

## A Muse: Beshalach

Beshalach is the central portion where exodus of the Israelites from Egypt play out; where according to midrash 600,000 souls left Egypt on the night between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. While we have been celebrating the exodus story for centuries and so much of our liturgy celebrates the miraculous events leading up to the exodus including the plagues, there are many who do not believe it was by the “hand” of God. In fact there is an entire school of thought supported by some celebrated Israeli archeologists that there never was an exodus for Egypt. The effort to convince those who are skeptical is in vain since for every argument for the intervention of God there are arguments that can be leveled against those arguments. In the end it boils down to faith. And faith is something that can't be argued with.

However, whether you believe the freedom story to be fact or fable the exodus story has become part of the national conscience of the Jewish people. For those with faith, the event took place as is stated in the text, and nothing more needs to be said. For those who don't believe the events as told in the Bible it is enough to invoke the “big lie” theory. A lie repeated enough times will be believed. The exodus story certainly has become part and parcel of the Jewish psyche so whether or not one believes the story is irrelevant to what can be learned from it. From the Biblical account it is apparent that the spiritual gap between the generation that entered Egypt and the generation leaving Egypt was so great that there was virtually no remaining legacy from their forefathers. In fact and as was commented last week there was even the discontinuation of circumcision. They had no idea who their God was or who the God of their forefathers was. The proof is in the fact that God had to present miracles in order to convince the Israelites as to the power of God. Furthermore, Moses was skeptical about any of the Israelites remembering or believing in the God of their forefathers.

The effort that God made in delivering the Israelites was far greater than the effort of the Israelites themselves in extracting themselves from their slavery. It would appear then than the Israelites weren't as interested in serving their God as much as God was in need of being served. Indeed throughout their trek the Bible rarely hints at a time when there

was any joy among the Israelites, except when the Egyptians were drown in the Sea of Reeds. Beyond that there aren't any demonstrative elements of joy. There are those who reach the conclusion that the Israelites were forced out of Egypt by God and the "chipazon" was referring to God and not the Israelites. In other words, God was in a hurry to redeem the Israelites; the Hebrews were in no particular rush. In fact the Talmud comments that the Hebrews were quickly approaching the 49<sup>th</sup> rung of spiritual contamination, and God was deeply concerned that they would have to be redeemed in a hurry before they reached the point of no return.

There are many parallels that can be drawn from these observations when analyzing the state of the Jewish community today whether in Israel or abroad. One example that comes to mind is the profile of Moshe. Here was a man an outsider, who didn't come from the "people" or experience their suffering. He came from the house of Pharaoh and was married to a Midianite. Theodor Herzl too was a man from the outside who didn't experience the suffering of the Eastern European Jews, those Jews who he thought he was redeeming.

One can also reference the exodus story as an analogy that has universal appeal. There is a syndrome where people having been denied freedom for so long are afraid of it and therefore may declare "I love my master". Our text of course deals with this in detail, but it is also something we have witnessed in the twentieth century. Fascism and communism are two examples of people denied freedom for so long opt for a political system that again denies them their fundamental freedoms. Another universal truth dealt with in the exodus story is the appeal and pull materialism has on people in exchange for following their dreams and ideals. The Israelites were willing to turn back to the "flesh pots" of Egypt rather than pursue their dreams of their own country and freedom. Have we witnessed that again in the twentieth century with the birth of Israel; the reluctance and resistance of American Jews to trade their desire for material comforts in order to live in their own country as free and proud Jews?