

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Beshalach

Parshat Beshalach: Foundations of Survival

The Torah is a text that is meant for all generations. If we wish to learn about how a Jew can achieve success in his life we study the Torah for insight and direction. The Jews endured a most challenging exile in Egypt with servitude, torture and death. Yet, they came out strong and fortified as a nation. What lessons can we learn about their success from reading the parsha that recounts their actual exodus from Egypt?

The Song

The shachris, morning prayer, contains the song of Az Yashir (found in our parsha) which the Jews sang recounting their being miraculously saved from their Egyptian pursuers. This song was the culmination of their expression of thanks for all that Hashem had done for them in arranging their freedom, bringing Egypt to its knees, destroying their enemies and granting the Jews status as G-d's nation.

Rabbeinu Bechaya points out that the Song of Az Yashir contains exactly eighteen verses which correspond to the eighteen blessings in Shmoneh Esrei and the eighteen vertebrae in the spine (See tractate Berachos 28b). What is the connection between this special song and the Shmoneh Esrei? I believe that the lesson here is that just as the goal of Shmoneh Esrei is to give praise to Hashem and to put in personal requests, so too, the entire Az Yashir is meant to praise Hashem and to beg Him to continue to take care of the Jewish nation. When a Jew goes through a hard time he connects to Hashem and begs Him for help.

Three Ingredients

There is a rule that Hashem deals with each person measure for measure. The Song of Az Yashir states, "With loving kindness You [Hashem] led the People that you redeemed (Shemos 15:12)." Rabbeinu Bechaya explains that Hashem treated the Jews with love and kindness because that is how they treated one another. He quotes an obscure Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:2) that states three merits that the Jews had which helped bring about their redemption:



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kindness, avodah (korbanos, prayer) and Torah study. This verse hints to all three:

“With love (chessed, kindness) you redeemed them, with might (refers to Torah) You [Hashem] led them, to Your holy shrine (avodah in the Mishkan).” The depth here is that the Jews came together and shared their passion for kindness with one another, they saw Torah as their bedrock and strength and they appreciated the prayer service and dedication of self which was inherent in the place of worship.

Great Women

Chazal (tractate Sotah 11b) tell us that it was in the merit of righteous women that the Jews were redeemed. It is for this reason that Az Yashir is followed by Miriam’s leading of the women to sing a song of thanks and gratitude to Hashem. The women held strong and kept their families together in their faith and commitment to Hashem. Rabbeinu Bechaya points out that throughout the Torah women were given credit for and acknowledged for their great contributions to the Jewish nation. In Parshas Yisro the women were asked if they wanted to accept the Torah before the men were asked (Shemos 19:3; Rashi ad loc.) because their acceptance and commitment was the crux that the entire nation’s commitment depended upon. Rabbeinu Bechaya points out that Miriam is called a prophetess here and all that she did was through Divine Inspiration. He also lists off other noteworthy women and their contributions to the Jewish nation. Avigial discussed the concept of tzror hachaim and Olam Habah, the World to Come; laws of prayer and concepts of the Resurrection are learned from Chana’s episode. Chazal (tractate Megillah 14a) tell us that there were seven prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Chana, Devora, Chulda, Avigial and Esther. Each one of them greatly enhanced and educated the Jewish nation.

A careful reading of the parsha reveals the secret to Jewish success. The way that we treat one another, the way that we relate to G-d and proper leadership and guidance are methods for success. Jews have learned the Torah and applied its lessons for survival and success for generations.

Shabbat Shalom!

JSN Team

