

Bursts of Light **Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

These weeks we study the parshiyos of the Torah that lead up to our exit from Mitzrayim after generations of our forefathers being enslaved there. Ever since we were young children, we have looked forward with anticipation to the stories of the makkos that lead to Yetzias Mitzrayim.

We learn in this week's parsha about the second to last makkah, which was that of choshech, darkness. Mitzrayim was frozen in a thick, blinding darkness, which prevented the people there from doing anything or moving at all. The Jews were unaffected and had light wherever they went.

Chazal teach that only one-fifth of the Jewish people merited leaving Mitzrayim. The others were not worthy of redemption and perished while the shroud of black engulfed Mitzrayim. Those who lacked the strength of faith to maintain their belief in Hashem and remain loyal to their customs and traditions died under the cover of darkness.

Rishonim and Acharonim remind us that what transpired to our forefathers is a precursor of what will happen to us. "Maaseh avos simon labonim." The trajectory of the Jews in Mitzrayim foretells what will happen to us as we approach our period of redemption. The Jewish people, dispersed around the world, will be faced with many challenges. We will suffer until the appointed time arrives.

Today, we live in the period of ikvesa deMeshicha, leading up to Moshiach's arrival. Just as during the period leading up to the redemption from Mitzrayim there was a plague of darkness, so too, in our day, there is darkness all around us.

Those who stick with Torah and mitzvos have light, as the posuk states, "Ki ner mitzvah v'Torah ohr." Those who remain faithful to Torah and mitzvos have light with which to guide them when all is dark and gloomy and keep them on the proper path. Those who forsake religion in the face of challenges lose the wherewithal to sustain themselves in troubled times and sink in the swamp of depravity, greed and anxiety.

We are confronted by a constantly changing society, one that is plagued by ebbing morals and a host of temptations that threaten to plague our lives. New problems arise daily. In order to merit Moshiach, we have to exert ourselves to remain faithful to that which makes us great. We have to remember why we were created and what our mission is. When we undertake an action, we have to think about whether it brings us closer to Moshiach or draws us away from him. If it will bring the geulah closer, then we should continue what we are doing, and if we assess that it will not hasten the geulah and will not bring light to the world, we should refrain from that action.

We are confounded by many tests as the level of tumah rises around us and so many are blinded to the obvious truth.

The challenges are tough. The tests to our emunah and bitachon are great. Tzaros abound. The good suffer, the weak squabble, and Jews around the world fear the future.

We can only imagine what transpired during the awful period of Egyptian slavery, as tens of thousands of grandchildren of Yaakov Avinu gave up hope. Mitzrayim, with its dark and corrupt values and attitudes, appealed to them. They viewed Judaism as backward and constricting. And then the plague of darkness descended on the country and those poor souls slipped away into oblivion.

The challenge is to realize that what appears to be light, what seems to be an illuminated approach or idea, might well be darkness.

At a time that cries out for light in so many ways, let us each do our share to shine some light on a dark world and help reveal the truths about the occurrences of our time, so that we can prepare for Moshiach. We see many things that are plainly obvious to us, yet we see how the media, culture and outside world misinterpret and lie in order to further their agenda. In the outside world, darkness rules, truth is of little importance, and lies are of no consequence.

Just as in Mitzrayim the Jews were subjugated by hypocritical people and a hypocritical king, so too, in our day, hypocrisy abounds, especially when it comes to Jews and the current war. Countries that have killed people with wild abandon bring charges against Israel for battling terrorists bent on its destruction. While tens of thousands of people are killed in Africa with nobody caring or taking notice, the world is suddenly concerned when Israel fights to live in peace. Russia invaded a neighbor, committing war crimes and wanton destruction and death, but nobody seems to mind enough to make a tumult about it. There are no protests, no resolutions, nothing in the mass media about the terrible genocide. The world is only concerned with little Israel, as protests against it continue across the nations of the West and East.

As Iran is at the doorstep of acquiring a nuclear weapon, if they don't already have one, we don't see any of the nations and leaders who swore they would never let Iran get a bomb doing anything about it. A country that is a sworn enemy of the West, which has unleashed armies of terrorists against myriad countries, continues on its murderous path, with nobody doing anything to stop it.

And then we are told that President Biden, ostensibly the leader of the free world, is furious at Israel's prime minister because he is not letting up on his fight against terror. Terror threatens Western countries, yet America's president does nothing to punish the world's worst state sponsor of terrorism. Instead, he seeks to rein in the one country that is battling terrorists who threaten all and to reward the group that perpetrated genocide against Israel on October 7th by rewarding them with a state of their own from which to battle Israel.

