplating and taking stock of these questions is daunting but doable? Perhaps overwhelming yet cannot be overstated.

Vacations are not the only times one can ponder these questions but they do make it easier.

May we rush to do good things, make a difference, impact others positively and may we be able to rush to celebrate good things together, in-person, very soon.

Shabbat Shalom