



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפד Pesach

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Hello, Welcome to all!

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.

As we approach the holiday of Pesach this year, we may feel like the Jews in Egypt before Hashem redeemed them. It feels like the world is caving in around us.

Antisemitism is rapidly increasing as more and more countries condemn Israel for practicing genocide on Hamas. By assuming a position of “empathy for the underdog” they try to hide their true hatred for the Jews in the “politically correct” cloak of sympathy. Of course, they don’t fool anybody but themselves, for how could any logical person accuse Israel of genocide when they are doing everything within their power, even endangering their own soldiers, not to kill civilians. Not to mention that the entire campaign is only to create a safe environment for their citizens.

There is danger from the north, and Iran is shaking a threatening finger at Israel. Unrest from the extreme left threatens to topple the Israeli government, and even the support that Israel enjoyed from our very own president, is no longer there, as he is now advocating that Israel abort their mission and create a Palestinian state.

It seems like we are witness to the words we will soon read in the Haggadah at the Pesach Seder:

שְׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלִבָּד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ אֶלָּא שְׁבָכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ,
וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם

For not only one enemy has stood up against us to annihilate us, rather, in every generation they stand up to annihilate us, But Hakadosh Baruch Hu, (Hashem) saves us from their hands.

In times like these, is there hope? How do we activate the “*But Hakadosh Baruch Hu, (Hashem) saves us from their hands?*”

The secret lies in this story from the Tanach.

Devora the Prophetess had defeated Sisrah the mighty general, and the land of Israel was quiet and tranquil for forty years. In around the year 1090 BCE the Prophet tell us (Shoftim 6:1).

(א) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְדֹד וַיִּתְּנֵם יְדֹד בְּיַד מִדְיָן שִׁבַּע שָׁנִים

1) *And the Jewish people did evil in Hashem's eyes and Hashem gave them into the hands of Midyan for seven years.*

In desperation, the people cried out to Hashem, Who sent a prophet to help them (Judges 6: 8,9).

(ח) וַיִּשְׁלַח יְדֹד אִישׁ נָבִיא אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה אָמַר יְדֹד אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנֹכִי הָעֵלִיתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְאֶצִּיא אֶתְכֶם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים (ט) וְאַצֵּל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד כָּל לַחֲצִיְכֶם וְאַגְרֹשׁ אוֹתָם מִפְּנֵיכֶם וְאַתְּנָה לָכֶם אֶת אֶרְצָם

8) *And Hashem sent a prophet to the Jewish people, and he said to them. "So has Hashem the G-d of Israel said: 'I took you out of Egypt and I took you out of bondage. 9) I saved you from the hands of the Egyptians and from your oppressors, I banished them, and I gave you their land.'"*

An angel then appeared to Gidon the son of Yoash and told him, "Hashem is with you O mighty hero!"

Gidon responded (v. 13) to the angel,

(יג) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו גִּדְעוֹן בֶּן אֲדָנִי וַיֵּשׁ יְדֹד עִמָּנוּ וְלָמָּה מְצִאֲתָנוּ כָּל זֹאת וְאַיִה כָּל נִפְלְאוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר סָפְרוּ לָנוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לֵאמֹר הֲלֹא מִמִּצְרַיִם הָעֵלָנוּ יְדֹד וְעַתָּה נִטְשָׁנוּ יְדֹד וַיִּתְּנֵנוּ בְּכַף מִדְיָן

13. *And Gidon said to him, "Please my master, is Hashem still with us? Why, then, has all this happened to us? And where are all His wonders of **which our forefathers told us saying**, 'Behold, Hashem brought us up from Egypt? For now, Hashem has deserted us and he has delivered us into the grip of Midian.'"*

Rashi provides the background for this statement:

