



PARSHA

ENCOUNTERS

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Parshas Beshalach ✍️ Rabbi Dovid Rokach

Distance Learning

This week's *parsha* describes the miraculous spectacle of *kriyas yam suf*. It is interesting to note how this momentous event is described differently in connection with its impact on each of three groups of people:

- 1) *Klal yisrael*—"and *Yisrael saw the great might inflicted on Egypt* and the people feared Hashem and they trusted in Hashem and in Moshe His servant" (*Shemos* 14:31)
- 2) *Yisro*—"now I know that Hashem is greater than all other gods because in the way [the Egyptians] sinned they were punished" (*Shemos* 18:11)
- 3) Egyptians—"and I will be glorified through [destruction of] Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am Hashem" (*Shemos* 14:4)

Why are different aspects of *kriyas yam suf* emphasized in each of these descriptions?

In *Mishlei*, a description is given of three types of individuals and their respective fates:

"A scoffer is hit, a fool becomes wise, and rebuke to a perceptive person will increase knowledge"
(*Mishlei* 19:25)

The *Ralbag* explains that this *pasuk* describes how Hashem deals with each of these three individuals. A scoffer laughs off any suggestion that his behavior requires improvement. He therefore must be hit with punishment to learn his lesson. A fool is prone to overlook his own shortcoming, but will not ignore a clear warning. By witnessing the punishment visited upon the scoffer, he becomes wise and seeks to avoid a similar fate. The perceptive person is on an even higher level and does not need punishment or even the unpleasant experience of witnessing the punishment of others. He is able

to simply listen to words of wisdom and become inspired.

The varying descriptions of *kriyas yam suf* quoted earlier reflect a similar concept. Each group of people identified in the *psukim* reacted to a different aspect of *kriyas yam suf*. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were in the category of scoffers—they had already rejected numerous opportunities to take a lesson from Moshe's warnings and the *makos*. To understand that "I am Hashem" it was necessary for them to personally suffer the consequences of *kriyas yam suf*. *Klal yisrael* was on a higher level. They were able to learn to "fear Hashem and trust in Hashem" by merely witnessing the fate of the Egyptians. *Yisro* exercised perception. He did not witness any suffering firsthand, but nevertheless recognized that "Hashem is greater than all other gods" by contemplating the precision of Hashem's judgment demonstrated by *kriyas yam suf*.

These ideas also provide an important perspective on world events. *Rav Avigdor Miller z"l* comments that one purpose of the numerous disasters constantly occurring throughout the world is for *klal yisrael* to learn to fear Hashem. As the *pasuk* states:

"I destroyed nations, their towers have become desolate . . . I said just fear Me, accept rebuke"
(*Zephania* 3:6-7)

By refining our ability to learn from natural, political, and economic disasters occurring at a distance, we minimize the need for such lessons to come any closer to home. May we be *zoche* to see the *yad Hashem* in conducting the complex workings of today's world, and ultimately, in orchestrating our final redemption.

Rabbi Rokach learns daily at the kollel.

HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Residing in Egypt (and Spain)

Rabbi Hensch Plotnik

“For as you have seen Egypt today you shall not see them ever again” (Beshalach 14:13)

Moshe Rabbeinu's words to Klal Yisroel in the face of impending attack from their Egyptian oppressors were meant not only to provide encouragement, but, according to Chazal, to notify us that we are forbidden from returning to Mitzrayim ever again (*Succah* 51b). According to the Rambam (*Hilchos Melachim* 5:7), violating this prohibition transgresses three *issurim*. (See *Maharitz Chayos* at the end of *Mesechta Succah* who wonders how an *issur* stated before *Matan Torah*, such as the *pasuk* in *Beshalach*, can be reckoned as an *aveira*.) The Rambam qualifies his words as pertaining exclusively to one who moves to Mitzrayim with the intention of remaining there. Traveling there for business purposes and the like is permissible.

Despite the Gemara and the Rambam, history bears witness to the fact that Jews have not resisted living in Mitzrayim. In fact, the Rambam himself practiced medicine there, serving as the royal physician. As we will see, since the days of the Rishonim this question has been dealt with and been written about extensively. We will also explore some of the opinions and their ramifications for another assumed prohibition, one against residing in Spain.

