

Shiur L'Yom Sh'lishi¹

[Tuesday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Beshelach:** Exodus 14:5-18
 Haftarah: Judges 4:6-11
 B'rit Chadasha: John 6:31-33

Stand firm, and you will see YESHUAT ADONAI

[Exodus 14:13]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 78:5-8;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus: Petition 13, *Retzeh - the Petition for Intimate Relationship*

Vayugad l'melech Mitzrayim ki varach ha-am – Then it was reported to the king of Egypt that the people had **barach-ed** – i.e. broken away; separated; transcended; fled Exodus 14:5a.

The night Egypt's firstborn died Pharaoh did not let the Hebrews go; he ordered them out! His decree was crystal clear: ***get out ... go ... Take both your flocks and your herds ... and be gone***. This was not, however, the way Pharaoh wanted the narrative spun to public. So, Pharaoh put his propaganda outlets to work. They invented a story so ridiculous that it seemed like it had to be true . They made up a false narrative of a great *insurrection*. They circulated a report that in excess 600,000 Hebrew *extremists*, in collaboration with hotheads from Egypt's other slave populations, had attempted a violent coup - then slithered off into the desert, where they were surely planning something even worse. Torah tells us:

Vayugad l'melech Mitzrayim ki varach ha-am

Then it was reported to the king of Egypt that the people had barach-ed..

V'yehafeich levav Pharaoh v'avadav el-ha-am

So Pharaoh and his officials reversed their position in regard to the people

V'yomru mah-zot asinu ki-shilachnu et-Yisra'el me'ovdeinu

and said, 'What have we done? We have released Israel from doing our work'

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as *fled* in the above verse is *barach*². The primary picture presented by this word is of someone *breaking through*, or *passing through*, a *barrier*³ - especially in a militant way, as part of an *insurrection*. The report was, thus, that the slaves were deplorable and

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² This Hebrew verb is pronounced *baw-rakh'*. It is Strong's Hebrew word #1272.

³ See Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament.

dangerous men who violently broke through barriers, committed crimes, and wrought havoc. Everyone in the palace knew better, of course. They all knew that Pharaoh had expelled the Hebrews – because they had been right there, encouraging him to do so, and nodding in agreement as he did. But if the political base wanted to think in terms of ‘escape’, that little rewriting of history would work just fine.

***Truth Is Elusive At Best – And Easily Obscured
or Spun Into Oblivion; Those Who Think They Pursue It
Are Usually the First – and Worst - Deceived***

This false narrative of what had happened ago to the Hebrews constituted revisionist history at its earliest. Conveniently forgotten were the details of the 10 devastating plagues brought about by the Holy One due to Pharaoh’s cruelty, deception, and stubbornness. It was not, of course, politically correct to talk about such things. So, the Egyptian wise men who wanted to keep Pharaoh happy - and their jobs intact - invented the concept of *spin*⁴.

While the truth was exactly 180 degrees opposite from the official report that was being circulated, for political purposes a good emotionally charged lie is always so much more useful than the truth.

Truth ... Or Consequences

Pharaoh knew exactly what had happened, of course. He had been up front and center in the story as it unfolded. He was fully aware what had really brought about the departure of mass departure of humanity from his country. He also knew exactly whose wrongdoing was responsible for the fiasco. He knew that the reason the refugees left his country was that he had ordered them to go. Not in a million years could he have foreseen what happened next. He had never dreamed that - without even being asked, hundreds of thousands of other expatriates, able workers all, would decide to cast their lot with the seed of Yisrael and their God and leave Egypt with the Hebrews. Pharaoh and his advisors apparently never realized how many people would abandon the ‘Egyptian Dream’ and take their chances in the wilderness. This is the part of the Divine Plan of Redemption and Restoration that the principalities of this world never see coming. This is the mystery of the Holy One’s endgame; it is what stings this world’s tyrants the most. Now he has to do ‘damage control’ – so, he calls his sorcerers and spin-masters into his war room, doubles down on

⁴ To *spin*, of course, in this context means to rapidly turn whatever the truth is 180 degrees so it appears to lie in the opposite direction.

the counsel of the ungodly, takes yet another stand in the way of sinners, and sinks down once and for all into the false comfort of the seat of the scornful.

Heaven helps the common people of Egypt. They had no grid through which to understand what just happened in their midst – and Pharaoh’s occultic advisors were intent on making sure they would never find out the truth. The spin machines of the palace started working overtime. They manufactured misinformation, spread disinformation, designed ‘bullet points’, and spewed propaganda. All the usual cover-up techniques – ‘fake’ news, fearmongering, race-baiting, class envy provoking, outrage promoting, conspiracy-theory spreading, hatemongering, blame-throwing, anti-Semitic ranting, history rewriting, violence inciting – were fair game. All blame had to be taken off of Pharaoh, off of the advisors, and off the magicians and priests of Egypt’s official state religion, and put onto ... *well, who do you think?* The *Hebrews*, of course.

Sure Warning Signs that a Nation or Culture is Imploding

Every time a nation is about to implode, it seems, a large section of the populace surrenders their national cohesiveness, their shared goals, and the whole idea of the *common good* in exchange for an ego-building *season of intense partisanship*. Socialization and Citizenship filters fail. Race-baiting and class-envy-inciting demagogues are suddenly afforded credibility again – which they gleefully use to stir the witches cauldron of simmering discontent always present in any society into a rolling boil. Unclean spirits run wild throughout the land. The vilest of perversions are normalized; old virtues demonized. Vain imaginations are allowed to displace rational thought. Old offenses are rehashed. Old wounds are re-opened. Old prejudices are re-ignited. Political discourse turns toxic. Respect and common decency are discarded. Ranting, fearmongering, revenge-mongering, virtue-signaling, and culture-cancelling become the order of the day. Scandalously slanderous accusations are leveled. Derogatory labels are thrown. Jaws are set; fists are clenched. *Ad hominem* attacks proliferate. Hate crimes increase exponentially. Scapegoats – falsely-labeled ‘people of privilege’ – are selected for slaughter. Anti-social behavior spikes. Profanity, lewdness, sexual perversion, trespasses, vandalism, criminal mischief, wanton acts of destruction, looting, and violence are all lauded as instrumentalities ‘social justice’. Generalizations are made. Vile, wildly over-simplistic slogans are chanted. Sabers are rattled. Ultimatums are issued. Lines are drawn in the sand. The streets fill up with the angry, the curious, and the criminal. Stones are cast. Bricks fly. Monuments topple. Boundaries are breached. Glass is broken. Fires light up the night. Victims are

