



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles

Take home Dvar Torah

Parshat Beshalach

תשפ"ד

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Hello, Welcome!

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,
independent and inclusive adult education program
focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by
studying text most interesting to each participant.
Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week,
friendships are forged between
mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of
wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until
now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so
that we may grow together as a community.**

The Jewish people left Egypt on the 15th of Nissan and travelled for seven days until they reached the Yam Suf (the Red Sea, or, more accurately, the Reed Sea). At that point, there was nowhere to go. They could not travel forward because the sea was in front of them. They could not retreat because the Egyptians were closing in behind them. And they could not go to the sides because, the Midrash informs us, wild animals stood ready to tear them apart. They were between the hammer and the anvil. What could they do? They prayed.

(י) וּפְרָעָה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲנִה מִצְרַיִם נֹסֵעַ אַחֲרֵיהֶם
וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל יְהוָה

*10) Pharaoh approached; the Children of Israel raised their eyes and behold! – Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened; **the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem.***

On the words, “**The Children of Israel cried out to Hashem,**” Rashi explains:

ויצעקו - (מכילתא) תפשו אומנות אבותם. באברהם הוא אומר (בראשית יט)
אל המקום אשר עמד שם. ביצחק (שם כד) לשוח בשדה. ביעקב (שם כח) ויפגע
במקום

*They employed the vocation of their fathers: Avraham established the morning prayer, **Shacharit**, Yitzchak established the afternoon prayer, **Mincha**, and Yaakov established the evening prayer, **Arvit**.*

In short, they prayed. Prayer is our secret weapon.

Yet, after all that the Jewish people had been through, why did Hashem again put them into such a difficult situation? The Midrash provides the background:

כיון שראו ישראל שהיו מוקפין מגי רוחות, הים סוגר והשונא רודף והחיות
מן המדבר תלו עיניהם לאביהם שבשמים וצעקו להקב"ה שנאמר ויצעקו בני ישראל

אל ה' ולמה עשה הקב"ה להם כך אלא שהיה הקב"ה מתאוה לתפלתן אמר ריב"ל למה"ד למלך שהיה בא בדרך והיתה בת מלכים צועקת לו בבקשה ממך הצילני מיד הלסטים שמע המלך והצילה לאחר ימים ביקש לישא אותה לאשה היה מתאוה שתדבר עמו ולא היתה רוצה מה עשה המלך גירה בה הלסטים כדי שתצעוק וישמע המלך כיון שבאו עליה הלסטים התחילה צועקת למלך אמר לה המלך לכך הייתי מתאוה לשמוע קולך כך ישראל כשהיו במצרים והיו משעבדים בהם התחילו צועקים ותולין עיניהם להקב"ה שנאמר (שמות ב) ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וגו' ויזעקו מיד וירא אלהים את בני ישראל התחיל הקב"ה מוציאן משם ביד חזקה ובזרוע נטויה והיה הקב"ה מבקש לשמוע את קולם פעם אחרת ולא היו רוצין מה עשה גירה לפרעה לרדוף אחריהם שנאמר ופרעה הקריב מיד ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה' באותה שעה אמר הקב"ה לכך הייתי מבקש לשמוע קולכם שנאמר (שיר ב) יונתי בחגוי הסלע השמיעני קול אינו אומר אלא השמיעני את קולך אותו הקול שכבר שמעתי במצרים לכך כתיב השמיעני את קולך כיון שהתפללו אמר הקב"ה למשה מה אתה עומד ומתפלל כבר קדמה תפלתך של בני לתפלתך שנאמר מה תצעק אלי

Once the Jewish people saw that they were surrounded on all three sides, the sea in front, the enemy behind, and the animals on the sides, they raised their eyes to Hashem and cried out in prayer. Why did Hashem do this to them? Because Hashem wanted to hear their prayers again. Reish Lakish said, "It is like the king who was travelling when he heard the voice of a princess crying out, 'Please save me from these bandits!!' The king saved her, and after a few days decided he wanted to marry her. He wanted her to speak with him, but she refused to speak with him. The king thought to himself, 'I know how to get her to speak to me.' What did he do? He staged some bandits to attack her so that she should cry out again, and he would once again be there to save her. When the bandits came, she started crying out to the king to save her. The king said to her, 'This is all I wanted, for you to speak to me.'"

