

Good Yom Tov, Chag Sameach, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors Barry and Phyllis Levi, who are sponsoring in memory of Barry's mother, Ruth Levi, whose yahrtzeit is on the 26<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. May her *neshama* have an aliya and may Barry and Phyllis be rewarded for their support of the Shul with *bracha* and *hatzlacha*, and good health.

As the Yom Tov of Pesach winds down, let us reflect on the past week—and on the past year—with gratitude that Hashem has brought us to this point, to enjoy this Yom Tov together. While we have not completely returned to normal, we can **appreciate** how far we have come with Hashem's help, and the things accessible today that were out of reach a year ago.

The end of the Pesach is a fitting time to step back from focusing on all of the necessary details of the Yom Tov, the chametz and matza, and focus instead on a broader theme of the holiday—**appreciation**. It is a fitting time to appreciate Hashem's active role in our lives and all the bracha in our lives.

And this perspective of appreciation, gives meaning and adds depth, to everything else we experience and think about during this Yom Tov and, indeed, to all the experiences of our lives.

It is one thing to be free, but it's another to appreciate that freedom.

It is one thing to have family, it's another to really appreciate those who are closest to us.

It is one thing to have a caring God who is invested in us, it's another to appreciate His ongoing presence in our lives, and know He is guiding us, even when His presence is not apparent.

The seder is structured to stimulate feelings of appreciation in us. That is why we begin with the bad and slowly arrive at the good: מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח. When everything is going well, it can be hard to appreciate what we have. When we are so far from the misery and deprivation of slavery, it can be hard to appreciate our blessings. We need to reflect on where we were-- a nation of slaves and idolators-- and where we would be without Hashem's help. Only then can we truly appreciate all the gifts in our lives.

The **Mishna** in Avos (3:14) writes that appreciation makes everything more significant...

חביבין ישראל שנקראו בנים למקום חבה יתירה נודעת להם שנקראו בנים למקום שנאמר (דברים י"ד) בנים אתם לה'  
*The Jewish people are fortunate to be considered God's children, but they are even more fortunate because Hashem let them know and appreciate that fact.*

The **Netziv** connects this Mishna in Avos to *yetzias Mitzrayim*, when Hashem said ולקחתי לכם לי לעם וידעתם כי אני ה' המוציא אתכם. Hashem not only rescued the Jewish people, but He did it in a way they could appreciate their ongoing relationship with Him. That is what *vi'datem* means—not only has He claimed us as His nation—He let us know and appreciate that this relationship exists.

A similar pattern is evident when Hashem told Avraham Avinu that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars. Perhaps surprisingly, Avraham asked במה אדע? How do I know? Is it conceivable that he was doubting Hashem? What was Avraham Avinu's real question במה אדע?

According to the **Alshich**, Avraham Avinu was saying the following—I trust that they will be numerous and eventually inherit the Land of Israel, but is there a way to ensure they will always appreciate this relationship with You, to ensure that even when times are tough, they will have the faith to survive the challenges?

Hashem told him *שנה* וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה You should know that *yetzias Mitzrayim* will help them appreciate what it means to be a nation of Hashem and that they will never take this closeness and status for granted. This experience will keep them strong during challenging times. He then showed him a vision of the future. What exactly did Hashem show Avraham?

פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב) בראשית פרשת לך לך פרק טו פסוק יז - יח  
ר' יהושע בן לוי אמר אפילו קריעת ים סוף הראה לו לאברהם אבינו דכתיב אשר עבר בין הגזרים האלה, וכתיב התם לגזור ים סוף לגזרים (תהלים קלו יג):

Among the things Hashem showed Avraham Avinu was *krias Yam Suf*. Why? Wasn't *yetzias Mitzrayim* enough proof? Were the ten *makos* not enough proof?

We can ask the same question on the *pasuk* from the incident of *krias Yam Suf*: וירא ישראל את היד הגדולה אשר עשה ה' במצרים וייראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו Why only now did they fully believe and not before?

