

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Happy birthday to our super-dedicated and indefatigable President, Kenny Friedman! It is amazing to reflect on the fact that he took on this position in the middle of a pandemic and has been working tirelessly to help the shul continue to grow and thrive during this tumultuous time. I can testify to the time and effort, care and concern, he puts in every day, thinking about the well-being of each and every member, as well as the well-being of Shomrei Emunah itself. Please join me in wishing Kenny a very happy birthday and many, many more happy and healthy years, together with his First Lady, Marla, enjoying much *nachas*, *bracha*, and *hatzlacha*! Thank you, Kenny, for all you do!

I want to thank the sponsors of the drasha:

- Chaim and Eleanor Leventhal, in memory of Eleanor's father, Dovid ben Elyakum, whose yahrzeit is 28 Shevat.
- Cheryl Mitnick, in memory of her father, Herman Mitnick, Chaim Aryeh ben Shlomo, whose yahrzeit is 25 Shevat.
- Pam and David Lehmann, in memory of David's father, Henry Lehmann z"l, whose yahrtzeit is 26 Shevat.

May the *neshamos* have an aliya and may all the sponsors be rewarded for their generosity and dedication to the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health!

This week, Klal Yisrael lost four renowned leaders and *talmidei chachamim*, each one of them leaving behind a special legacy. In alphabetical order:

- Rav Avraham Avidan, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Shaalvim.
- Rav Yitzchok Scheiner, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of the Kaminetz Yeshiva of Yerushalayim.
- Rav Dovid Soloveitchik, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Brisk Yerushalayim.
- Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski, zt"l, renowned psychiatrist and prolific author of more than 60 *seforim* and books.

These losses are hard to replace. May their memories be a blessing.

In this week's *Mishpacha* magazine, **Rabbi Hanoach Teller** wrote:

*"But perhaps Rabbi Twerski's greatest achievement was unlocking the world of psychiatric insight for the Orthodox Jew. With his chassidic background, rabbinic ordination, heimish air, and treasure trove of chassidic tales, Rabbi Dr. Twerski was able to serve as a rare bridge between two worlds. He introduced frum Jews struggling with addiction to the Twelve Steps and gave them the keys to recovery. He shared insights into the human psyche and the work of self-improvement in a warm, witty voice that was always encouraging and thought-provoking and never threatening or distant. He was a fearless trailblazer as well, founding the Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pittsburgh and the Shaar Hatikvah rehabilitation center for prisoners in Israel. He showed struggling Jews that one can benefit from the advances of psychology while never compromising their observance."*

Although I had the privilege of meeting Rabbi Twerski at a conference around a decade ago, my interaction with him was mainly through his books. Indeed, for the last several years, I have been giving each Shomrei Bar Mitzva boy his commentary on *Mesilas Yesharim*. My first "introduction" to Rabbi Twerski was through his Haggada, *From Bondage to Freedom*, which one of my relatives used at our Pesach Seder one year. I later purchased my own copy and have often quoted from his commentary on the "four questions," where he drew from his decades of experience helping addicts—applying relevant life lessons from Yetzias Mitzrayim. He offers a very insightful comment about Pesach and Judaism in general.

*"The four questions emphasize yet another aspect of spirituality: **the ability to live with conflict**. The emphasis of modern psychology on the resolution of contention has resulted in people eschewing all conflict. Living with ongoing stress has become unthinkable, and many individuals who find themselves entangled in*

struggles that are not readily resolvable may attempt to escape therefrom by rather desperate methods, not the least of which is seeking the oblivion or euphoria of alcohol, mind altering substances, or diversionary activities. The loss of tolerance for conflict has had a profound impact on interpersonal relationships as well as on the interpersonal psyche. The unprecedented divorce rate is, to a great measure, due to the inability to withstand conflict, and to seek immediate relief from all frustrating situations.

The four questions point out that the seder, the feast of spirituality, is characterized by the co-existence of conflicting ideas. We eat the dry matzah, the bread of the slave, and the bitter herbs to commemorate our enslavement, yet we recline on couches and dip appetizers into dressings according to the custom of the free and wealthy nobility.

The answer is that we do not need to reconcile all conflicts. The concept of freedom as espoused in the Torah is quite distinct from the secular concept. According to the latter, the ultimate aim of freedom is the absence of discord, a state rarely encountered in reality. **Torah freedom includes the capacity to live with stress, and to be able to achieve serenity in the face of conflict.**”

This insightful comment answers a puzzling **Rashi** in the beginning of our Parsha, when we are told that Yisro heard something that inspired him to join the Jewish people. But the Torah speaks only very generally about what he heard...

שמות פרשת יתרו פרק יח פסוק א

(א) וַיִּשְׁמַע יִתְרוֹ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֱלֹהִים לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ כִּי־ הוֹצִיא יְקֹנָק אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם:  
*Jethro priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people, how the LORD had brought Israel out from Egypt.*

Rashi wonders—what exactly did he hear? A lot had transpired during that exciting period...  
Rashi points to two specific things...krias Yam Suf and milchemes Amalek.