targeted, taunted, and tortured. Innocent blood runs in the streets like water. The stench of death fills the air. Hyenas howl. Vultures circle. The newly widowed, orphaned, maimed, disabled, and bankrupt tremble in terror and their grief is mocked – while the perpetrators of the violent actions that wreaked havoc on their lives are hailed as ‘mostly-peaceful protesters’, ‘freedom fighters’, and heroes of ‘social justice’.

In such seasons education becomes indoctrination; accepted protocols of traditional science are disregarded, and self-proclaimed scientists sell their services, their pens, their tongues, and their souls to the highest ideological, governmental, or genocidal bidder; medicine becomes a means of manipulation; art degenerates into profanity; censorship becomes the ultimate virtue; chaos becomes the ‘new normal’; and ‘justice’ becomes just another rallying cry of vandals, looters, and murderers. In such a season, the line that separates truth from fiction does not just blur – it ceases to matter. Truth becomes whatever the loudest, most vile and violent, offended elites and paranoid narcissists in society decide to say it is. In such a season, the spiritual hunger in a man for wisdom, revelation, and inspiration from Heaven is replaced by obsession with polling data, propaganda, and pseudo-information from human sources. In such a season, emotion, opinion, and attitude take on god-like pre-eminence. In such a season, everyone and his neighbor suddenly has, and insists on publicly expressing, an opinion; everybody and his dog suddenly has, and feels compelled to air, a grievance; and everybody and the horse he rode in on suddenly has to spread a tidbit of gossip, repeat and add to an accusation, wallow in the contagion of outrage, and decree a vehement condemnation. Welcome to the *season of partisan, emotionally charged reports!* Gird up your loins – such seasons are not pretty ... and never, ever turn out well for anyone concerned.

Welcome to the World’s First – and Prototypical – Dystopian Nightmare

Egypt has just experienced a Divinely-orchestrated ‘*Hebrew Spring*’ – and Egypt’s power brokers and elites are not happy. Neither their money, their political prowess, their propaganda machines, nor their occult spells had an answer for the staff of the crude-talking shepherd the Holy One sent among them. Their bought-and-paid-for politicians have been embarrassed. Their self-serving institutional thinking has been exposed for the folly it is. Their financial empires are crumbling and their fortunes are evaporating before their eyes. Narcissists one and all, they are raging against the loss of power, prestige, and control. They rally. They regroup. They conspire. They come up

with a plan. They realize that, with all the changes wrought recently in Egypt, the emotions of the populace are raw and ripe for manipulation. So, they send instigators, agitators, and race-baiters into the fray. They enlist brainwashed ideologues to sew hate-filled, hyper-judgmental rhetoric about the Hebrews everywhere they go. They feed their mouth-pieces bullet points of ‘new speak’. Some are blaming all the current woes on climate change; others are insisting it is the work of the Great Satan and his spawn. Some are demanding that the swamp be drained; others are insisting it should be expanded. Some are even saying that Pharaoh was complicit and are demanding he be impeached. But the main thrust is to spread blood libels against the Hebrews. The main goal is to unite the populace against a common enemy – those dastardly ‘Jewish dogs’. Actors, entertainers, and athletes are more than willing to launch profane rants on cue. Thugs and murderers are always willing to hire out to march in the streets, chant vile, racist, and profane slogans, stop and propagandize traffic, terrorize pedestrians, passers-by, and looky-loos, break windows, start fires, vandalize buildings, loot shops, foment riots, and set up enclaves of gang-controlled lawlessness. Haters are always looking for someone they can *hate*. Race-baiters are always looking for ignorant, excitable crowds to *race-bait*. Class envy inciters are always looking for an excuse to rant about how the haves are taking advantage of the have nots. Social justice demagogues are always going to demand investigations, governmental hearings, solicit heavily biased if not blatantly false testimony, and make findings of who is to blame. Self-righteous vigilantes are always insisting someone has to pay. Gossips are always happy to gossip. Hypocrites are always looking to split hairs, apply double standards, and spew mock-outrage they hope will cover up their hypocrisy. So, all Egypt’s elite had to do was stir these rabid ‘social justice’ groups up ... and turn them *loose!* All they had to do was activate the nuclear option; initiate the final solution; and cue the battle hymn for the dystopian death-march.

And so it came to pass that paranoia and perversion, hysteria and hype, misinformation and disinformation, were caused to spread over Egypt like the Nile at flood stage. Meanwhile, the truth about what happened has gotten completely lost in the sound and the fury. Who knows what really happened? And for that matter, who cares? The key principles of politics, ideology, and religion are: “*Perception trumps reality*”, and “*Never, under any circumstances, let a good crisis go to waste!*”

So, Pharaoh and his minions are not giving up yet. No, not by a long shot. They have one last play – a massive, dystopian counter-intelligence offensive –

up their sleeve.

How About a Little ‘Wag-the-Dog’ Distraction

Pharaoh had a *wag-the-dog* plan⁵ ready to launch – he just needed confirmation that the people on the street were buying the lies the spin-masters had thrown out. Focus groups were formed and fed a generous supply of inflammatory rumors - all calculated to send shockwaves of outrage, fear, and jealousy through the populace. Then one day the hoped-for confirmation came: ***Vayugad l'melech Mitzrayim ki varach ha-am*** – *Then it was reported to the king of Egypt that the people had escaped/fled/separated themselves Exodus 14:5a.*

Finally the buzz on the street was that “the slaves ESCAPED!” The disinformation strategy had worked like a charm. History had effectively been rewritten. Pharaoh’s role in this debacle had been effectively purged from the collective consciousness. An artificial reality construct had been accepted in place of the truth. Now for the *piece-de-resistance*. Sharpen the arrows. Polish the spearheads. Pull out the shining armor, and put it on the horses. Assemble the charioteers, and inspire them with visions of glory. Form a parade of Egypt’s finest chariots, with Pharaoh, in all his regalia, standing tall at the head of the brigade. A little chariot ride for genocide could be just the ticket! ‘Tail’ - go forth and ‘wag’ your ‘dog’!