אשר ספרו לנו אבותינו - פסח היה, אמר לו : אמש הקרני אבא את ההלל, ושמעתי
שהיה אומר (תהלים קיד א) : בצאת ישראל ממצרים, יועתה נטשנו, אם צדיקים היו
אבותינו, יעשה לנו בזכותם, ואם רשעים היו, כשם שעשה להם חנם כן יעשה לנו, ואיה
כל נפלאותיו

It was Passover. Gidon told him, "Just last night my father read me the Hallel and I heard him saying (Psalm 114) "When the Jewish people left Egypt ... Hashem took them out with amazing miracles!" And now Hashem has abandoned us! If our forefathers were righteous, then Hashem should redeem us in their merit, and if they were evil, then Hashem should redeem us even though we don't deserve it, just like He redeemed them, even though they didn't deserve it."

Upon hearing Gidon's words *Hashem Himself* turned to him and said (v. 14).

יִדְּוּ וַיִּפְּן אֵלָיו וַיֹּדֶד וַיֹּאמֶר לְךָ בְּכַחֲךָ זֶה וְהוֹשַׁעְתָּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכַּפַּף מִדְּיָן הֲלֹא שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ

*"Go **with this strength of yours** and you shall save Israel from the grip of Midian; Behold I have sent you!"*

To which "strength" was Hashem referring? What was it that Hashem saw in Gidon that indicated that he was the one to save the Jewish people?

The simple reading is because Gidon spoke favorably about the Jewish people and was not critical of them. A leader must always believe in his people. But there is more.

It was Pesach, and at the *seder* the night before, Gidon heard his father relating the miracles that Hashem performed for the Jewish people when He took them out of Egypt. This is what raised the question in his mind. It's Pesach *now*, the holiday on which Hashem saved us with many amazing miracles! Where are those miracles *now*?

Why isn't He doing the same for us *now*? We are in the same situation with the Midianites, and Hashem has forsaken us! Where *is* He?

Gidon's expectation that only Hashem could once again save His nation was the quality that so impressed Hashem. Gidon took deeply to heart the message of Pesach and was building on the fact that Hashem took the Jews out of Egypt with so many miracles, as the reason that Hashem should once again save them from their current situation! Via the exodus, Hashem established Himself as our savior. It is inappropriate that Hashem's nation endure hardship and embarrassment. It is also an embarrassment to Hashem that His nation be at the mercy of a different nation. Isn't He all powerful? Can't He help them?

Hashem told Gidon, "You have the confidence in Me that I will do miracles for you as I did in Egypt? Then you are the person to save the Jewish people, and I will do the miracles for you just as I did for them. When you put your complete trust in Me, and me only, I will not let you down."

To this end, Hashem wanted to defeat Midyan in a miraculous way to show that it was He who defeated them and not Gideon's army. Indeed, Gidon defeated the Midianites without even lifting a sword! He started out with 32,000 soldiers, but Hashem told him to send away anyone who was afraid to fight. 22,000 troops left and Gideon was left with 10,000 men. Hashem then said to him, "There are still too many men." Hashem showed Gideon which men to take with him, and in the end, he was left with just 300 men to fight against the mighty Midyanite army. His 300 men had lanterns and shofars that they all blew at the same time, and the Midianites were so terrified that they all killed each other. This was an open miracle, and all saw that Hashem fulfilled Gidon's expectations.

The above describes the concept of בטחון - *trust and security*-in Hashem. When a person puts his complete trust in Hashem, and nothing else but Hashem, Hashem will not let him down. When we think that we have other options, Hashem says to us, “OK, try your other options and see if they can help you!”

This is the secret of the exodus from Egypt. When the Jewish people realized that they have no other option other than to place all their trust in Hashem, Hashem redeemed them. It seems that this is where we are heading also. Where else can we turn for salvation? All of our “friends” have abandoned us, and we are left with no way out of this nightmare. There is only one option; to put our trust in Hashem and ask Him to send the redemption.

Where does this concept originate? Hashem taught it to us.

