

Sing in the Darkness **Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

Let your mind paint the scene. At the time that Paroh decreed that all Jewish baby boys be killed upon birth, Moshe was born prematurely so that the Mitzriyim would not be aware that he was born. He was set afloat in a small boat/basinet in the Nile River, with his sister watching nearby to be able to follow him and ensure his safety. The daughter of Paroh came by and decided to rescue him. She brought him back with her to the palace and raised him as her son.

Subsequently, Moshe was forced to flee and went to Midyan, where he married a daughter of the righteous Yisro. His father-in-law gave him a job, tending his flock of sheep. Moshe was walking with his flock in the desert when he came upon a sight that captured his attention and concentration.

There was a fire burning inside of a bush, and though the branches were burnt, the bush wasn't being consumed by the fire. He wondered how that could possibly be and surmised that perhaps there was something supernatural going on that was rooted in holiness. Why else would Hashem cause him to pass this phenomenon?

The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 39:1) states that just as his ancestor, Avrohom Avinu, studied the world and concluded that it could not have come into being by itself, Moshe perceived that Hakadosh Boruch Hu was announcing His Presence. Moshe recognized that this was to become a defining moment in his life.

As he stood at the bush engrossed in thought, the Ribbono Shel Olam addressed him, telling him that he had been selected for a lofty mission, with the goal of saving His people and leading them out of Mitzrayim.

Moshe asks for assurance. "When the Bnei Yisroel will ask me who sent me, what Name shall I tell them?"

Hashem told him to say that He appeared to him with the name "Ehkeh asher Ehkeh – I will be with them through this golus and all the subsequent travails and hard times."

Moshe's life had changed drastically. From being a lowly shepherd in a strange country, the Creator had spoken to him and appointed him as his messenger to return to Mitzrayim and tell the poor, abused, impoverished nation of slaves that freedom was in the air and they would soon be leaving Mitzrayim as free people. Hashem would take them for His nation, and there would be a spectacular exit, after which He would take them to the land He had promised to their forefathers, Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov.

Though Moshe was the humblest person who ever lived, he could have imagined that his message would be cheerfully welcomed as the people who had only known slavery would hear that their oppression, misery and anguish would soon end.

However, that didn't happen. When he gathered them together and gave over Hashem's message of emancipation, they didn't listen to him.

The posuk recounts, "Velo shomu el Moshe mikotzer ruach umei'avodah kashah – They didn't listen to Moshe because they were short of spirit and overworked."

Perhaps they wanted to listen and they wanted to hear what Hashem's messenger had come to tell them, but they were unable to. They couldn't listen. They were incapable of hearing the words that spoke of a transformation that would soon change their lives. They were so dispirited that they could not process the message promising a better tomorrow.

Like every posuk in the Torah, this posuk is recorded for posterity to instruct and guide us. The words and their lessons remain relevant for eternity. The story of the people too tired to hear the words they had been awaiting for two hundred years is relevant to us in our day.

We live in a state of anticipation, always awaiting good news. People nowadays are glued to the news, waiting for something good to happen. They wait for the war to end in Gaza. They wait for the hostages to be returned. They wait for airlines to resume flying to Eretz Yisroel so that they can afford to go and again be in the land of our avos. They wait for news that the economy has turned around, that an election has taken place and the party of the anti-Semites has been thrown out. People wait for news on a cure for cancer, Parkinson's disease, ALS, Alzheimer's and all the other dreaded illnesses that people are suffering from.

And most of all, we wait for the news to spread that Moshiach has arrived with a message similar to the one Moshe Rabbeinu brought to Mitzrayim – that our redemption is here.

Suddenly, it has once again become acceptable to be anti-Semitic. Universities believed to be institutes of higher learning are exposed to be nothing of the sort, instead, they are incubators of radical leftist ideology and rabid anti-Semitism. Each day, there is news of an attack or a rally, which remind us that we are in golus and not nearly as safe as we had imagined.

We view the news of the day and we seek to find in them hints portending the coming of Moshiach. We know that everything is from Hashem. We see in wars and tragedies, triumphs and recessions, words of the nevi'im coming alive, leading, we hope, to the geulah.

Our emunah guides and inspires us, even when times are rough. It allows us to see past the darkness and the rough times, knowing that just as night is followed by day, so, too, rough times are followed by good times.

The period of the First World War was very difficult for the Jews of Eastern Europe. Entire towns and cities were emptied of their Jewish inhabitants, who were forced into exile with no source of income. They faced hunger and all sorts of deprivation. Many were drafted into the Russian army, never to be seen again. Yeshivos were also greatly affected, going from place to place, existing on mere morsels of food.

A bochur was very depressed and couldn't pull himself together. He approached the Chofetz Chaim and bared his soul to him, stating that he could not continue. "Rebbe, ich ken nit oishalten." The rebbe of Klal Yisroel looked at the bochur and said to him that he could strengthen himself by looking at the history of Am Yisroel all the way back to the beginning of time.