Let's review this story of *krias yam suf*: After all their years of slavery and suffering, the Jewish people were finally rescued by Hakadosh Baruch Hu and they finally left Mitzrayim. At this point, we would have thought that Hashem would take them to their final destination, Israel, as quickly as possible, by the shortest route. But He did not do so. The shortest route would have been straight north, up the coast towards current day Gaza (in Hebrew, *derech erez Plishtim*). But the *pasuk* explicitly says they did not travel that way.

שמות פרק יג: (יז) ויהי בשלח פרעה את־העם וְלֹא־נָתַם אֱלֹהִים דָּרֶךְ אֲרָץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים

Which way did the Jews go? Southeast, towards the Yam Suf.

שמות פרק יג: (יח) וַיִּסַּב אֱלֹהִים וְאֶת־הָעָם דָּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף וַחֲמִשִּׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצְרָיִם מִצְרָיִם:

Why? If they had just gone straight up the coast, they wouldn't have had to cross the Red Sea and they would have been in Israel in a matter of days. It would have saved so much heartache. What was the advantage of taking a longer and more circuitous route?

The first *pasuk* answers our quandary.

וְלֹא־נָתַם אֱלֹהִים דָּרֶךְ אֲרָץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ־יָנַתְּם הָעָם בְּרֵאתְּם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִם:

According to **Rashi's** reading, Hashem did not take them on the shortest route, **specifically because** it was direct. Sometimes a shortcut is not the best idea.

רש"י שמות פרק יג פסוק יז: כי קרוב הוא - ונוח לשוב באותו הדרך למצרים.

If it is so easy to get to your destination, it is also easy to go back. If something is easy to attain, it is also easy to give up or lose. Hashem wanted them to take the longer route to make sure they could sustain their level of spirituality once they arrived in Israel.

But there is another way to read that *Pasuk*, another lesson in this extra travel time,. The **Daas Zekeinim mi'baalei haTosfos** offers a novel interpretation of the phrase *ki karov hu*:

ולכן לא הנהיגם כמנהגו של עולם כי קרוב, כלומר העם קרוב של הקב"ה שנאמר לבני ישראל עם קרובו

The Daas Zekeinim suggests that "*ki karov hu*" should be translated as "for we are His close family," as we are called עם קרובו. According to this translation, *ki karov hu* has nothing to do with geography or the route they took. Instead, it relates to the closeness (literally the relationship) between the Jews and Hashem. Since Klal Yisrael is close to G-d, they do not travel the normal route; they travel differently than regular nations.

The Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, **Rav Simcha Zissel Broide**, elaborates on the Daas Zekeinim.

פעמים נדמה לאדם במרוצת חייו כי דרכי ההשגחה העליונה עמו נסתרת היא, ולכאורה נדמה לו כי סיבוכים שונים ומשונים נגררים בדרכו, לכל אשר יפנה ההצלחה ממנו והלאה, לפי חישובו הוא. הרבה דברים שהחלו לפי תכנית פשוטה וחלקה ותוצאותיהם ברורות, לבסוף משתבש הדבר והתוצאה אחרת מכפי שחשב. והאדם עומד ומשתאה ומתמלא תרעומת ואיננה יודע שאדרבה—"כי קרוב הוא", חביב הוא לפני הקב"ה ועל כן ההנהגה עמו איננה כמנהגו של עולם, ולהיפך עליו לזקוף ראשו ולהתמלא רוממות כי בהנהגה זו יכול הוא לראות ייחוסו הרם והגבוה וקרבתו לה', שהכל נעשה לטובתו כפי עומק דעת הבורא.

*Many times, in the rush of life, God's plan is hidden, and we struggle to understand the challenges and obstacles in front of us. Many times, things develop differently than we planned or imagined they would. It sometimes seems like success is eluding us. And the truth is just the opposite. Hashem is leading each of us on the path we are supposed to be on. Everything ends up the way it was supposed to, because Hashem is our karov, our beloved family member, leading us on the appropriate path, looking out for our best interests.*

A great lesson for life lies in these few words of the Daas Zekeinim. We believe that we have a special closeness to the Almighty. As such, we are subject to Divine Providence (*hashgocha pratis*). For His special people, Hashem, as it were, takes us by the hand and leads us through life. This is the lesson of *krias Yam Suf* to remember when unexpected or unpleasant things happen in life. We ask ourselves "This does not make any sense; why is it happening to me?" "Why am I on the circuitous path?" "Why do things seem to be different than I wanted or expected?" That is when we have to remember that **כי קרוב הוא** "He is close to us." He is taking us by the hand and is giving us a different type of treatment, taking us on a path uniquely meant for us. He is guiding and orchestrating from behind the scenes.

