



PARASHAT BESHALACH

DOING THE RIGHT THING...

Dealing with conflict

The sages say that when the Jewish people saw the Egyptians chasing after them, they divided into four groups regarding what to do. One group said they should give-up and return to Egypt; a second group wanted to fight the Egyptians; the third wanted to flee into the dessert and hide (according to the Jerusalem Talmud they wanted cry out to God in the desert); the fourth weighed the options and decided to keep moving forward, into the water.

Four groups, four approaches

There is a general lesson to be learnt here. The Egyptians rushing up from behind are symbolic of any struggle that threatens to stop us from advancing and reaching our goals. The four different responses to the impending struggle stem from four different ways of seeing the world, each of which represents a consciousness linked with one of the four Worlds of Kabbalah.

Immediate surrender to the demands of the enemy is the motto of the first group who wanted to return to Egypt. This is the point of view of those whose sole ambition is to live comfortably and without worries. When faced with a challenging struggle, individuals who see this as the goal of life will quickly give up their beliefs and goals. This attitude is expressed today by those who seek to surrender to the Arabs in hopes that they, in return, will act in goodwill and surrender their own goals and objectives. It is also the ill that has befallen many who in light of the difficulties experienced in the Land of Israel have simply picked up and left for somewhere “better.”

Even the call to arms for fighting the enemy made by the second group contains a hidden aspect of surrender. By halting your own advance and turning to face your enemy, even if you have not surrendered completely, you have given your adversary a partial victory in that he has stopped you from moving forward.

The third approach, fleeing towards the desert, does not face the enemy, but rather claims, as the verse in Isaiah states, “Hide for a moment, until the danger passes.”¹ The argument, which we know so well from many pious Jews today is to hide in isolation in the shadow of the “clouds of glory.” There in a closed world, they hope that things will work themselves out. Even this way of dealing with conflict and struggle expresses an element of surrender, both in the helplessness it fosters and in its aversion from coping with struggle.

The fourth way of thinking, and it is important to stress that this was the only option that accorded with the Almighty’s, claims that the only proper response to an enemy the likes of Egypt who attacks from behind (as opposed to *Amalek* who at the end of our *parshah* attacks head on and forces us to fight him) is to push forward, even if this means walking straight into the sea. The only real solution is to ignore the enemies from behind, advance, and continue marching on towards our goal, with determination and willingness for self-sacrifice.

Four approaches, four worlds

When corresponding these four modes of consciousness with the Kabbalistic Worlds, note that each reflects the *sefirah* of crown, the source of the general attitude guiding the consciousness in that World.

The first group waving the flag of surrender corresponds to the World of Action, the lowest level of consciousness, where evil has the upper hand. When a Jew’s consciousness resides mostly in this world and it remains detached from the consciousness and points of view of the higher Worlds (which one connects to through the Torah and the *tzadikim*) when faced with conflict, he cannot help but feel that there is no hope and that evil will overpower him and be triumphant. A person in this state of mind despairs because he feels isolated and alone, even if he is in a group of like-minded individuals.

The approach to struggle taken by the second group that turns back to face the enemy corresponds to the consciousness of the World of Formation, which (at least externally) divides reality into half good and half evil. The World of Formation is where the struggle between the good and evil inclinations in each individual's life takes place. Those who turn to battle evil do so because they have not heard or taken to heart the Ba'al Shem Tov's teaching that one should "refrain from evil," through the power of "doing good."² In order to win our fight against evil (be it the evil that still lurks in our heart, or an external enemy), Chassidut teaches that we should ignore it and focus only on augmenting our good actions. As we have explained, by turning to engage the enemy (and forgetting about the good task at hand) this group's consciousness provides the enemy with an important psychological victory.

The individuals in the third group, who prefer the path of isolating themselves in the desert until everything blows over corresponds with the consciousness found in the World of Creation. The World of Creation is the source of repentance (*teshuvah*) and the cry to God, which stems from the sense of distance from the World of Emanation, the consciousness that is one with the Divine. This causes the individuals with this type of consciousness to cry out and pray to God (thereby distancing themselves from their true destination, Mount Sinai, symbolic of the Divine consciousness of the World of Emanation). Indeed, unlike the emotional storm that accompanies the consciousness of Formation (the second group) this approach is based on reason. The feelings

stemming from a consciousness of the World of Creation are grounded and indeed there are times when one should simply turn to God and cry out for salvation, "from one's self and the hearts depths."³ Still, as much as the emotions are already clarified, the intellectual mindset of this group's consciousness is yet to be and what is lacking is the ability to keep one's focus on the ultimate goal—in this case, reaching Mt. Sinai and receiving the total clarity of the Torah.

The fourth group's consciousness corresponds to the awareness of the World of Emanation, the highest world, where God's will shines brilliantly and clearly. In Kabbalah this is described as, "the father principle (i.e., supernal wisdom, the source of Torah) nests in emanation." The real goal is to connect the souls of Israel to the Torah its truth and the life it gives. Thus, the goal is to reach Mt. Sinai and if a body of water blocks the way, one must be prepared to jump in, without any hesitation, knowing full well that nothing can deter us from reaching this goal.

Obviously, there is a powerful message here for us. We too face difficult challenges today and it is all too easy to choose to choose the easy way out. Sometimes, even choosing to fight is the wrong choice, because the only purpose evil has is to confuse us and divert our focus from our real task. The only true and tested response is to continue moving forward and advancing towards our goals with total self sacrifice.

(based on Malchut Yisra'el, pp. 291-301)

Notes: **1.** Isaiah 26:20 **2.** Psalms 34:15. **3.** Psalms 64:7.

THE REDEMPTION GROWS NEAR

The ultimate goal of the true king of Israel is to become one with his people, a state alluded to by the sages' statement that "the servant of a king is a king [himself]." Even if all his subjects enjoy the best possible life, the king will not be satisfied until he and his essence—his single-mindedness in serving God and God alone—is incorporated into each of his subjects.

The king is willing to completely give up his own self and his privacy in order that each of his subjects can be transformed into him—this is the true king. The king yearns that everyone should become Mashiach, to the point where he himself is no longer seen, is no longer in the picture. It is as if the king can disappear from the picture altogether.

(based on Chasdei Dovid Hane'emanim, volume 9, p. 271)