Adam Harishon was created on Friday and sinned that same day. After a few hours, the sun went down and it became dark. He thought that the world was ending and cried to himself that his sin destroyed the world. He fell asleep and woke up the next morning to find the sun rising. He realized that this is the way of the world. It gets dark and then it gets light.

The Chofetz Chaim told the poor boy to take the message of Adam to heart and to know that every period of sadness is followed by a period of good. That is the way Hashem created the world, as the posuk says in Bereishis, “Vayehi erev, vayehi voker – There was night and then there was day.”

The same applies in our day. Look at the Holocaust, when six million of our brethren were brutally murdered. Many more were displaced, ending up around the world as poor refugees in strange countries, many with minimal religious life.

Those same survivors were gifted by Hashem to be able to rebuild their lives, remarry, and give birth to a new generation of Torah Jews. Yeshivos grew, communities expanded, and now Yiddishkeit flourishes in cities and towns across the globe. There are more people learning in yeshivos and kollelim today than before the war. Organizations are burgeoning as the population multiplies.

The sun set during the Second World War, but then it rose and continues to strengthen.

The remarkable growth was led by people who, though beaten and robbed of everything, never got down. Their faith allowed them to dream and to do where others thought it would be impossible to resurrect that which was. Nothing could get them down. Each day was viewed as a chance at coming back and rebuilding, step by step, piece by piece, brick by brick, and person by person.

They had spirit, and their spirit carried them as they benefitted from Hashem’s help.

But there are always bitter people who have no spirit. Surrounded by opportunity and blessing, they focus on the negatives, locked in and held back by the inability to see beyond the sadness and darkness of the past. Their lack of faith precludes them from dreaming of a better day and pushing themselves to overcome the gloom and working towards building and rebuilding. They can’t acknowledge greatness in others, nor do they possess the self-confidence to achieve anything themselves.

There is so much goodness in our world. Despite the bad and sad parts, there is much to be happy about if we would just look for it. We forget that we are blessed to live in a land of plenty, which provides for the poor and those unable to make ends meet. Despite the increasing decay, we are able to dedicate ourselves to lives of Torah and kedusha, accomplishments and success.

Torah and mussar keep the person who studies them active, optimistic, energetic and positive. It shapes an individual into a mentch, a person who respects others and is worthy of respect himself.

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (6:9) explains that the reason the Jews in Mitzrayim were not able to listen to the words of Moshe was because they were not bnei Torah. Torah broadens a person’s heart, he says. Had they been bnei Torah, they would have been receptive to Moshe’s message.

We, who have been granted the gift of Torah, have no excuse for not being open to hearing the words of the Moshe Rabbeinus of our generation and those who seek to improve our lots and help us prepare ourselves for the geulah.

Hakadosh Boruch Hu appeared in the burning bush to signify to Moshe to never give up on the Jewish people. Despite how blackened they are, Moshe was to know that they will never get eaten up and will never be totally destroyed.

Hashem was also indicating to Moshe that no matter how religiously diseased the Jewish people appear, there is always a flame of holiness burning inside of them. You can meet a Jewish person and think that he has strayed so far from the path of Torah that there are no longer any sparks left in him. Know that he has a neshomah, and in that neshomah there is a pilot light such as the one that used to remain lit in stoves, ovens and boilers.

The small flame remains lit, waiting for someone to flip the switch. When that happens, a torch can be ignited inside of that person. It is our duty to inspire people who have strayed and get that fire going, and sometimes it happens by itself in response to outside stimuli.

Since the awful day of October 7th and the resultant war and eruption of anti-Semitism, untold thousands of Jews who had strayed had their switch flipped and they began to seek a connection to Hashem and to Torah and mitzvos.

We should never give up on anyone.

We should always look for the good in everyone, and when the good is not evident, we should seek to uncover it.

In our own lives, we should note all the good we have and be thankful for everything. We should be thankful for the shuls we have to daven in and the yeshivos and botei medrash spreading Torah and kedusha to a thirsting people. We should be thankful for the peace and tranquility that we enjoy, and for the homes, the heat, the cars, the gasoline, the electricity, and everything else that we are blessed with in this country.

No matter how bad we think things are, there are always many things to be thankful for. Lately, people have adopted the daily habit of writing down things that they thank Hashem for. Try it and you will be amazed by how much good there is and how kind Hashem is to you every single day.

It is heartening and it can be therapeutic. It creates an opportunity to sing in the darkness of golus. Despite all that is going on in your life and in the world, there is always much to be thankful for. By appreciating Hashem's kindness, we become encouraged to take steps that we were hesitant to take, to aim higher in Torah and avodah, to know that with proper tefillah, emunah and bitachon, there is nothing that can stand in our way.

When we learn the parsha and read the posuk, "Velo shomu el Moshe mikotzer ruach umei'avodah kashah," let us ensure that we aren't worn down without spirit. Let us keep ourselves focused to see sights and sounds pointing to imminent geulah, may it arrive speedily in our day.