Meanwhile, A Few Kilometers Away In a Nearby Desert ...!

Meanwhile, in a wilderness not far away, the Hebrews and the mixed multitude of men from all nations and ethnicities that accompanied them out of Egypt are oblivious to Pharaoh’s schemes. They are busy just trying to wrap their minds around the concept of ‘freedom’. This is the first time in our lives that we have not woken up to the sound of one of Pharaoh’s taskmasters cracking his whip and barking orders. Please forgive us if we stare at everything we encounter like kids who just walked into their first candy store! The concept is still gloriously new to us. We are the rankest of novices at the strange and wonderful art. Innocent babes in ‘liberty woods’ – that is what we are! Wherever we go is someplace we have never been. We have only just begun to explore what it means – and does not mean – to walk out our newfound ‘freedom’ in a *meaningful way in real time*. The *dream* of freedom is one thing; but the *day-to-day experience* of it is ...! well, it is proving to be

⁵ ‘Wag the dog’ is a contemporary metaphor for a contrived, focus-shifting military action. The ‘dog’ of the metaphor is media attention [because the media controls opinion of the common man]; the ‘tail’ which wags the ‘dog’ of media in the direction the manipulators in power desire is usually a showy, patriotism-provoking military offensive against an enemy that has been created by a disinformation, fear-mongering campaign.

something else entirely. We are quickly discovering that the freedom that has been wrought for us is neither *nirvana* nor *utopia*. The freedom the strong Right Hand of the Holy One has purchased for us is no 'free ride'. There is no government assistance program available here. There is no army to make us feel safe and protected from the threats we imagine waiting for us behind every hill and hoodoo of the desert scape. There is no shelter from either the heat of the raging sun in the day or from the bitter cold at night. There is no place to hide from sandstorms or, for that matter, sand fleas. Life goes on. The world keeps spinning. The sun keeps shining. The wind keeps blowing. Bugs keep biting. Jackals keep howling. Vultures keep circling. Stomachs keep growling when they want food. Throats keep getting thirsty. The complainers among us keep complaining. The cynics and critics among us keep spouting negativity. The control freaks among us – and in us - still use every trick in the book to manipulate everybody and everything around them. Bodies still get tired. Muscles still get sore. Fleshly appetites, urges, desires, and lusts still demand an inordinate amount of time and attention. Attitudes and armpits still emit foul odors. Human mouths around us still spout sickening streams of nonsense, ignorance, complaint, sarcasm, cynicism, blame, accusation, gossip, and profanity. Petty offenses and pet peeves still rise up and want petting. And haters? Well, you guessed it! Haters gonna hate.

Freedom Does Not Mean That Others Hate Us Less

If we thought getting out of Egypt meant we would never again have to be on the receiving end of angry stares and shouts from men who blame 'our kind' for whatever they don't like about the world, we were naïve. If we thought freedom from bondage meant we would no longer be the object of mankind's darkest dreams of genocide, we were mistaken. If we thought our children, wives and very lives had been threatened by Egyptian chariots, soldiers, and Pharaohs for the last time, well ...l we are in for an unpleasant surprise. Back in Egypt, you see, hard times have really come home to roost. Food is scarce, and Egyptians used to the high life are having to go into the slime pits and store cities and do the hard work we Hebrews – and the mixed multitude that chose to leave Egypt with us - used to do for them. The people of Egypt are not happy, and they are looking around for somebody to blame. All the propaganda producers have collaborated to point the finger at us. Someone has to pay, and the demagogues in Pharaoh's court know that we are the *perfect scapegoat*. *C'est la vie* – that is life. The rhetoric is ratcheting up. And the prevailing sentiment is: "*Kill the Beast!*" And unfortunately, *for purposes of this little drama, the role of 'the Beast' will be played by ...l you guessed it – anyone who is, looks like, or dares associate with, a Hebrew!*

Mah Zot Asinu?

Mah zot asinu? [i.e. *What have we done/wrought?*] These words begin on the lips of Pharaoh and his servants – and will soon end up on the lips of almost everyone in the Camp of the Redeemed. The first critical challenge of newfound freedom is about to present itself. The question about to be thrown forcefully on the Kingdom Roundtable table is this: considering the price that has to be paid and the wrath that has to be endured from those we leave behind - *'is being free really worth the cost?'* Oh, yes, Dear Ones. Freedom is worth all that. And even when freedom is, at least arguably, not worth it, being with the Holy One our God, and being who He created us to be, and doing what He created us to do, most definitely is!

If we are truly to be free from the people who once held us in bondage – whether the bonds by which they held us were forged by force or familiarity - our *heart must ache for freedom to be with and do the will of the Holy One* more than it aches for comfort, safety, or even self-preservation. If we are to remain free after we have been delivered from a co-dependent relationship our *minds must consider freedom from that relationship, and walking henceforth with the Holy One, our only tenable option.* And if we are not to be drawn back into the dark dungeon from which we escaped, in the times of intense pressure that come with our newfound freedom our will must cry out, with everything that is within us, *'Nevertheless - give me the liberty the Holy One designed for me ...l or give me death!'*