Imagine how the Jewish people must have felt. Here they are in the desert, having just left Egypt. They have a basic sense of where they are going. Everyone assumes they will be travelling via *Eretz Plishtim*. Suddenly, God does something different—He leads them towards the Yam Suf. Then the Egyptians are suddenly in hot pursuit. What thoughts must have been going through their minds? The natural reaction would certainly have been "Why did He do this to us? Why did He trap us between the sea and the desert and the Egyptian army? If He had taken us by way of the normal route, we would not be in this predicament!"

But what was the end result of that detour? As they were miraculously saved through the miracle of *Krias Yam Suf*, they understood "*ki karov hu*"—that the Jewish people have a special relationship with Hashem.

שהרי אילו נחם דרך ארץ פלישתים לא היה צריך לקריעת ים סוף, נמצא דכל זה נעשה מחמת הקרובה, וכן הוא בזיווג ומזונותיו של האדם, שהנהגה היא בדרך "כי קרוב הוא."

"*Klal Yisrael saw the Great Hand and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant.*" They came to a level of belief in God and in Moshe at Yam Suf that surpassed the level they had achieved in Egypt. They were a changed nation.

רשב"ם שמות פרק יד פסוק לא: ויאמינו ב"י - שאף במדבר לא ימותו ברעב:

As the **Rashbam** explains it was what they saw at Yam Suf that gave them the strength to follow Hashem in the Midbar.

The **Haksav Vehakabala** differentiates between emuna 'ל' and emuna 'ב'—אמונה בה'—is a general faith in Hashem not in a specific promise. Until now they had faith in specific promises—**now they had complete faith in Hashem...**

הכתב והקבלה שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יד פסוק לא

(לא) ויאמינו בה'. האמנה הסמוכה לבי"ת הוא הבטחון במי שמאמינים בו שבידו לעשות כחפצו לכל דבר, והסמוכה ללמ"ד אינו כ"א האמנת לאותו דבר שהוא אמת, כגון אם לא יאמינו לי, לא האמנתי לדברים ודומיהם (רל"ש).

*This is the message of Ki karov hu.* G-d takes us by the hand. He leads us down a path, and we sometimes cannot understand why He is doing this to us. Only later do we sometimes understand His ways. But internalizing that הוא קרוב הוא that Hashem loves us and takes us on the path that is right for us, helps us get through challenging times. And this epiphany led them to real belief—not in a specific promise—but in Hashem

And this is why the Jewish people exclaimed at Yam Suf נחית בחסדיך you led us with mercy...

The **Baal HaTurim** points to the only other time in Tana"ch that the word נחית is used is in Tehillim 77 נחית כצאן you led us like sheep. The image is precise: just as the shepherd guides each sheep to the pasture right for it, and just as the sheep sometimes doesn't understand why the shepherd is guiding him with his stick away from the grass he wants... Klal Yisrael realized that Hashem was guiding them with love and precision.

בעל הטורים שמות פרשת בשלה פרק טו פסוק יג: (יג) נחית. ב' במסורה. נחית בחסדך. נחית כצאן עמד (תהלים עז כא). מה הרועה מרעה צאן כל אחד לפי המרעה הראוי לו (עי' שמו"ר ב ב) כך היה הענן מנחה אותם כל אחד לפי מהלכו, הגדול לפי גדלו והקטן לפי קוטנו (ספרי במדבר י לד). ומה הרועה מרביץ הצאן בצהרים שלא יכם שרב ושמש כך היו מוקפים בעננים שלא יכם שרב ושמש

The **Ramban** writes that our faith and relationship with Hashem is based on *yetzias Mitzrayim*, which culminated with *Krias Yam Suf*. That is why we have a *yom tov* on the last days of Pesach to commemorate *krias Yam Suf*. Through *Krias Yam Suf*, God has done His part to convince us that He cares and lovingly guides us. Now, it is up to us to appreciate that experience and integrate its timeless message into our lives, especially during difficult and confusing times in our lives.

