

## Pesach Days 7 and 8

The leining for the seventh day of Pesach comes from parshas Beshalach and recounts the episode, of the Bnai Yisroel reaching and crossing the Yam Suf. The Torah in Chapter 14:9 dramatically records the scene where the Egyptians are chasing Bnai Yisroel and they see the Jews in the distance, encamped by the sea. Bnai Yisroel turn around and see the Egyptians coming towards them from behind and the expanse of the sea in front of them, and they feel trapped.

The medrash gives a moshal of a small bird which is being chased by an eagle, so it swoops down and finds a small crack in a rock which the eagle would be too big to enter. He enters the little crack and the big eagle can only watch from outside. As the little bird breathes a sigh of relief that it has escaped the clutches of the eagle, he turns to see a big snake waiting for him inside the rock.

Bnai Yisroel's response is to cry out to Hashem. It is left to Rashi to tell us that their cry was one of prayer – "Tofsu Umnos Avosov", literally they grabbed the craft of their forefathers, of Avraham Yitzchok and Yaakov who prayed at various times when they needed help.

The traditional explanation of this Rashi that we are brought up with praises Bnai Yisroel for strengthening their commitment to tefilo at this difficult time and understands that although the concept of prayer was known prior to this point, there is nothing like adversity to renew ones commitment to davening.

However, the Rav Bartenura and later the Maharal ask an obvious question that makes them rethink this position.

The pesukim immediately following tell of Bnai Yisroel complaining to Moshe, saying that he should have left them in Egypt rather than bring them out to the desert to die.

This reaction does not seem to come from a group of people who have just strengthened their Emunoh through prayer. How can it be that they went from tefilo to complaining in such a short space of time.

The Maharal therefore explains that when Rashi says "Tofsu Umnos Avosov" it does not mean that they undertook meaningful prayer, but rather they knew that when trouble had occurred in earlier generations, the Avos took to prayer, so they thought that if they offered up a quick tefilo, everything would be alright.

But not surprisingly, just saying the words is not enough; and that left them complaining. If they would have offered meaningful prayer, perhaps they wouldn't have needed to moan to Moshe.

It is then Moshe's job to turn around to them and say that they need not fear as they will see how Hashem will save them if they really put their trust in Him.

The very quick lesson that they learned was that just doing tefilo by rote, because that's what our forefathers did, will not be effective.

When religion is important to us 24/7 365 days of the year, maintaining commitment to and excitement for mitzvos on the one hand and not doing them by rote is a challenge that we face often. On the other hand, not everything about our religion is exciting – sometimes we just have to get on and do the mundane stuff. If we always wait for the exciting parts, we will miss out many essentials.

Rav Bernstein o'h would often say that every yom tov maftir which tells us of the special korban of the day, finishes off "al olas hatomid" – the special yom tov korban did not replace the tomid; it was offered in addition to the korman tomid which was sacrificed twice daily, every day of the year. His message was, don't only get excited by the yomim tovim and exciting and unusual things of yidishkeit, there is also "al olas hatomid" – don't forget that there is also a mundane side which means that there are obligations to do every day that are less exciting, but we have to renew our commitment to them also, so that they don't become activities by rote.

This perhaps is most poignantly felt on last days Pesach. It is the only yom tov where there is nothing out of the ordinary. There is no seder, no all night learning, no extraordinarily long shul and no sitting in the sukkah. Its just yom tov, at a time of year when the nights and days are equal and so there are no extremes of bringing it in very early or very late. But it is this simplicity that gives this yom tov its beauty; a unique balance of a special yom tov with no special activities - more mundane but never by rote.

Written by Geoffrey Hollander, based on divrei torah given by R Sholom Rosner and R Isaac Bernstein.