Freedom is never free. Communing and co-laboring with the Creator of the Universe are never cheap. There are always significant – and often quite painful - costs involved. Every time we step out in freedom, following the lead of the Great Shepherd-King of Heaven, we leave behind people with whom we have developed fleshly soul-ties. Our gain is always someone else's loss. Those we choose to leave behind seldom let us go, therefore, without *hard feelings*, without *harsh words* - and without *a virtual bloodbath of one variety or another.* The party or parties left behind inevitably experience the *sting of rejection.* They may feel *betrayed* – even *victimized.* This often leads them to *irrational, highly emotional,* and sometimes *downright pathological* behavior. They mount a furious campaign of *self-justification*, of *blame shifting*, and eventually, in many cases, of *reprisal.* *If I can't have you – the truly dark-hearted among those you leave behind say to themselves - then NO ONE CAN!* That is where the real trouble can come in. That is where people have to ask themselves, *'is freedom worth it? Is freedom worth being hated for? Is*

freedom worth *suffering for*? And, ultimately, is freedom worth *dying for*? We will see, Beloved. But even so, if freedom is to long endure, the vacuum left by the breaking off of a co-dependent relationship must eventually be filled with something more – some ONE more wonderful – than mere freedom. The vacuum left by breaking away from an abuser, an oppressor, a user, a taker, or a manipulator, must be filled by One much more worthy than the other was unworthy – One who brings out the best from, and WHO inspires the deepest levels of passion, potential, creativity, and fruitfulness in, the ‘free’ person.

For freedom to be sustained, the love that motivates it must cease to be a love of freedom either as a concept or a status. The experience of freedom must transform into a *love of the Author and Finisher of freedom* – i.e. the Holy One Himself. For freedom to last – much less mean anything to subsequent generations – the story underlying the ‘freedom’ status one enjoys must become far more than a story of rescue and deliverance – it must become a story of love and trust, told with a lump in the throat and a twinkle, if not a tear or two, in the eye.

***Welcome To Covenant Antidote
for a Season of Dystopian Partisanship;
a Season of Inspiration, Divine Romance, and Childlike Trust***

The wilderness stretching out eastward from Egypt has become our new village. Out here the desert sky is our only ceiling, and the vast sandy plains serve as our only floor. Out here it is easy to imagine both angels and desert foxes watching our every move. Out here it is normal to hear both unclean spirits and black cobras hissing at us from behind every rock. Out here it is almost too hot to bear in the daytime. Out here an unexpected and unwelcome chill falls hard with the shadows every evening. Out here, covering is more valuable than gold, food is more precious than silver, and water more to be sought after than either.

How long will this wilderness excursion last? How long will WE last? It is a matter of trust. In whom, however, do we trust? Moshe may walk in front of us, but it is the Holy One Himself we follow. Moshe is not our deliverer – the Holy One is. The God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya’akov has stepped out of eternity and invisibility to take on form for us – and become our Redeemer. Looking to our eyes like a great pillar of cloud, He and He alone leads our march. As the sun sets each evening the appearance of the pillar manifestation turns to fire, allowing us to follow His graceful movements even through the darkest of nights. Wherever He goes, we will go. And wherever He

lodges, we will lodge. This is now our life. This is our new reality. We do not know where our food, drink or shelter will come from. We do not know if we will be attacked by predators or by enemies, or if we are attacked, how – or even if - we will survive. All this requires a tremendous amount of trust.

We are gradually learning to trust our Redeemer – but He knows that we have a long, long way to go in that regard. He knows that we are used to trusting in our own wits, in the strength of our own backs, and in the clever ability we have been honing for centuries to play Pharaoh's vanity against him. These are the rods and staffs we have carried into the desert. He knows that we do not yet realize how totally useless these things are in the wilderness. And for our own good, He is about to fix all that.

The Holy One also knows that right now we are in love – but not with Him. He knows that we are infatuated with the intoxicating feeling of freedom from bondage. That infatuation will never sustain us out here in the desert, of course. So He has a plan to turn our attention away from the infatuation with freedom to an intense love for and delight in Him, and Him alone. If we are going to survive –much less become who He has called us to be and do what He has brought us out of bondage to do - He has to become *our everything*. His Will has to become our will. His ways have to become our ways. His thoughts have to become our thoughts. And His passion has to become our passion.

A humble, contrite, and unconditional surrender has to occur in order that the great transformation He has in mind for us may move to its next phase. How is the Holy One going to bring about our surrender? He is going to lead us into the teeth of a challenging obstacle course that He has strategically designed to both *severely test our capacity for trust* and *reveal to our hearts at the deepest level possible who is – and who is not - worthy of our love*. For here is wisdom: *Unless and until what one perceives as trust gets tested in a series of fiery trials, and not only survives the trials but grows as a result of it, what one has confused with trust is merely a delusion of wishful thinking.*

So the die is cast. The bull will rush toward the *muleta* cloth being waved in front of him. Here is how Torah records it:

V'yesor et-richbo v'et-amo lakach imo

[Pharaoh] harnessed his chariot, and summoned his people to go with him.

Vayikach shesh-me'ot rechev bachur

He took 600 chariots with chosen crews,

V'chol rechev Mitzrayim v'shalishim al-kulo
as well as the entire chariot corps of Egypt, with supporting infantry for them all.

V'yirdeifu Mitzrayim achareihem

Setting out after [the Israelites],

v'yasigu otam chonim al ha-yam

the Egyptians overtook them at the Sea -

kol-sus rechev Pharaoh ufarashav

all of Pharaoh's chariot horses, cavalry, and infantry -

v'cheylo al-Pi ha-Chirot lifnei ba'al Tzafon

while they were encamped at Pi Ha-chirot, opposite Ba'al-Tzafon.

Welcome to Pi Ha-Chirot – the Doorway to Sheol

At this point in the narrative we the readers are supernaturally transported from the intrigue at Pharaoh's court to the panic going on at the refugee camp at *Pi ha-chirot*. Some Hebrew sages have noted that the name of the place literally means 'the mouth (or entrance) of the pits/caves/holes', and suggested that the "pit" in question was not just the *yam suf* (sea of reeds), but was the entrance to *sheol* [the unseen world of spirit beings and what humans think of as 'afterlife']. I doubt the Hebrew refugees who saw the great clouds of dust (from the charge of Pharaoh's army) and heard the war cries and the rumbling and roar of the chariots and horses would argue that description. Here is the way Torah describes what was happening in the camp as Pharaoh's army approached from the West:

UFar'oh hik'riv vayisu b'nei-Yisra'el et-eyneihem

When Pharaoh drew near, the children of Yisra'el lifted up their eyes,

v'hineh Mitzrayim nosea achareihem

and behold, the Mitzrim were marching after them;

vayir'u me'od

and they were very afraid.

vayitz'aku b'nei-Yisra'el el-Adonai

And the descendants of Yisrael cried out to/screamed at the Holy One.