On Pesach, we are told to think about where we came from and what we have been given, so that we can appreciate all our blessings and thank God for the gift of being part of the Jewish people—fully appreciating our faith and our freedom, and our close relationship, being guided and cared for for the past thousands of years, as His special nation.

The lesson of Pesach and appreciation is epitomized in the song Dayeinu. We think of this song as a staple of our Pesach seder, but it was not included in the haggados in Eretz Yisrael during the Temple era...

It was first mentioned in an appendix to the 10th Century haggadah of the Rav Saadia Gaon and did not become a formal part of most *haggados* until the Middle Ages...in dark times of exile. Why was it added? Why did it become a formal part of the *haggada*?

Dayeinu breaks down the redemption from Egypt into 15 steps and says—for each one we must be thankful. If God had taken us out of Egypt and not carried out judgment against the Egyptians—we should have thanked Him. If He had given us the Egyptian riches and had not split the sea—we should have thanked Him...

When we take a broad view, the song is hard to understand. If God had brought us to Har Sinai and not given us the Torah—Dayeinu.

But would that really have been sufficient?

If God had taken us out of Egypt with the Egyptians' riches and had not split the Sea—Dayeinu. But would that really have been sufficient?

What are we trying to accomplish by breaking down the story into 15 steps?

We focus on each of the steps because doing so helps us appreciate all the miracles that God did for us—individually—appreciating each step for what it was...even before getting to our final destination.

Dayeinu teaches us an important lesson about appreciation. It teaches us that, in life, if we wait for the ending—for everything to make sense and add up before feeling gratitude--we will never be happy. We will never be thankful. We will never appreciate what we have.

When we are in *galus*, when we struggle, it can be hard to appreciate all the *bracha* that we do have because of the overall darkness we experience. Dayeinu teaches us to carefully examine and appreciate all the little things that are good, as they are happening. Appreciating and recognizing the good things in life helped our ancestors endure the challenges and the dark times. In the Middle Ages, in the bitter *galus*, this song helped give people perspective...and appreciate the good things to be thankful for.

**Rav Soloveitchik** noted that before Hashem revealed to Moshe the "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy," He made a puzzling statement וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת-כַּפֵּי נִרְאִיתָ אֶת-אַחֲרַי וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרָאוּ (שמות ל"ג:כג): *You shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.*"

What does this mean? Rav Soloveitchik answers: When we are surrounded by love and warmth, when life is good and we are happy, at that time we don't always see God's "face." At such a time, for a variety of reasons, we do not always "face up" to our blessings; appreciate them and value them.

Only later, after God's presence has passed, after the *middos ha-rachamim* are gone, only then do we see God's "back." Only then do we begin to understand how lucky we were -- and are no more; how precious our experience was — but now it is gone. Now, perhaps too late, we learn to cherish and admire what we should have acknowledged earlier. It is only in retrospect, after the good times, so to speak, are gone, that they will be cherished and longed for. What healthy person appreciates his limbs — until, Heaven forbid, they are threatened with paralysis or amputation? Who is thankful for his heart until it starts to give him trouble? Who thinks about his lungs until his breathing becomes difficult?

And who truly appreciates loved ones when they are still with us?

That is what Pesach is all about. Stopping and appreciating God... our loved ones... our precious time on this earth... all the blessings we have...our special relationship with Hashem...our history and our destiny...

And although we hope and yearn for לשנה הבאה בארעה דישראל, we can still be thankful NOW for all our blessings...knowing that Hashem is holding our hands as we journey through life כי קרוב הוא, because of our close relationship with Him.

Let us remember that life does not last forever, that those we have with us now will not remain with us indefinitely. Let us cherish them now. Appreciate and enjoy the present, and be grateful for what we have. Many times our lives resemble the Jewish people's circuitous journey when they left Mitzrayim—it is not clear how the pieces fit together. But *yetzias Mitzrayim* gave us the understanding and faith that קרוב הוא, Hashem is close to us, and guiding us every step of the way on the path meant for us. May we internalize this lesson and may this circuitous route of 2,000 years of *galus* soon come to an end with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash *bimhera vityamenu*...amen.