

The Ride Home

Shvi'i Shel Pesach - 5783

You may be aware that Baylor, Scott and White Medical Center, right here in Dallas, features the first program in the world that offers uterine transplants outside of a clinical trial. This program has the potential to change the lives of women experiencing absolute uterine factor infertility, and indeed, it already has- including from our broader community. Since the program's inception, four from women have been able to conceive and give birth to children, in one case after more than 20 years of marriage. These women have come from all over the world to benefit from this program, and of course, Bikur Cholim has taken care of their needs with class and compassion. When one of these women delivered her child, it was a communal simcha. What a privilege it was for us to be a part of such a miracle! The Bikur Cholim whatsapp group buzzed with messages asking who would give rides to the overjoyed family members, who could deliver food to the hospital- all answered within minutes. And then, another message went out. It was finally time for the baby to be released from the hospital; who would like to transport the mother and baby to where they were staying? I thought to myself, what a *zechus* it would be to volunteer for that. Aside from the act of *chessed* itself, I could tell everyone that I was the driver for the miracle baby! And then I thought for a second time. "Are you

insane? Can you imagine the kind of pressure resting on this car ride? This woman has been waiting for 20 years to have a child- what if, God forbid, something happens on the way back from the hospital? What if I say something stupid or insensitive? I can't do it."

I think you would all be shocked if I told you that we all make a significant error in the way we talk about *yetziat mitzraim*. And by "we all," I don't just mean you and me- I mean our sages as well. In the Haggadah, we say it would have been enough if God had קרע לנו את הים. Our sages tell us that matchmaking is an endeavor as arduous and difficult as קריעת ים סוף. How would you translate these terms? Most of us would say it means to "split the sea"- but that's wrong. The term we use to indicate that the sea *split* actually means that the sea *tore*. In fact, the Torah itself uses a different term, describing how the waters were ויבקעו - the waters were cleaved. That means "to split." Why do we use terminology that is evidently inaccurate?

Our sages tell us that whenever anyone attributes a Torah thought, a pithy saying, an insight or anything at all to its correct source, redemption is brought to the world. In a world sorely in need of redemption, I thank Rabbi Eli Pearlman of DATA who directed my attention to a remarkable comment of Rabbeinu Bachya.

Whenever we think of the parting of the sea, we envision Moshe lifting up his staff, and then the sea split all the way through the moment Nachshon ben Aminadav

entered. The Jewish people then crossed to safety on a dry sea bed, walls of water on each side of them and the roiling waters closing behind them over the hapless Egyptians. That's the way it's depicted in most illustrated Haggadot. Rabbeinu Bachya suggested that it actually looked quite different. The Jewish people entered the water, which was draped over them "like a roof." Instead of splitting all the way through, it split bit by bit with every step they took, the water surrounding them to their right and left, and above them, too. They could never see through to the other side. Think of a zipper, each set of teeth opening as the slider separates them. The Torah described the end result when it says the waters split, but the process was one of tearing.

Now, this sounds like a simple and slightly pedantic linguistics lesson, but I believe that Rabbeinu Bachya's explanation contains an important life lesson for us as well: **there is no stage in life, no event, that is the solution to our challenges**, the clear path to the other side. In 2019, Saturday Night Live did a sketch featuring Adam Sandler as the operator of a tour company specializing in tours in Italy, for Italian Americans. It was one of the funniest, and most insightful sketches they've done in years¹:

Every so often people leave us a review that they were disappointed or didn't have as much fun as they thought. We always remind our customers, if you're sad now, you

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbwIC2B-Blg>

might still feel sad there, OK? Do you understand? That makes sense? Our tours will take you to the most beautiful places on earth. Hike to cliffs off the Amalfu coast, fish with the nets in Sorrento...you're still going to be you on vacation. If you are sad where you are, and then you get on a plane to Italy, the you in Italy will still be the same sad you from before, just in a new place. Does that make sense? There's a lot a vacation can do. Help you unwind, see some different looking squirrels, but it cannot fix deeper issues like how you behave in group settings or your general baseline mood. Taht's a hob for incremental lifestyle changes sustained over time. And please, if you and your partner are having trouble connecting, we guarantee our tour will not help. If you won't want to touch each other at home, be reminded, in Italy you'll have those same feelings and thoughts.

Maybe that's why our sages used the terminology of קריעת ים סוף to describe marriage. Ask anyone who married after a lengthy singlehood (like me) or has been dating for a long time, and they will tell you that there were many times when they felt that all their problems would be solved by marrying. Of course, that is nonsense. Life begins *anew* under the Chuppah, and a life together contains constant challenges, evolution and opportunities for growth. Those who have taken the wonderful step to make aliyah have found it to be rewarding and fulfilling; it is a blessing to live in the place where we belong, where the Jewish future is unfolding and where we will all, *Be'ezrat Hashem*, end up. But even the most *farbrente olim*, the ones who rhapsodize about how every second of their lives is

now imbued with sanctity and purpose and how their lives are constantly amazing, will admit that aliyah did not cause major challenges in their lives to evaporate. They have either remained, or have been replaced with new ones. If you change jobs, if you move houses, if you move schools- none of these moves will be the panacea that solves all of life's problems immediately, the clear path through tempestuous waters.

Think about the journey that the new mother endured before her successful uterine transplant. A complicated, heartbreaking journey fraught with frustration, tears and hopelessness- not to mention the unimaginable expenses of costly fertility treatments, travel and hospitalizations. How difficult it must have been to endure the thoughtless comments of well-meaning loved ones, the lifecycle events of family members and friends, the Yamim Tovim centered on family when she desperately yearned for one of her own. No doubt that she turned to God countless times and thought that if only she would conceive, if only she could have a baby, all her troubles would be over. But Hakadosh Baruch Hu does not split the sea for us all at once; the journey of *emunah* is not one in which we take a leap of faith, and then miraculously see all the way to the other side. With this mother and her wondrous baby, I was focused on a 20 minute car ride home, and that's why I

ultimately and regrettably did not answer the call. Her journey until now focused on conceiving, and then delivering the baby, but of course, that was just the beginning- now she actually has to raise this child. Our life is a constant process of קריעת ים סוף - a process that is always unfolding, whose end is not known to us.

But the converse is true as well. Trauma therapists speak about the difference between acute trauma, brought about as a result of one traumatic event, and complex trauma, brought about over a period of time, almost imperceptibly, due to a constellation of factors. If trauma can develop gradually, healing can too. This is the message of קריעת ים סוף. Many of us are facing daunting things after Pesach- professional challenges, personal issues, communal matters- and if we look at all we have to deal with and think we have to solve every challenge completely and immediately, and do it all at once, it will be overwhelming. If life is beset by constant challenges, and if we can't see all the way through to the end, it means that *we don't need to*. We just need to take the first step, facing today's problem, today. No doubt this new mother is elated, of course- but when she thinks about all that lies ahead, she may feel overwhelmed. But for this miracle child- and any child, because every child is really a miracle- a lifetime of Torah and mitzvos, a lifetime of connection with Hashem and with people- it all begins with a ride home.

On today, the day of *emunah*, let us learn the lesson of the *tearing* of the sea. While the road before us is never clear, and the path is never illuminated, if we take the first step, and then the second, we will reach the other side.