When Hashem introduced Himself to the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai with the first commandment, He characterized Himself as the “*The One who took you out of Egypt!*” Why that moniker, and not “the creator of the world and everything in it, including you!” Our Sages teach us that Hashem wanted us to know that when He took us out of Egypt, He created a special relationship with us. In this relationship, He wants to be known as our savior. Hence, He is telling us that, when we are in trouble, **He** is where we need to go for salvation, just like in Egypt.

The Talmud (Shabbat 31a) says that when a person comes before the heavenly court after his life is complete, they will ask him, “Did you hope for the redemption? Did you wait for the Mashiach to come?” Where does this expectation come from? Where does the Torah command us to wait for the Mashiach?

The סמ"ק - Rabbi Yosef from Korviel, says that it comes from the first of the Ten Commandments.

כשם שאני רוצה שתאמינו בי שאני הוצאתי אתכם, כך אני רוצה שתאמינו בי שאני ה' אלהיכם ואני עתיד לקבץ אתכם ולהשיעכם. וכן יושיענו ברחמינו שנית

Just as Hashem wants us to believe that He took us out of Egypt, so He wants us to believe in Him that He will gather us in and redeem us a second time by bringing the Mashiach. Hashem wants to be known as our savior.

Similarly, He will save us from all troubles that we encounter. We are his children, and we have no other Father to turn to.

This idea answers a vexing question about the Passover holiday.

Let's say, for example, a person was in jail for many years, and at some point, a gracious individual, took up his cause and freed him from jail. The day he actually set foot on free soil was September 1st. It would be appropriate that every year, on September 1st the anniversary of his freedom, that he make a festive party for his family and close friends, to celebrate his freedom. He would invite his benefactor to join the festivities, and laud him for his goodness and thank him for the freedom that he enjoys so much. If, however, after several years of freedom, our subject found himself back in jail, would it make sense for him to celebrate September 1st, the day of his previous release from jail? What would he be celebrating? He is no longer free!

Isn't this what we are doing by celebrating Pesach? True we were freed from the slavery of Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, but our freedom has been stripped from us. We are in exile once again, not living in Israel with the Holy Temple service in place, as the Torah intended to be. We live in a world dominated by the morals and values of western civilization, not by the morals and values of the holy Torah which is what we were freed from Egypt for.

In a very significant way, we are again influenced by the “gods” of the society that we live in, and we ourselves may also serve them to a degree. So exactly why are we celebrating? Aren’t we like the freed prisoner who is back in jail?

When Hashem freed us from the slavery of Egypt, he didn’t just set us free and say to us, “Okay, you are now free, you’re on your own, have a nice life!” He took us out of Egypt to be His special nation. Going back to the analogy, what if the benefactor when redeeming the prisoner told him, “I am adopting you as my son! And from now on, whenever you are in trouble, you can count on me to take care of you.” He surely would celebrate the anniversary of his freedom, since that was the day his relationship with this great benefactor started! The celebration of September 1st gives him great hope and promise that he will once again be redeemed from this jail sentence as well.

Having said this, we gain a new insight into the Passover Seder. The celebration over the exodus is not only a celebration over Hashem taking us as His nation then, but also a celebration of the future redemption as well. Since with that event we became Hashem’s nation, it guarantees that Hashem will redeem us once again. Telling of all the miracles and fanfare that surrounded the exodus from Egypt emphasizes the point that our current situation is unbecoming to Hashem; downtrodden and vilified by the nations of the world. How could Hashem allow such a thing to happen to His beloved son, the Jewish people? It is a disgrace to His name! Please, Hashem, don’t allow this to continue! *For the honor of Your name*, show the world Who You are - Your might and power, as You did in Egypt!!

In the Haggadah we say:

שֶׁבְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ, וְתִקְדּוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם

In each and every generation, they stand up to annihilate us, and Hashem saves us from their hands.