Similarly, when the Jewish people were under the tyranny of the Egyptians, they turned to Hashem and cried out to Him to save them from their plight. Hashem listened to their prayers and began redeeming them. Hashem wanted to hear their voice again, but they refused to speak with Him [??]. What did Hashem do? He sent Pharaoh after them

so that they would once again cry out to Hashem to save them. When they did, Hashem told them, "This is all I wanted, to hear your voices cry to me once again."

Our Sages point out that this Midrash provides us with a valuable insight as to how, so to speak, Hashem works, which, in a way, turns things upside down.

When a person encounters a difficult situation, a disturbing diagnosis for example, conventional thinking suggests that he needs to pray to Hashem to remove the problem. This Midrash reveals that the cause and effect are reversed: Hashem wants to hear his prayers, and, because He is not hearing them, Hashem staged the entire diagnosis to get him to pray. Had he been praying properly all along, he would not have needed this wake-up call to get him to start praying.

When matters are as we "expect" them to be, namely, we are healthy, and all of our needs are met, we tend to think that we have no need for divine intervention. With everything under control, for what do I need Hashem?

Nothing, of course, could be further from reality. Things are as they are *only* because Hashem in His great goodness has granted us these blessings, each of which constitutes a special gift from Hashem. And Hashem, being so patient with us, gives and gives, until we mistakenly think that we have it coming to us and that this is the way it should, and always will, be.

This is where a person runs into trouble. Hashem reaches the point where He says, "This fellow is taking things for granted, totally ignoring Me and not talking to Me. I need to wake him up! I know how to get him to talk!"

But why does Hashem care if we talk to Him or not? Why does He pressure us into talking to Him? Does He need our attention?

What we must always bear in mind is that Hashem is perfect; there is absolutely nothing that we can give to, or subtract from, Hashem. Hashem's essence cannot be affected by anything, and it makes no difference what we do, for He does not benefit from our mitzvot, and He does not suffer from our sins.

So why does He covet our prayers?

Hashem created a person to receive the most sublime pleasure possible in the World to Come. He put us in this world first, to earn that reward through the good choices that we would make throughout our lifetimes. Hashem wants us to connect to Him through the Torah and Mitzvot so that He can reward us for our good deeds. It is for **us** that Hashem wants us to have a relationship with Him. The relationship that we create in our lifetimes through fulfilling Hashem's commandments will constitute the relationship that we will have with Hashem when our soul leaves this world and returns to the World to Come. The deeper the relationship *here*, the deeper the relationship *there*. Having this relationship with Hashem is the greatest pleasure that one could ever have, and this is the reward of the World to Come.

Imagine the tragedy of a person who lived his whole life with no connection to Hashem. Life was all about *him*; what *he* did, what *he* has, and where *he* stood in the eyes of the world. When this person dies, leaving behind all of his material possessions, he will, for the first time, meet his Maker, Hashem. How will he connect to Him? The only currency viable in the World to Come is Torah and Mitzvot, as it is through them that one connects to Hashem. But this person never pursued them while alive, and now it is too late. This tragic result is also

the last thing that Hashem wants. He created man to receive pleasure, not torment.

I would imagine that the person would complain to Hashem, “*Why didn’t You tell me? Why didn’t You help me to get on the right path?*”

At that point, Hashem will show him that He indeed sent him numerous messages trying to notify him that He is here. But the person wasn’t interested in picking up the cues, ignoring every one.

This does not mean to say that this is the only reason that a person becomes sick or encounters difficulties in life. Hashem has a unique connection to each person in the world and has a reason for everything that He does. However, if something happens, this approach is the first option to consider. Who can truthfully say that his relationship with Hashem is perfect, that he is not neglecting Hashem in any way? This is a likely scenario, and the easiest to correct.

Walking down the street one day, a college professor happened to walk right into the middle of a gang fight where he was struck in the back by a bullet and rendered a paraplegic. Despite numerous surgeries and therapies, he remained confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. At that point he said, “Now I really need to figure out what life is all about!” Then he burst out laughing and said, “That was the dumbest thing I ever said! When I was healthy and well, and had all my faculties, I didn’t need to figure out what life is about; but now that I am a paraplegic, I do?”

In any case, he proceeded to figure out what life was about and why he was put on this earth and ultimately investigated his Jewish religion. He became religious and led a very meaningful life from his

wheelchair. He later observed, “It’s better to be a paraplegic and know what life is about than to be healthy and not have a clue.” He took his wake-up call seriously and used it to turn his life around.