The Radvaz suggests that just as the Rambam permits traveling to Mitzrayim without intent to remain (based on the *Talmud Yerushalmi*), if one originally went to Mitzrayim temporarily, a subsequent decision to remain does not constitute a genuine *issur* either. The Radvaz excuses the Rambam's own move to Mitzrayim by noting that the Rambam did not move of his own volition. Rather, he was forced by royal edict. The Radvaz himself acknowledges his own establishment of a yeshiva in Mitzrayim where he learned and taught Torah. Because he eventually returned to Eretz Yisroel (apparently according to his original plan), settling in Mitzrayim temporarily was permissible.

The *Hagahos Maimoniyos* refutes the claim that once Sancheirev moved citizens of the various countries around, so that the original Mitzriyim were no longer in Mitzrayim, the *issur* no longer applied. After all, the Gemara tells us that the great community of Alexandria was punished for transgressing this *aveirah*, despite their residing in Mitzrayim **after** Sancheirev's time. He offers a different *heter*, that of the *Sefer Yereim*, based on the idea that the prohibition is only to return “*baderech hazeh od*,” from Eretz Yisroel, directly to Mitzrayim. Traveling from any other country was never forbidden.

The Radvaz dismissed this approach because the other *pesukim* mentioned by the Rambam make no mention of this proviso. In addition, the Chida in his *sefer Shem Hagedolim* reports that the Rambam indeed moved to Mitzrayim directly from Eretz Yisroel (as brought in *Chumash*

Medrash Halachah).

Rabbeinu Bachya (*Devorim* 17:16) holds that because the purpose of the *issur* was to escape the negative influence of the decadent Mitzriyim, in the absence of that generation, there is no longer an *issur*. This approach, aside from being difficult to reconcile with the Rambam's opinion, has to be understood in light of the many questions raised by various *meforshim*.

Yet another *limud zechus* is raised by the Ritva (*Yoma* 38a), who states that the *issur* applied only when Klal Yisroel lived peacefully in their own land. Once Klal Yisroel was dispersed throughout the world, Mitzrayim was not considered to be any different than other countries in *Chutz La'aretz*. This, too, requires clarification, as the *Mechilta* states that even in the period of Yonason Ben Kerach, which followed the *churban*, the *issur* was still in effect (see the extensive footnote in the Mosad Harav Kook edition).

Most interestingly, the *Kaftor Vaferach* writes that the Rambam's own grandson reported that the Rambam signed a letter while living in Mitzrayim: “He who transgresses three sins daily!” Was the Rambam incriminating himself as a willful sinner? This can be most easily understood in light of the abovementioned Radvaz, which stresses that the Rambam's move to Mitzrayim was involuntary. Many other suggestions have been made to explain these puzzling words. In fact, the *S'dei Chemed* (vol. 3, *ma'areches yud klal* 46 p. 67) casts aspersions on the authenticity of the entire *mesorah* of such a letter, based on the myriad approaches mentioned in the *meforshim* and *poskim* to justify the practice of many Jews who have resided in Mitzrayim by choice.

A related topic involves the question of how Jews settled in Spain during the years following the expulsion of the Jewish population in 1492. There is a supposed “*kabbalah ish m'pi ish*” (an unbroken oral tradition), as quoted by many *poskim*, including Harav Uziel zt”l, the Rishon L'Tzion, that a ban, perhaps even a full blown *cherem* (edict of excommunication) was issued after the expulsion, that Jews should never return to Spain (see *Tzitz Eliezer* vol 5:17). The Minchas Elazar of Munkacz (vol. 4:11) questions if there ever truly was an official ban, particularly in light of the fact that the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* was a victim of the expulsion yet makes no mention of any such *cherem* or the like. He treats it as no more than a “*safeq*” and continues to permit it based on many considerations.

Rav Ovadiah Yosef Shlita (*Yabia Omer* vol.7 Y.D #14) quotes a *teshuvah* from Rav Avraham Yitzchok Kook zt”l that any such ban, even if it actually took place, would not have been decreed with any more stringencies than the Torah's ban on returning to Mitzrayim. As mentioned above, the Rambam permitted temporary residence as well as travel for business purposes; this ban wouldn't have been any more severe. (The entire issue of the Spanish ban is a topic in itself and will iy”h will be dealt with separately in a later issue.) This approach would not satisfy every situation but at least opens the door for further discussion based on the abovementioned opinions.

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