[Exodus 14:10]

It is one thing for us to sit in comfortable houses and study halls and read impassively of, and engage in objective discussions about, events like this that happened long ago to people we do not know. It is something altogether different to *live through* such events. There were *real people* – real fathers, mothers, and children – hemmed in by the Sea of Reeds. There was *real confusion*. There were *real emotions*. There was *real danger*. There were *real lives* at stake. And the people who had to deal with this real danger and the real

emotions it produced were not wizened scholars, hardened soldiers, or Olympic athletes – they were just a bunch of poor, uneducated, very tired and completely disoriented *slaves*.

Do not give in to the temptation to *sit in the seat of the scornful* and judge them for ‘lacking faith’. Times of crisis do some very strange things to people.

The Ugliness of Panic

Up to now, the trek out of Pharaoh’s world into the new life to which the Holy One has called us has been somewhat of a ‘high’. Egypt in the rear-view mirror. A gigantic *matzah* party at the place called *Sukkot*. This ‘freedom’ is wonderful stuff, huh? In fact Torah tells us that our motley group of former slaves arrived at *Pi Ha-chirot* in a condition Torah describes as *b’yad ramah*. What does that mean? Well, we know the preposition *b* [*beit*] means ‘in’ or ‘with’. We know that the noun *yad* literally means ‘hand’⁶. We know *ramah* means ‘high’, ‘exalted’, ‘increasing’, or ‘uplifted’⁷. Most English translations of the phrase *b’yad ramah* render the combination ‘with a high hand’, or ‘with an uplifted hand’. When I read such translations, I instinctively picture 2 to 3 million people doing ‘the Wave’⁸. It is a giddy act of people riding an emotional high. Life is sweet. Freedom is intoxicating. That is, until a great dust cloud, and the rumbling of chariot wheels, shocked us back to ‘reality’. In the face of an oncoming holocaust, our freedom quickly became ‘*just another word for nothin’ left to lose*’. And suddenly the party was over. Stress takes over. Stress does things to people – especially to people who are ‘trapped’ or pushed into a corner. The redeemed of the Holy One are in no wise exempt. In the stress of the situation, even the redeemed of the Holy One can say some pretty unbecoming – and irrational - things. For B’nei Yisrael it started with the framing of three very emotionally charged questions:

Ha-mibli eyn-k’varim b’Mitzrayim

‘Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt?’

L’kachtanu l’mut b’midbar

Why did you have to bring us out here - to die in the desert?’

⁶ *Yad* is *yod, dalet*, Strong’s Hebrew word #3027, pronounced *yawd’*. It is first used in Torah in Genesis 3:22 to describe the part of the body which the Holy One was concerned, after the Fall, that man would stretch forth to take fruit from the tree of life. See also Genesis 4:11. The word thus means that which is an extension of a man, or which signifies man’s own efforts outside the will of the Holy One.

⁷ *Ramah* is a form of the word *rum, resh, vav, mem sofit*, Strong’s Hebrew word #7311, pronounced like the English word *room*. The first Biblical usage is in Genesis 7:17, to describe the condition of the waters of earth after 40 days of rain at the time of the Flood. They were ‘risen’, or ‘increased’.

⁸ In actuality the phrase *b’yad ramah* is probably an ancient Hebrew idiom.

Mah-zot asita lanu l'hotzi'anu m'Mitzrayim
What is this you have done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?
[Exodus 14:11]

Let's take a look at each of these questions in turn.

Question #1: Weren't there enough graves in Egypt?

When the mass migration of refugees walked out of Egypt behind the pillar of fire, they left behind, in their dust, a land famous for placing its dead in stunning tombs and glorious pyramids. They also left behind a people in the process of embalming, mourning, and burying every firstborn of every family.

There were, indeed, *many* graves in Egypt. Egypt was, in fact, all about graves. It always had been. Graves were woven into the very fabric of Egyptian thought and philosophy of life. Egyptian culture was absolutely fascinated with death – and, necessarily, with graves.

The Egyptian cultural fascination with death and graves was – judging from the question the people posed to Moshe - apparently not lost on its slaves. That is understandable. But consider the irony of the people's '*Weren't there enough graves in Egypt?*' question. Somewhere in the crowd now gathered at the Sea of Reeds was the unburied sarcophagus containing the bones of Yosef [Joseph], son of Ya'akov [Jacob], formerly known in Egypt as *Tzafenat-Paneach*. Yosef's final words to his sons, many generations ago, had been:

anochi met v'Elohim pakod yifkod eitchem

"I am dying, but God will surely visit you,

v'he'elah eitchem min-ha-aretz hazot

and He will bring you up out of this land

el-ha-aretz asher nish'ba l'Avraham l'Yitzchak ul'Ya'akov

to the land which he swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov."

pakod yifkod Elohim etchem

"When God visits you, which He surely will,

v'ha-alitem et-atzmotai mizeh

carry up my bones from here."

[Genesis 50:24-25]

The bones of *Tzafenat-Paneach*, second in command under Pharaoh, could have – would have – been buried in a glorious Egyptian tomb. But he would have none of it. He was a visionary, and saw beyond the glory of the mummy-vaults and pyramids of Egypt. And like his father Ya'akov before him, though

he knew he was going to die in Egypt, Yosef made it clear to everyone that he did not want any part of any Egyptian grave. So, in the midst of people who had grown up in awe of Egypt's tombs and pyramids, Yosef's bones testified time and time again, generation after generation, that there is something better and much more grand than burial in an Egyptian grave. But in the face of extreme danger the question had to be asked – and answered – again. Was it indeed for something better and grander than an Egyptian tomb that the Holy One had brought these people out of the land of the pyramids? Before they went any further, they needed to ask the question – even if they received no answer other than prophecy from Yosef's very dry bones.