This is why Hashem wants us to cry out to Him in prayer. He wants to have a relationship with us while we are down here on this earth so that we can continue it when we ultimately meet Him in person. If we didn’t create it while here, we can’t create it there.

When the Jewish people were trapped at the Yam Suf, Rashi tells us that they deployed the secret weapon of their forefathers, prayer: Shachrit, Mincha, and Arvit.

The Sages pose a question on Rashi. Their prayer at the Sea was of a different type: prayer from a foxhole!! This was prayer in a time of extreme difficulty, stress, and fear. How does Rashi compare it to an “everyday” Shachrit, Mincha, or Arvit?

The answer is that from here we learn the proper posture and mindset that one must assume when praying a “daily” Shachrit, Mincha, and Arvit! Our thoughts and feelings must be like a prayer from a foxhole, where we feel totally helpless and with no option other than Hashem, because the reality is that *we have no other option!* We are dependent on Hashem for everything that we have; and just because we have it now provides no guaranty that we will have it tomorrow. We are constantly dependent on Hashem’s lovingkindness and love. When we appreciate that we receive everything that we have from Hashem, and express this to Him thrice daily in our prayers, Hashem won’t need to send us a wakeup call. Additionally, through our daily prayers, we develop a very deep and strong relationship with Hashem through the gratitude that we feel and express to Him on a constant basis for all that He does for us. It will be ever stronger in the next world as we bask in

the sublime pleasure that Hashem bestows upon us for our good deeds and for the holy way in which we lived our lives.

The Talmud Tractate Berachot (55a) intriguingly says,

ואמר רב חסדא חלמא בישא עדיף מחלמא טבא

Rav Chisda said: It is better for a person to have a bad dream than to have a good one.

Why? Rashi explains that it is because a bad dream brings a person to do *teshuva* (repentance). A person seeing himself in a bad situation in his dream becomes shaken up; it jolts him out of his stupor to do *teshuva* to avoid the visualized consequences of his dream. A good dream allows him to think that all is well and that no change is necessary.

Sometimes Hashem sends us a “bad dream” in a different way.

All of a sudden, something starts bothering a person. It’s an ache where he never felt one before. What’s this from? he wonders. The doctor says, “It could be nothing, or it could be something very serious. We need to do some testing to figure it out.” The person goes through a battery of tests and then waits for the results. This is like the bad dream. A dream is just a dream with no tangible effect on anything; but it could portend a calamity down the road. If a person does *teshuva*, as Rashi suggests, he can avoid the whole thing. On the other hand, if he doesn’t respond, the eventuality may come true.

Similarly, the new pain that he is feeling is Hashem’s wakeup call to him. Hashem is telling him, “You need to give Me more attention, I don’t have enough of a relationship with you.” If a person responds appropriately, turning to Hashem in prayer, he may avoid the entire problem. This was all that Hashem wanted, and explains why He

brought him the pain in the first place. If, however, if he ignores Hashem's overture to him, he may find himself in deep trouble. Therefore, before the results come back from the tests, he should turn to Hashem and pray fervently to Him that the pain be nothing. *This* is what Hashem really wants. Then, when the results come back negative, he should not make the colossal mistake of thinking that there never was anything there! There *was* something that could have been very serious, but, because he responded properly, Hashem, having received the desired result, didn't need to make it into something. If, however, he doesn't respond, he may find himself with something very serious. Once diagnosed, it will take a miracle to remove it, and one cannot expect Hashem to do a miracle for him.

This works because, as the Midrash told us, Hashem wanting our prayers is the reason for the problem, not the other way around. When we know how Hashem operates, so to speak, and what He really wants from us, we can react with the proper response that will address the real problem instead of taking all kinds of pills or applying all kinds of band-aids that just treat the symptom but not the problem.

Appreciating this concept, that Hashem wants to have a relationship with each of us, may answer many questions about things that happen to us in life. Seeing them in this light, that they are overtures from Hashem, may guide us to the correct path as to how to deal with them in the most productive and beneficial way.

We can apply this concept to the current crisis in Israel today. Everyone is flummoxed.

With the casualties mounting every day, the people and the army want to put an end to the war, but they can't. If they leave a single member of Hamas alive, it will all start again. They want to secure the

release of the hostages, but they are at a loss as to how to accomplish it. 100,000 families are displaced with no end in sight. So many people are in distress, and there is no clear path forward as to how to end the problem. What are we to do?