רש"י שמות פרשת יתרו פרק יח פסוק א

וישמע יתרו - מה שמועה שמע ובא, קריעת ים סוף ומלחמת עמלק:  
*And Yisro Heard — What was the particular report which he heard so that he came? — The division of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek*

The obvious question on Rashi: Why did Yisro need to hear more than “just” Krias Yam Suf? That was an open and obvious miracle, where the Jewish people were miraculously saved, while the Mitzrim were miraculously punished. It was an obvious expression of divine reward and punishment. The Torah testifies about the effect of Krias Yam Suf on the Jewish people.

שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יד פסוק לא

וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים וייראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו:  
*And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses.*

And, as we say in *maariv* davening *Who does miracles for us...taking revenge against Paraoh...* **Rav Simcha Zissel Broide** points out that this phrase *העושה* in present tense—Who **does** miracles for us. He cites the Navi Yirmiyahu, who says that the miracles in Mitzrayim have had a lasting effect until today

ירמיהו פרק לב פסוק כ: אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַת אֱתוֹת וּמִפְתִּים בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם עַד־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וּבְיִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְאֲדָם וּמַעֲשֵׂה־לֵךְ שָׁם כְּיוֹם הַהֵנָּה:  
*You displayed signs and marvels in the land of Egypt with lasting effect, and won renown in Israel and among mankind to this very day.*

As the **Malbim** comments—the effect of the miracles in Mitzrayim and the Yam Suf have had an effect on both the Jewish people and other nations—until this day!

מלבי"ם ירמיהו פרק לב פסוק כ: אשר שמת אותות ומופתים בארץ מצרים, בעת יצ"מ: עד היום הזה. שלא סרו האותות והמופתים בכל דור ודור, בין בישראל בין באדם בשאר אומות, שכולם השיגו נפלאותיך

What more does would Yisro need to hear to inspire him to join the Jewish people?

And what was so inspiring about the bloody and difficult war with Amalek—with many casualties. Moreover, we are told, in the end that Yeshoshua only weakened them, but the fight will continue in every generation; it will be a perpetual battle. *לִיְקִוּךְ בְּעַמְלֵק מִדֶּרֶךְ דָר the war with Amalek is in every generation...*

I believe that ironically, this is exactly what drew Yisro close to Judaism. He understood that life is not one big display of miracles. Rather, he was attracted to Judaism as a religion that was not focused only on the power of God but also on the responsibility of man, highlighted by the perennial battle with Amalek and by the Jewish commitment to fight evil—whenever and wherever it rears its ugly head...

He wasn't looking for utopia. ***He did not expect religion to promise that there would be no conflict or stress.*** Yisro understood, as Rabbi Twerski wrote, that life requires ***“the capacity to live with stress, and to be able to achieve serenity in the face of conflict.”***

Yisro was a seasoned religious searcher, and he understood that true religion cannot be only about God's strength and ability to make Himself known, as He did at Krias Yam Suf, or about promises of complete serenity with His involvement in the world. There must also be a need for human intervention and man's responsibility to do his part to help perfect the world. Yisro was looking for a religion that gave man a meaningful mission—that placed the burden of spirituality on man along with God. Therefore, it was both Krias Yam Suf, the greatest display of God's might, and *milchemes* Amalek, representing man's commitment to perfect the world and root out evil, that drew him in.

It has been noted that in Judaism, we have the ten commandments, but not a bill of rights.

In *The Last Lecture* (page 175), Carnegie Mellon Professor, Randy Pausch said: *We've placed a lot of emphasis in this country on the idea of people's rights. That's how it should be, but it makes no sense to talk about rights without also talking about responsibilities.*

Yisro was drawn to this Torah message of responsibility. He was not looking only to be wowed by excitement—he knew that truth requires hard work, the daily grind of life, even if it is hard and lacks glamour.

In 2000, **Rabbi Twerski** published a little book called Rebbes and Chassidim: What they Said—What they Meant. He records the following story (page 111): *“When R' Schmelke assumed the position as rabbi of Nikolsburg, the community leaders told him that it was customary for each new rabbi to recommend a religious practice he wished the community to adopt. This would be written in the community chronicles, and the entire community was obligated to abide by it. R' Schmelke said that he wished to delay his recommendation until he had the opportunity to familiarize himself with the community. After several weeks, R' Schmelke asked for the book of chronicles and very carefully wrote in the Ten Commandments”*

Rabbi Twerski observed “while traditions and customs are important, they should not be given greater importance than basic Torah principles.” I think one can also learn from this story that it is “easier” to follow Hashem when things are new and exciting. But when it is about fighting the same battles each day—when it is about hard work—that is a different story. But that hard work is exactly what attracted Yisro to Judaism.