Who has taken responsibility for, and possession of, Yosef's sarcophagus? Torah tells us: *Vayikach Moshe et-atzmot Yosef imo* – i.e. *Moshe took Yosef's remains with him*. Exodus 13:19. While the rest of the Hebrews were busy themselves by gathering up *matzah* dough and collecting and packing the gifts of gold, silver, and precious garments the Egyptians showered on them, Moshe was focusing all his attention on something altogether different. He would carry Yosef's coffin. He would carry the remains of the Dreamer. He would carry the hope of redemption. He would carry the Messianic Prototype. He carried on his shoulders a sarcophagus full of bones crying out “*Do me this kindness – do not bury me in Egypt!*” Moshe was thus as prepared as any man can be for the question of whether there were enough graves in Egypt. End of argument.

Question #2: *Why did you have to bring us out here – to die in the desert?*

This second question is even more fundamental – and absolutely necessary. Forget Egypt for a moment. Forget what was left behind. The real question is: *What does the future hold?* The real issue is *What is the real meaning – and ultimate purpose – for which we are here* [wherever that may be]? Do not get judgmental here. Do not give in to the temptation to toss back your head and condemn B'nei Yisrael. They had not yet seen even a trace of the ‘something better’ of which Yosef's bones testified. All they had seen so far was hot, dry desert. They did not yet really know *why* the Holy One had redeemed them. They did not have any real idea what He had planned for them. They were a people suddenly without an understanding as to a reason to live, a purpose, or a destiny. As death stared them in the face, they had to ask themselves – and Moshe – and the Holy One: *Is there anything in our future worth living for – worth dying for?* Freedom from bondage was great, you see – but only if there was something meaningful to do with one's life after leaving Pharaoh's work crews.

Why, they wanted to know, were they *there*? Why had the Holy One – or Moshe - brought them to the banks of the Sea of Reeds? This, it was obvious to see, was no ‘promised land’. Had it all been just a cruel hoax? Were they, when it got right down to it, just trophies in Moshe’s personal feud with Pharaoh, or just pawns in the cosmic ‘war of the gods’ they had witnessed over the past few months in Egypt? Had they now fulfilled their purpose and outlived their usefulness?

Question #3: *What is this you have done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?*

The third question is the ultimate question, of course. It is the question we all ask, in times of trial, in one form or another. It is the question posed to the Holy One that could be rephrased ‘*what is the nature of our relationship?*’- or perhaps, more poignantly, ‘*what is it that you want from me?*’ The question was whether the Holy One was interested in *their well-being* – or just in *getting the best of the gods of Egypt*. The question was whether, now that they had bloodied their hands with the blood of the *Pesach* lamb, as the Holy One instructed them to do, there was *more* for them.

This third question absolutely must be answered – in all our lives. All three of these questions were, in fact, questions that desperately needed to be asked and answered before the people went one step further. These people did not yet know they were *the betrothed Bride-to-be of the Creator of the Universe*.

Do you know that, Dear Reader? Do you know why the Holy One has kept you alive, sustained you, and brought you to this season? Do you know His plans for *you*? Do you trust the Holy One’s plans to be for your *good* and not for harm? The Holy One wants you to be *sure* of this. That is one reason why He weaves circumstances and trials into the tapestry of our lives which cause us to struggle with the “*What is this you have done to us?*” question.

Keep in mind therefore that the Holy One knew before He ever took our ancestors out of Egypt that this exact thing would happen, and that these exact questions would be asked. Indeed He orchestrated the whole scenario in this manner to bring it to pass. Engendering the ‘*Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt?*’ and the ‘*Why did you have to bring us out here?*’ questions in the minds of the people was all an integral part of the Divine plan. You see, *there is a process that redeemed slaves must go through*. It is a process of *deprogramming* – what we might call ‘*renewing of the mind*’. It is a continuing, on-going, progressive process. With every deliverance there must

follow *a period of soul-searching*, of questioning everything that has happened, of pondering what is to come next, and of wondering what it all means. In such a time it is inevitable that negative thoughts and attitudes will surface, that sarcasm will issue forth, and that ugly emotions repressed for years will find expression.

It is important to understand that this rather unbecoming stage is *a necessary part* of transitioning from a slave mentality – the coerced surrender of one’s will to the dominance of another human being - to a point where one can *freely* and *voluntarily* surrender one’s will to the Holy One. What brings this necessary but unpleasant stage about? The Holy One knows – it is not *celebrating freedom* that brings people to the point of overcoming the slave mentality. It is *facing crisis*. Enter Pharaoh’s chariot brigade, on cue, stage left.

Dealing With Crisis – Phase II

But the soul-searching and questioning of our redeemed slave population is just beginning. Another phase is about to begin. We have given voice to our concerns about *the present crisis*. Now we must go further, and compare our present crisis to our past. There is inherent in this process – for *B’nei Yisrael* and for all today who receive the Holy One’s deliverance - an “I told you so” component. Here is the first verbalization of the multitude concerning their collective view on the past:

Halo-zeh ha-davar asher dibarnu eleicha v’Mitzrayim l’emor

Isn't this the word that we spoke to you in Mitzrayim, saying,

chadal mimeinu v’na'avdah et-Mitzrayim

'Leave us alone, that we may serve the Mitzrim?'

[Exodus 14:12(a)]

At this point those of you who have been reading along with the narrative for some time now may feel you must have amnesia. When, pray tell, in the narrative thus far, did anybody tell Moshe “*Leave us alone, that we may serve the Mitzrim?*” It simply didn’t happen. Some among us may have harbored such thoughts in our worst moments, but Torah certainly does not record anyone ever speaking them out loud. So why does Torah record this *non-event* – something that simply never happened - as the foundation of the collective recollection of the people when subjected to ‘crisis mode’? Ah, that is precisely the point. The Holy One wants us to know that *revisionist history* and ‘*spin*’ are not limited to the pagans. The Holy One does not want us to think of ourselves more highly than we ought. The Holy One wants us to be fully aware that people who claim covenant with the Holy One, and whom He has

redeemed, likewise engage in *spin* – turning the truth 180 degrees.