The Talmud (Tractate Sota 49b) lists some of the signs that Mashiach is near. The last one stated is:

ועל מה יש לנו להשען על אבינו שבשמים

And upon whom do we have to rely? Our Father in Heaven.

When the situation reaches a point where we feel that the only way out is to turn our eyes to Hashem for salvation, this is a clear sign that Mashiach is near, because this is the precursor to Mashiach. We must realize that it is only Hashem who is in control and that we need to turn to Him. This is exactly what Hashem wants, to hear our voices.

So many Jews in Israel have lost their way and perceive no use for Hashem. On Shemini Atzeret, October 7, Hashem sent a wake-up call that gave people to realize that He is here and that He is real. He wants to hear our voices!!! We need to call out to Him as our forefathers did. We need to use our secret weapon, our mouths, and beseech Hashem for salvation. This is what Hashem wants from us, and this is the only avenue that can work. Hashem knows how to get us to talk. Let's do it!

* * *

To this point, there are many stories about people who were in grave danger on that day who accepted to return to Hashem and His commandments and, miraculously, were saved from the horrible fate that otherwise awaited them. These people understood the message and immediately called out to Hashem to help them. They were spared and lived to tell their stories.

I will share Amnon's story again and add one more.

Amnon's Story (Reprinted with permission from Chayeinu Magazine)

Shabbat Morning. I was strolling with Yigal, Rafi, and Avichai, enjoying the gentle breeze. Rafi pulled out two cigarettes and handed them to me to light. We continued on our way, kicking stones and sharing the latest news.

Suddenly, Yigal screamed. I looked up and we all started screaming. From the distance we saw mobs of terrorists running at us with knives, guns, and hand grenades. Frantically, we looked for a place to hide. The closest building was a gas station – not a smart choice, with its glass walls that could be easily smashed with a bullet or even from pounding. But for the lack of a better option, we ran in and locked the door.

Avichai broke the silence. "I promise You Hashem, I'll put on tefillin every day. Just let me live so I can show You how sincere I am."

"And I promise Shabbat. Hashem, every single Shabbat for the rest of my life. Just let me live." Rafi cried out, dropping his cigarette stub.

"Shabbat and tefillin and tzitzit too..." We all cried and thought of all the mitzvot we could remember – hoping to live long enough to realize our promises.

There they were. Arabs on the other side of the thin glass that divided us. Banging, pounding, kicking, and even

shooting. But that thin glass wall seemed to have the strength of iron barriers. The more they shot and banged, the more we cried and promised. And all four of us lived to realize our resolutions. We are now connected to that Power that held the barrier firm בין ישראל לעמים - between the Jewish nation and the gentiles.

Efrat's Story (Reprinted with permission from Chayeinu Magazine)

I was not your typical Chareidi (religious) woman. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But I wasn't clueless. I knew what I should be doing but it was hard for me to conform, so I didn't. I like creativity. I like doing things the way I decide. That's why I looked the way I did. And, from my looks, you wouldn't guess that I even knew there was a dress code for a Jewish woman.

Simchat Torah morning found me washing some last remains of the dishes, scrubbing down the table, and sweeping away some crumbs... when suddenly I heard screaming, yelling, banging and all the terrifying things that you never want to hear. Arabs, mobs of them, were running down the streets, breaking into apartments one after the next, killing, looting, demolishing, and leaving havoc in their wake.

Panic overcame me as I scooped my two little kids and locked myself into the bedroom. I knew it wasn't a safe option, but I couldn't think of anything better.

As the sounds of gunshots became louder, I called out to Hashem, for He is my father too, even if I hadn't always done His will in the past. I begged Him to save me and my children. "I promise" I cried out, "If I make it out alive, I give you my word that

I will throw out every single article of clothing that does not conform to Your will. Nothing will remain in my house if it does not suit a bat Yisrael.” I cried and begged for forgiveness for my past misdeeds and pleaded that I should live to correct my ways.

It took eighteen hours to learn that not one house on my block was spared. Not one- other than my own. And soon my wardrobe was added to the piles of rubbish that lined the roads.

I still like creativity, and I still like to look good- and I do! I look like your typical proud chareidi woman.

We have received a wakeup call. Let us respond by letting Hashem hear our voices in prayer. All Hashem really wants is for us to reconnect with Him. Doing so, will also help our brothers and sisters in Israel who are in distress.