And that is the message that we are to take from Har Sinai—that along with the *kolos u'brakim*—the fanfare—the sound and light show—was a prescription for life—things that we must do day in and day out if we are to follow the will of Hashem. That is why towards the end of the parsha, Hashem says to Moshe:

שְׁמוֹת פְּרִשְׁת יִתְרוּ פֶּרֶק כ פֶּסוּק יט – כא: (יט) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם בְּי מַדְּוֵשִׁים דְּבַרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם: (כ) לֹא תַעֲשׂוּן אֵתִי אֱלֹהֵי קָסֶר וְאֱלֹהֵי זָהָב לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם:

19: The LORD said to Moses: Thus shall you say to the Israelites: You yourselves saw that I spoke to you from the very heavens: 20: With Me, therefore, you shall not make any gods of silver, nor shall you make for yourselves any gods of gold.

תפארת שלמה מועדים שבועות

אבל אח"כ כתי' והי' אם שמוע תשמעו וכו' ושמרת כל חוקיו כל המחלה אשר שמת' במצרים לא אשים עליך כו' כי באמת סוף הדבר שלא יעשה עמנו רעה. אבל בתחלה אתם לא תכוונו על כך בעבור טובתכם כמו שהזכיר הכתוב לא תעשון אתי אלהי כסף וכו' והבן The **Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk** says that Hashem is telling the Jewish people not to make Him into a God who gives out gold and silver...not to build their religious experience on the expectation of open miracles and bounty. But, rather build their religious experience on hard work necessary to achieve self-perfection and develop a relationship with Hashem.

(כא) מִזְבֵּחַ אֲדָמָה תַעֲשֶׂה לִי וְזִבְחֶתָ עָלָיו אֶת־עֲלֹתֶיךָ וְאֶת־שְׁלֵמֶיךָ אֶת־צֹאֲנֶךָ וְאֶת־בְּקָרֶךָ בְּכָל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲזַכִּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי אָבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ וּבְרַכְמֶיךָ:

21: Make for Me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.

Hashem is telling them—you have been impressed and overwhelmed by miracles, but going forward, don't expect everything to happen on its own, without hard work. From now on, you will need to work to accomplish your mission, day in and day out.

This idea is reflected in a famous Gemara in Shabbos 88 says that Hashem suspended a mountain over the Jewish people like a barrel and “forced them” to accept the Torah. Rav Acha Bar Yaakov worries that the Jews could always issue a disclaimer--they were compelled and didn't accept of their own free will. What does it mean that they were forced? Didn't the Jewish people say נעשה ונשמע?

**Rav Shimon Schwab** in his *Maayan Beis Hashoeva* (page 279) explains:

אלא הכוונה היא שיכולים לומר לא קיבלנו אלא בעולם כזה של אונס והכרח, כלומר בעולם שהכח של הקב"ה היא ברורה מאד שהוא ית' מתנהג עם בני ישראל למעלה מדרך הטבע בנסים גלויים ובהשראת השכינה, בוארים ותומים ובנבואת הנביאים, וזהו פירושה של כפיית ההר כגיגית...ולאור זה נבין דברי חכמים וחידותם שהמשילו כפיית ההר כגיגית, והיינו קובא שמטילים בה שחר, ולא אמרו כפיית סל וכיו"ב, אלא שרצו חז"ל להודיענו במליצתם שהכפייה בזמן מתן תורה היתה בבחינת "שכרות" מרוב התגלות נסים גלויים שמבלבלים את המוח כמו שחר.

*Chazal's statement means that B'nai Yisrael would be forever able to point out that the Jewish nation agreed to keep the mitzvos only in a time when God's existence and intervention in human affairs are unquestionable and blatantly clear. Their commitment would be valid only when. Only when Hashem was performing miracles for them through the prophets and his Holy spirit was resting among them in the Beis Hamikdash. The Jews could argue that they accepted the Torah only because the mountain hovered over them like a barrel. Just as a barrel is used to hold an intoxicating beverage, as Rashi explains "a wine cask," B'nai Yisrael was prepared to keep the Torah only at a time when they felt intoxicated with the sweet feeling of closeness to Hashem, accompanied by absolute conviction in His omnipotence and His preferential treatment of the Jewish people. The Jewish nation could not guarantee that would overcome the trials of exile and keep the Torah properly, even during times of darkness. When God hides Himself and when they suffer so much...*

It was not until the Purim story, where Hashem's hand in their salvation was hidden, that the Jewish people fully accepted Hashem and His Mitzvos, despite not clearly seeing His involvement. But Yisro had fully accepted this long before. He had been drawn to a religion not only when life is filled with “casks of wine,” but that expects man to work even when things are difficult, and Hashem's presence is hard to discern.

We are living in times of darkness. Let us strengthen ourselves like Yisro—and recommit to our mission to carry out our task in life, to fulfill our mandate to follow Hashem when His presence is recognizable and also when He is hidden. Let us take on the responsibility to battle the darkness of Amalek, evil and injustice, and to stay strong in our faith—*ad bias goel*, until Hashem sends us the days of Mashiach, *bimhera viyamenu...amen*.