Our memories play tricks on us. *Villain* becomes *victim*. *Prophet* becomes *pariah*. Thus we absolutely must learn to rely *not upon what men say* or upon what we ‘*believe*’ - but solely upon the Words – and the deeds of covenant faithfulness – of our God. Contrary to popular opinion, beliefs will not get you through a real crisis. Neither will faith. Only *our God* – the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov - has that kind of power. Learn that lesson and learn it well, lest you be fall victim to the great deception of formalized religion. And that leads us to conclusion/culmination of the soul-searching [for now].

Dealing With Crisis – Phase III

The final statement of the multitude at this juncture is:

ki tov lanu avod et-Mitzrayim

*It was **to** [good] for us when we served the Mitzrim,*

mimuteinu b’midbar

We are dying in the wilderness."

[Exodus 14:12(b)]

Patrick Henry said, “*Give me liberty or give me death!*” Noble words. But alas, Patrick Henry had never been a slave. He did not have to shed *a slavish worldview* like an emerging butterfly sheds the cocoon in which it incubated, or like a baby being born sheds its placenta. Our ancestors did. Alas, when trouble comes into our lives we find we often do as well. So don’t worry too much about our complaining non-heroes. The Holy One is full of grace, mercy, and understanding.

Moshe Declares The Vision of Heaven Over the Situation on Earth

Moshe’s reply to the people’s complaints, soul-searching questions, and bitter sarcasm, teaches us how to deal with the spin-masters, complainers, and history revisionists among us:

Al-tira' u hityatzvu urei'u et-yeshu'at Adonai

Don't be afraid; Stand firm and you will see the Holy One's Yeshua

asher-ya'aseh lachem ha-yom

which He will make for you today.

ki asher re'item et-Mitzrayim ha-yom

For the Egyptians you see today,

lo tosifu lir'otam od ad-olam

you will never see again.

Adonai yilachem lachem v'atem tacharishun

The Holy One will fight for you and you will be silent/speechless.

[Exodus 14:13-14]

Having thus turned the attention of the people away from the “spin” of the revisionists and blame-placers in our midst and focused our gaze back upon the Holy One where it belongs, Moshe is in position to receive strategic instructions from the throne of the One who brought us this far, and Who was not about to let His Beloved go back to Egypt now.

The Holy One Speaks Into the Crisis

The Holy One does not disappoint us. Pharaoh has spoken. The multitude has spoken. Moshe has spoken. But the Holy One – as always – has the last word:

The Holy One said to Moshe, "Why do you cry to me?

Speak to the children of Yisra'el, Veyisa'u [i.e. Go up!]⁹

*Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea, and baqa¹⁰ [divide] it:
and the children of Yisra'el shall go into the midst of the sea on dry ground.*

I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Mitzrim, and they shall go in after them:

*and I will get myself kavad [honor, glory] over Pharaoh,
and over all his host, over his chariots, and over his horsemen.*

*The Mitzrim will know that I am the Holy One,
when I have gotten myself kavad [honor, glory] over Pharaoh,
over his chariots, and over his horsemen."*

We all know what happens next. A people who asked sacrilegious questions just a few moments previously will walk dry-shod through the Sea, and come that much closer to the *chuppah* the Holy One is preparing for them at Sinai. And the pit of *sheol* will swallow Pharaoh's army, with all its mighty chariots and charioteers. Stand firm, and see indeed, the deliverance of the Holy One.

Toro! Toro!

And so, at the Word of the Holy One, those who were recently Pharaoh's slaves fall silent. The Holy One has spoken. It is not a time for *k'vetching*. It is not a time for *casting blame* or worrying each other with worst-case scenarios. It is not a time for preaching, teaching, or prophesying. It is not a time for quoting Scripture. It is not even a time for speaking great words and declarations of faith. It is a time for silent watchfulness. The instruction of the Holy One, through His prophet, is: *Stand – be silent – and see the Yeshua of*

⁹ The Hebrew word used here is a form of the verb root *nasa, nun, samech, ayin*, Strong's word #H5265. Pronounced *naw-saw'*, this word is first used in Genesis 11:2, to describe the process of journeying or relocating done by those of Noach's descendants who settled in the plain of Shinar.

our God. As it says in Revelation 8:1, in describing what happened upon the opening of the ‘seventh seal’: *there was silence in heaven for half an hour*. Back on earth, however, Pharaoh did not stop to listen to the sounds of silence. Still smarting from the blows his nation has endured in connection with the ten plagues, and still grieving for the firstborn sons who have perished, he and his officials cannot wait to rush in and slake their thirst for bloody genocide.

The “trap” is set. The “bull” is about to make its final, fatal charge. *El Matador* is ready, with shimmering sword in Hand.

It Would Have Been Enough

As Pharaoh’s chariots, horsemen, and armies all bear down on unarmed multitudes trapped with their backs to the Sea of Reeds, the bull looks like the odds-on favorite to carry the day. Who could possibly stop him now? We will see soon enough. But for now, every year as we read parsha *Beshelach* it behooves us to ask ourselves *was it really necessary for our forefathers to undergo the ordeal of hearing the hoof beats and war cries of the oncoming army?* Was it really necessary that they look death right in the face? Was it really necessary that they see - with their own eyes - the destruction of Pharaoh’s mighty army? At our Passover Seder each year we recite the song *Dayeinu*, saying:

If You had only *brought us out of Egypt*, but had not *punished the Egyptians* -
It would have been enough for us!

If You had only punished the Egyptians, but had not *destroyed their gods* -
It would have been enough for us!

If You had only destroyed their gods, but had not *slain their firstborn* -
It would have been enough for us!

If You had only slain their firstborn, but not *given us their wealth* -
It would have been enough for us!

If You had only given us their wealth, but had not *divided the sea for us* -
It would have been enough for us!

If You had only divided the sea for us, but had not *led us through on dry ground* -
It would have been enough for us!

