

## Parshat Shevii Shel Pesach 5778

The poignancy and significance of shevii shel Pesach can easily be overlooked. It is the only Yom Tov where we have no beracha shechechyanu; we do not say full Hallel; and it falls in the course of a process (the Omer) rather than being a fully fledged destination of its own. And when it is compared to the power and impact of the seder night at the beginning of Pesach, it tends to be given less emphasis in our sensitivities.

### Are we ready?

R' Tzaddok HaCohen (in Pri Tzaddik) comments on the final lines of Avodim Hayinu: "Even if we were all wise..., it is still a mitzvah to relate the story of the Exodus from Egypt." He explains the intent of the Haggadah is not just to recount the story. Rather, the point is that one is obliged to tell the story in such a way that he himself feels, and makes others feel that they are indeed in the process of leaving Egypt *and getting ready to go through the Sea*. One must feel the joy and the freedom in his soul as if he is really leaving Egypt for good.

The thought of preparing ourselves for the second stage – the passage through the sea – is sometimes given less focus at the time we are reciting the hagaddah. Yet freedom alone can lead to anarchy. It is the channelling of this freedom to developing our emuna, to becoming worthy recipients of Hashem's Torah and serving with bitochan as His people, which provides us with direction.

### Yetzer hara symbolism

The idea that matzah symbolizes the yetzer tov and chametz the yetzer hara is brought down widely. When one searches for the chametz on erev Pesach, one is rooting out the yetzer hara. Connecting that idea to shevii shel Pesach, some conclude that the seventh day of Pesach should be the culmination of rooting out the chametz totally. "For a whole week, I have been chametz-free, I am trying to get rid of the yetzer hara. My avodah of getting rid of the yetzer hara reaches its peak on the seventh day of Pesach".

The Sfas Emes brings a midrash that the seventh day of Pesach is like the 'Shabbos of Pesach'. What does that mean? He explains that just like shabbos is the tachlis, the goal and the culmination of the six days of the week; so too, the seventh day of Pesach is the culmination and the goal of the other six days of Pesach. Just like one works and prepares for shabbos during the six days of the week, so too one has to work and prepare for the seventh day of Pesach on the previous six days of Pesach. In this way, then just as the celebration of Krias Yam Suf we can relate to our becoming totally free as a nation physically; on the spiritual level we can relate to becoming totally free from the yetzer hara. This is the avodah of the seventh day of Pesach.

### Kriat Yam Suf

Shevii shel Pesach is the day of the splitting of the sea, the destruction of the Egyptians and the singing of the shira. Why is this not an independent Yom Tov? The meforshim explain the miracle is considered the culmination of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Pesach is the yom tov which celebrates Yetzias Mitzrayim, and Yetzias Mitzrayim was not complete until Kriat Yam Suf. Rabbi Michael Rosensweig adds the miracle itself was transcended by its impact on our emunah and yirat Hashem. The shirah it engendered has emotional and intellectual teachings that are with us for all time.

### Three stages

The events of the day can be subdivided into sections. First the splitting of the sea and the escape of Bnei Yisrael; next the destruction of the Egyptians; and finally the shirat hayam.

There is a chazal which explains the departure from Egypt at the beginning of Pesach as an act of pure rachamim by Hashem. We had few merits to deserve it. But by krait Yam Suf, a new situation had arisen. We needed to merit this new miracle. So Nachshon ben Aminodov had to enter the sea until it reached his head and only then did it split. The newly freed nation had to learn that Divine hashgocha is all embracing – but to merit His favourable intervention, we have a duty to do all

we can to deserve it. Our bitachon in Hashem should be unconditional and unreserved; but we need to know, and do, what Hashem expects of us.

The drowning of the Egyptians was the fulfilment of Hashem's promise to Moshe that "I will be glorified through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know I am Hashem". The overthrow of the most powerful nation in the world was an everlasting reminder to the entire world of the omnipotence of the Almighty.

## The shira

The spontaneous expression of joy gave rise to the observation this was the first time in history that man had sung shira of praise to Hashem. The power of song to bring out emotion and the power of emotion to bring a people to burst into song was overwhelming.

But beside the pure joy, the words of the shira have so much to teach, a long detailed study is justified. To select some phrases we see examples of the depths of meanings in the shira.

Take the well-known source-text for hiddur mitzvah: "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him (Zeh Keli v'Anveyhu); the G-d of my fathers and I will exalt him." In the Haggadah we read of the many more miracles by the sea compared with those in Egypt. (Bartenura lists 10; if you look in Ma'am Loez you will find 50 set out and explained). Rabbi Yissocher Frand asks: "Were they all vital? Would not Klal Yisrael have been satisfied with the "mere" splitting of the sea (no bone-dry sea bed, or no tent of protective water over their heads)? Why did G-d add all these flourishes to the basic miracle? He answers that they were basically a form of "hidur mitzvah". "When I do something for My Nation, I want it to be first class! I do not want to just get by" These extra miracles showed us how much He loved us. So it is profoundly logical for this possuk to be the source from which we learn that when you do a mitzvah, you do that bit extra to make it beautiful. When we buy someone a present, we accentuate our feelings with a beautiful box and smart wrapping paper. We want it to be as nice as possible. These extra flourishes are to demonstrate how much we love the recipient. Correspondingly, each Hiddur Mitzvah is intended to

show Hashem how much we love Him. So a choice esrog; the select tefillin; and (dare it be said?) when interacting with Hashem's creatures, being the best ambassador of Hashem we can be. It is because that is how the Ribono shel Olam treated us.

The double expression "mi camoicha..." ends with the phrase "Nora tehilot osei feleh". Rav Munk explains there is a sense in which Hashem is too awesome to praise. As Hashem created and supervises everything, what possible benefit can we give Him by expressing His praises? Anything we say would be woefully inadequate. Yet this is one of the sources from which we learn of the need to utter tefillot and pray to Hashem. It is for our benefit, as a constant reminder of Hashem's graciousness to us every day, that we have the need to make that connection through our daily davening.

Even that most prosaic of words "Laimor" has something to teach. It doesn't simply mean "saying"; it connotes that the words are to be repeated (or "said over"). Rav Munk expands on this. Whenever in the future you are rescued from distress, attribute your victory to Hashem, rather than your own strength. Offer Him this song of triumph. This is why the shira is a part of our daily tefilla. Everywhere, in the Holy Land or in exile, as well as for all time; Israel's very existence is a continuous miracle. So every single day Israel has a thousand reasons to sing this song of salvation.