

Parshat Beshalach 5779

וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרָכָה בְּשַׁלַּח, וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרָכָה בְּשַׁלַּח This week's Parsha starts with the phrase 'וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרָכָה בְּשַׁלַּח', 'And it was when Paroh sent the people'. Famously, there is a view in Chazal which states that when a Parsha is introduced with the word 'וַיְהִי', it indicates that something bad is going to happen. The obvious question, therefore, is what negative element happens in this parsha? Within this paragraph in the Chumash it simply describes the route on which Hashem took the Jews and how Hashem travelled, so-to-speak, in front of the Jews with a cloud and fire?

The Sefer Shemen HaTov, of Rav Dov Zev Weinberger zt"l (a Rav in Brooklyn who was niftar last year) suggests that the negative idea in this parsha arises from the phrase 'וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרָכָה בְּשַׁלַּח' 'And it was when Paroh sent the people' itself. Given all the miracles which occurred in Egypt, we would expect the release of the Jews from Egypt to be attributed to Hashem, rather than Paroh as the Passuk describes. However, Rav Weinberger explains the Passuk attributes this to Paroh to reflect the fact that some of the Jews still perceived that it was Paroh who sent them out of Egypt as he was the one who ordered their release, rather than appreciating that it was Hashem who orchestrated all the events leading up to their release and Who ultimately ensured that they left Egypt. It is this incorrect perception which the Passuk is bemoaning with the word וַיְהִי.

Perhaps as a consequence of this attitude, Hashem then arranged for Paroh to change his mind and to pursue the Jews, requiring the miracles at the Yam Suf, which made it clear to the Jews that their freedom was not due to Paroh's decree but rather due to yad Hashem. The Passuk therefore emphasizes that at the Yam Suf 'וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח אֱלֹהִים אֶת-בְּרָכָה בְּשַׁלַּח', that the Jews fully appreciated that it was the hand of Hashem giving them their freedom, leading to them singing the beautiful song of וַיְשִׁיר אֶזְרָא in thanks to Hashem.

Rav Weinberger extends this idea and says that throughout Jewish history, it can appear that the Jews' salvation has come at the hand of fellow human

beings. For example, he says, the state of Israel was formed because of a decree by the United Nations. However, we need to remember that 'מִלְּךְ לֵב', the heart of a King is in the hand of Hashem and that though we must indeed be grateful to those who come to our aid, we must remember that in reality our salvation comes from Hashem.

בְּמִצְרַיִם קָבְרִים אֵינָם הָמְבֹלֵי When the Egyptians were chasing the Jews, the Jews turn to Moshe and complain about the fact that he took them out from Egypt – 'was it for lack of graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert, what did you do to us taking us out of Egypt?' This is the first of several examples through Chumash where the Jews make a significant complaint to Moshe and this despite them having just seen all the miracles Hashem did in taking them out of Egypt. Yet we do not see Hashem or Moshe being critical of the Jews for this complaint as we see on other occasions. Why was this?

Based on Rav Yitzchak Yehuda Trunk of Kutner in his sefer Mikra Mefurash, Rav Goldsmith explains as follows. Throughout their years of slavery we do not hear of the Jews complaining (except for one occasion when they have brief respite when the King of Egypt dies) as they were so downtrodden that they didn't have an awareness of anything other than slavery; they had no personal goals or aspirations or a hope for a better life. Moshe then delivered a message of hope for freedom and individual and national accomplishments in the service of Hashem. The Jews then started to see freedom, doing Mitzvos, living lives of meaning and purpose and striving for more. Then suddenly it appeared that these hopes and dreams were to be quashed when the Egyptians gave chase so the Jews felt a sense of despair when this sense of freedom appeared to have been short lived; and say it would have been preferable to die without having ever had this glimpse of what a free life could be like and they would not have even thought of having complained. Thus, the very ability of the Jews to complain in this scenario was an expression of the freedom they had so recently acquired which had granted them hopes and aspirations; and they were not to be blamed for that. *Based on Divrei Torah by Rabbi Goldsmith of Shaalvim Sem*