If You had only led us through on dry ground, but *had not drowned our oppressors* -
It would have been enough for us!

* * * *

It makes great poetry. But think about it. *Would it* have been “enough”? Would it *really* have been ‘enough’? Oh, it would have been more than we *deserved*. It would have been more than we *had asked*. It would have even

been more than we could ever have *conceived*. But - to the Holy One - it would *not* have been “enough”. It is never enough - in the Holy One’s eyes - for His people to merely walk a few steps away from slavery; He always insists on burning the bridges behind us. He always arranges such circumstances as are necessary to show us very clearly that there is nothing worthwhile to go back to.

The Holy One is not just taking us out of slavery, and setting us “free”, you see; He is taking us *unto Himself, as a bridegroom takes a bride*. And Heaven help the Pharaoh or charioteer who tries to pry us out of His Hand.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Let’s begin today’s study with a few questions:

[A] Describe the Egyptian force that went out in pursuit of the redeemed remnant that had followed Moshe out of Egypt. Who - and what - did it consist of?

[B] What emotion does the Torah say the redeemed experienced when they looked up and saw Pharaoh’s forces coming after them?

[C] With what three questions did the people confront/accuse Moshe?

[D] Moshe does not directly respond to these three questions. Instead, he makes a bold statement of faith [Exodus 14:13-14]. What actions does Moshe tell the people to take?

[E] What does Moshe tell the people they will see if they “stand firm”?

[F] What instructions did the Holy One give to Moshe?

[G] What did the Holy One say in verse 18 was the redemptive purpose in his destruction of Pharaoh’s army?

2. In today’s Haftarah aliyah from the book of Judges, *Devorah [Deborah]* calls upon a man named *Barak* to form an army of 10,000 men and go to Mount Tabor. The purpose of the trip is to spring a “trap” the Holy One has laid for the army of *Yavin [Jabin]*, King of Hazor, who has, like Pharaoh, made Israel a part of his kingdom. Note that it is not a superior military force that the Holy One is going to use to defeat *Yavin*. He is only going to take 10,000 men – from only 2 of the 12 tribes. He has no chariots. His men are not warriors. He has only one advantage – the Will of the Holy One. And that is, of course, enough.

*She sent and called Barak the son of Avino`am out of Kedesh-Naftali, and said to him, Hasn't the Holy One, the God of Yisra'el, commanded, [saying],
“Go and draw to Mount Tavor, and take with you ten thousand men
of the children of Naftali and of the children of Zevulun.*

I will draw to you, to the river Kishon, Sisera, the captain of Yavin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into your hand."

The challenge is laid down. The issue is not whether the mission will be successful – the Holy One has decreed it, and it will happen. The issue is whether Barak will claim the glory and honor – *or* give the glory and honor to the Holy One. It is a choice each of us has to make on a regular basis.

Barak said to her, If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go. She said, I will surely go with you: notwithstanding, the journey that you take shall not be for your honor; for the Holy One will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.

Devorah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called Zevulun and Naftali together to Kedesh; and there went up ten thousand men at his feet: and Devorah went up with him.

Now Hever the Keni had separated himself from the Kinim, even from the children of Hovav the brother-in-law of Moshe, and had pitched his tent as far as the oak in Tza'ananim, which is by Kedesh.

[A] What is the name of the man *Devorah* calls forth to form and lead the army?

[B] In your Bible Dictionary, in Strong's, and in Gesenius, look up that man's name. What is the meaning of that name?

[C] From what tribes was this man to select his soldiers?

[D] Get out your Bible Atlas, and look up Kedesh (in Naftali, that is) Mount Tabor, and the Kishon River. Draw a map showing the location of each of those places - as if you are drawing up *Devorah's* battle plan.

[E] What was the response of the man *Devorah* had chosen to her instructions?

[F] As a result of this response, what did *Devorah* say would happen?

[G] We are introduced, in verse 11, to a group of people called "Kenites". Look up this group of people in your Bible Dictionary. Were they descendants of Ya'akov? If not, who were they, and what was their relationship with B'nei Yisrael?

3. In today's B'rit Chadasha aliyah, Yeshua is continuing his discourse with the people who witnessed the miraculous feeding of the five thousand men, plus women and children, with "five barley loaves and two small fish". He is teaching those people – and us – concerning *otot* [covenant-affirming signs and wonders] sovereignly performed by the Holy One. He does not want them [or us] to see the Holy One as a '*Heavenly Houdini*' Who does magic tricks. He does not want them [us] to imitate Pharaoh's court magicians. Our life is not to be based upon *illusion* – but upon *reality*. Miracle interventions of Heaven do

occur – but they do not occur according to our whim, when, why, or for whom we choose. Because we do not – cannot – see what He sees, both in the ‘now’ and in the ‘future’, signs and wonders cannot be brought about by our command or decree. They occur only when, where, why, and as the Holy One, in His infinite knowledge and wisdom wills – for the sake of His Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan.

They said therefore to him, "What then do you do for a sign, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you do? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written, 'He gave them bread out of heaven to eat.'" Yeshua therefore said to them, "Most assuredly, I tell you, it wasn't Moshe who gave you the bread out of heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

[A] What do the people want to know from Yeshua?

[B] Yeshua reminds the people that it was the Holy One, not Moshe, who showered manna from heaven. Yeshua then tells them that “bread from heaven” better and more lasting than manna has been provided. How does Yeshua define “true bread from heaven”?

May you see the deliverance of the Holy One this day, as you taste the true bread from heaven.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 78:5-8

For he established a witness [Hebrew edut] in Ya`akov, and appointed a torah [teaching] in Yisra'el, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known [Hebrew, yada – intimately familiar] to their children; that the generation to come might know, even the children who should be born; who should arise and tell their children, that they might set their hope [Hebrew, kesel] in the Holy One and not forget the works [Hebrew, ma`alal] of the Holy One, but keep His mitzvot, and that they might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that didn't make their hearts loyal, whose spirit was not steadfast [Hebrew `aman (trustworthy/faithful)] with/unto the Holy One.