We also say in the Haggadah,

בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר חֲנִיב אָדָם לְרֵאוֹת אֶת עֲצָמוֹ כְּאֵלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם

In each and every generation a person is obligated to see himself as if he himself left Egypt.

We are commanded to remember the exodus from Egypt twice daily. Why does it say only that “*in each and every generation*” a person must see himself as if he himself has left Egypt, why not every day, or every minute of every day? The answer is that there is a correlation between the two times it says, “*in each and every generation.*” It is in the merit of seeing ourselves as having been miraculously saved from Egypt that we merit being saved from the enemy that rises up against us to annihilate us, in every generation. When we activate the secret of the Exodus by placing our trust only in Hashem, and in His ability to deliver us from any hardship, as He proved in Egypt, Hashem will save us.

The Midrash tells us that after the Jewish people passed through the Reed Sea, a new dimension was added to their name עברי - *Ivri*. Avraham Avinu was known as *Avraham Ha-Ivri*. The commentaries explain that the root word עבר (*ever*) means “side”. He was called by this name because ideologically he was on one side of the scale, and the rest of mankind was on the other side. He believed in Hashem, One G-d, while the rest of the world believed in idols.

Having passed through the Reed Sea, in addition to the idea that the Jews are ideologically on the other side of the world than all the nations, the Jewish people became known as “*Ivrim*” because they “passed through” the sea. The word עברו ים - *they passed through the sea.*

What was so significant of this event that conferred a new meaning to their name?

This event defines the Jewish people. The middle of a sea is not a place where a human being can exist. After a few minutes of treading water, without intervention, he will succumb to exhaustion and fall to the bottom of the sea. But, here, an entire nation stood in the middle of the sea, with the water forming walls around them that did not cave in and drown them. They stood fast and secure in a place which under normal conditions would have been lethal! But this is exactly what Hashem wanted to demonstrate. "You are a miraculous nation! You can live in the middle of a sea! You are not subject to the laws of nature. I, Hashem, control nature, and as My people, you can rise above it.

Should you question if this is true, ponder this for a moment. How am I here as a Jew to think about this question? By every logical and reasonable analysis, no Jew should be alive today to believe in Hashem. With everything the Jews have been through - ***In each and every generation, they stand up to annihilate us,*** - we are still here to tell the story of Pesach and how Hashem saved us. Our very existence today is a veritable miracle! Hashem has protected and preserved us throughout the thousands of years of exile in foreign countries and from the numerous attempts to annihilate us.

In the words of our Sages, "One small sheep in the midst of seventy hungry, salivating wolves, each vying to devour it, does it have a chance to survive? If it has a powerful shepherd, keeping the wolves at bay, absolutely!"

This is how it feels today also; like we are in the middle of a raging sea with giant squalls of water on all sides of us just waiting to crash down upon us to drown us. Somehow, miraculously we continue to survive, as the squalls of water never come down to drown us. Hashem is protecting us, as He always has.

As we approach the Pesach holiday, let's take the message of Pesach to heart and realize that Hashem is our loving Father and that He and only He can save us from our troubles. Let's activate the "Pesach card" and put all our trust in Hashem and ask Him to take us out of this exile once and for all. He actually wants us to turn to Him and say, "It's Pesach, where are Your miracles?" This is what Gidon did, and that is why Hashem chose him to save the Jewish people.

Hashem promised us through the Prophet Michah (7:15) that the miracles that accompany the coming of the Mashiach will mirror the ones that occurred in Egypt.

(טו) כִּי־מִי צִאתְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֶרְאֶנּוּ נִפְלְאוֹת

15) As in the days when you left the land of Egypt, I will show wonders.

The Sages teach us that in the month of Nissan the Jews were freed from Egypt, and, similarly, in the month of Nissan, the Jews will be freed from their exile. Nissan is the month of miracles. This Pesach, let us ask to Hashem to show us His miracles and redeem His children from their troubles through bringing the Mashiach. Our heartfelt, fervent prayers are sure to have a powerful impact.