Jews who have been living peacefully in Europe, the U.S. and Canada are facing anti-Semitism on a level unseen in the past couple of generations. Schools, from elementary to high school to college, now not only condone Jew-hatred and bias, but also educate their students to despise

Jews. Ancient canards that many thought were dead and buried long ago are once again vibrant and accepted as fact.

The State of Israel was founded with the Zionist dream that if there would be a Jewish country, anti-Semitism would end and Jews would be accepted among the family of nations. It hasn't exactly worked out that way.

This week, The New York Times sought to promote "diasporism," the idea that Israel need not play a central role in Jewish life. Their article cited a quote from a New York Jewish writer, who wrote, "When I die, I hope it will be here in New York, the promised land..." I read that and the frightening, prophetic words of the Meshech Chochma in Bechukosai about those who believe Berlin is Yerushalayim, immediately came to mind.

People are confounded, wondering why the world hates us and why they judge – and treat – us so hypocritically. Those who study and follow the Torah don't have such issues, for they know the truth as expressed by the Ramban at the end of this week's parsha.

Hashem brought the makkos to show all that He created the world and runs it, causing everything that happens to happen. When He wills it, He keeps the world going according to its regular way of functioning, but when He wills it differently, He changes things around and proves that He is in charge.

This is why the Torah instructs each generation to teach the next one that Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim and how He did it, through many miracles. Thus, Yetzias Mitzrayim is a constant reminder that Hashem causes everything to happen and nothing happens by itself. There is a reason for everything. Hashem watches over each one of us with kindness. Those who perform the mitzvos properly are rewarded and those who do not are punished. We are never alone and things don't happen just because a tyrant, or an enemy, or a competitor, or a child or spouse woke up in a bad mood that day. It happened because Hashem caused it to, for reasons not always understood by us.

This is why we observe many mitzvos as zeicher l'Yetzias Mitzrayim, to remember that Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, because remembering that He took us out reminds us that Hashem created the world and controls it and everything that happens in it and to us.

Tefillin is one of those mitzvos. The posuk commands us at the end of the parsha to affix tefillin to our arms and heads: "Vehoyah l'os al yodcha uletotafos bein einecha ki b'chozek yod hotzianu Hashem miMitzroyim." Tefillin on our arms and forehead is a sign that Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim with a strong hand. Every day, when we put on tefillin, we reach back to the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim, remembering what we are all about and our relationship with Hakadosh Boruch Hu.

In next week's parsha of Beshalach, we learn of the "mann," a supernatural food which Hashem sent every morning (except Shabbos) so that the Jews in the Midbar would have what to eat.

Moshe told Aharon to take some and put it in a flask for safekeeping to remind the Jewish people that Hashem is the one who feeds them.

Rashi cites that in the days of Yirmiyohu hanovi, when he admonished the people for not studying Torah, they responded that if they would forgo their jobs and learn Torah they would not be able to provide for themselves and their families. Yirmiyohu removed the container of manna and told them that just as Hakadosh Boruch Hu provided for your forefathers in the desert, so too He can provide for you.

This concept is reinforced by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 1:5), which states that a person should recite parshas hamann, the pesukim of the Torah which speak about the deliverance of the manna daily, to strengthen the belief that Hashem provides us with our food. Rishonim write that people who recite these pesukim daily will never lack for food.

Every time we eat something we thank Hashem for the food and are reminded that He created the world and provides for everyone, thus strengthening our emunah and earning for us zechuyos to merit Hashem's continued blessings.

The mitzvah of Kiddush Hachodesh, also in this week's parsha, reminds us on a monthly basis that we should never despair. Although the moon shrinks and disappears, it always returns to its former glory, size and strength. The Jewish people, as a nation and as individuals, should never perceive loss and hardship as eternal setbacks. Hashem watches over us and provides us the ability of resurgence and growth.

As we see forces of darkness and fiction vying for control, we should strengthen our emunah and bitachon in Hashem and live our lives in the way that we will find favor in His eyes.

We are to be a nation of truth and morality, decency and honesty. We don't get down when others knock and mock us, and we don't get blown off track by hypocrites, buffoons and attention-seekers with bullhorns.

We remember who we are, what we are, and that we are led by the Creator, Whom we follow.

In a world where greatness is elusive, mediocrity is mistaken for superiority, fairness has been replaced with intolerance, love and acceptance with hate, we must remember that there is strength in humility and nobleness in character and we follow our convictions, those of our forefathers throughout the ages, whether they are popular today or not.

Torah and mitzvos are beacons of light – the light that drives out the darkness of makkas choshech that characterizes our day. May they continue lighting our paths and brightening our lives until the coming of Moshiach very soon.