

## **The Roller Coaster of Life** **Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz**

After learning the first parshiyos of Shemos, we arrive this week at Parshas Beshalach, which depicts the exit of the Bnei Yisroel from the awful experiences of Mitzrayim. So many years later, we are overcome with joy and universally refer to the Shabbos when Beshalach is read as Shabbos Shirah, the Shabbos of Song.

But as we study on, we learn that following the joyous redemption from Mitzrayim, the Bnei Yisroel began complaining, doubting Moshe Rabbeinu and expressing a desire to turn around and go back to a life of servitude.

They were able to bounce back from their depression, return to a lofty level, and chant Oz Yoshir. They appreciated all that Hashem had done for them, recognized His greatness, and sang the eternal shirah, which we recite every day.

After experiencing a trying, sad or insulting circumstance, a person sometimes thinks that it's all over. But later, he views it in retrospect and sees that awful experience as a springboard for a new opportunity or self improvement. He looks back at what happened and realizes that everything he went through was Divinely planned and for his betterment. When it all comes together and he is able to appreciate what Hashem did for him, he is overwhelmed by Hashem's kindness and shirah bursts forth.

At Krias Yam Suf, everything became evident to everyone at the same time and the whole nation sang shirah.

Describing the song, the Torah uses the singular tense of the word shir, to sing. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh remarks that the posuk states, "Ashira, I will sing," because, at that moment, there was no separation between the multitudes of people who had traversed the Yam Suf. There was complete achdus, as the people were all of one mind in putting the whole story together and grasping what had been done for them, followed by the immediate need to express their gratitude.

The moment before Oz Yoshir was when everything came together. These same Bnei Yisroel, who just a few pesukim earlier had been complaining about being redeemed, and who doubted, grumbled and expressed a wish to return to servitude, suddenly simultaneously realized Hashem's greatness and total dominion over every facet of creation. At Krias Yam Suf, they finally saw and understood the glory of Hashem.

Taking this a step further, we can answer a question raised by Chazal in the Medrash and in the Zohar. They question why the Torah uses the term shirah to describe Oz Yoshir. Shirah is lashon nekevah. Shir is lashon zochor and would have been more appropriate.

We can explain that the Bnei Yisroel at Krias Yam Suf perceived that they were the ultimate recipients of the Ultimate Giver. In seforim, the appellation for one who receives is “bechinas nukva.” Through the use of lashon nekeivah, the Torah signifies that, at that moment, the Bnei Yisroel recognized themselves as recipients. It was this realization and appreciation that enabled them to rise to the level of proclaiming the ultimate shirah and allowed them the zechus to sing the enduring song of creation, which we repeat in perpetuity.

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, a master of emunah and bitachon, whose messages of faith sustained the Mirrer Yeshiva in its darkest hours, was said to derive his inspiration from reciting the shirah each morning. Talmidim relate that before reciting Oz Yoshir, he would prepare himself as he did for Shema or Shemoneh Esrei, realizing that he was entering a new dimension in avodah.

When the shirah is read in shul, the entire congregation rises to hear it read with its unique, festive “trop.” The laining then continues with yet another central moment in our history. Klal Yisroel, a nascent nation, is confronted by Amaleik. We read about Moshe Rabbeinu raising his hands, inspiring his people to victory. When he lowers his hands, the Bnei Yisroel begin to falter. This story is written as a timeless lesson. Hashem tells Moshe, “Kesov zos basefer ki macho emcheh es zecheh Amaleik – Write this down and write that the milchomah will endure, milchomah laHashem b’Amaleik midor dor.”

Rashi and the Ramban quote the Medrash (Tanchuma, Seitzei 11), where Chazal teach that the existence of Amaleik prevents the Kisei Hakavod from being whole and renders Hashem’s Name incomplete.

Since Amaleik has such a corrosive influence, why is he allowed to exist to confront us in every generation? Why does Hakadosh Boruch Hu allow him to survive, when He could have made him and his nation as extinct as all the other nations that haunted us and are long gone and forgotten?

Perhaps the reason Amaleik is permitted to exist is that, as the Jews saw on the banks of the Yam Suf, our lot is not to live within perfection, but, rather, to create perfection within what is given.

The path of our nation has always been strewn with obstacles. We have always traveled a road that is not flat, but full of hills and valleys, peaks and drops. We are the people who went from intense labor to witnessing the glory of Hashem, seeing makkos wreak havoc on the lives of our captors. We went from the appearance of Moshe, who promised to save us, to an increased workload, followed by offering the Korban Pesach in defiance of our brutal hosts and, finally, baking matzos and marching off to freedom.

We quickly grew afraid of the freedom and began longing for a return to Mitzrayim. That valley was followed by the peak of shirah, when everything became clear. The Bnei Yisroel saw their past, present and future merge into a seamless song.

And then, following the apex of clarity, came Amaleik.

Amaleik is a reminder that we can never be at peace. We can never rest. We can never let loose and think that we have overcome so much and can deal with anything that can pop up in our way. Life is not like that. We always have to be on guard.

Knowing that Amaleik exists reminds us that there are challenges around the corner and that we must be prepared for them. Unexpected issues invariably crop up, just as there were challenges back when the Jews were comfortably on their way to the Promised Land.

Until the arrival of Moshiach, there will be ups and downs. There will be periods of intense joy and times of dreadful sadness. There will be birth and death, weddings and divorces, employment and unemployment. Just as we can never be complacent, we must never grow despondent and we must never say that times will not get better. We must never be lulled into thinking that things happen without reason. We must never become depressed, thinking that we are alone.

Life is like a roller coaster. The little cars roll along the track, slowly making their way up the hill until they reach a high point. From there it's downhill, with the momentum of the descent propelling them into the valley and then the next height. Up and down the cars go, around and around, providing frightening lows, invariably followed by great thrills.

And so it is in life. There are lows and there are highs and they follow each other. The hills of life allow us to regain our strength and appreciation of our abilities, injecting us with energy and stamina to propel us out of the inevitable lows that can follow.

Today, we don't face off against Amaleik as we once did, but his presence is felt too often.

Amaleik is present in those evil people who kill and torture Jews. It is present in the nations of the world that seek to crimp Israel and not allow it to destroy its enemies. It's there in the rise of anti-Semitism, pushing senseless hatred of Jews, just because. It sounds ridiculous, but Amaleik is out of the fringes, claiming that a tunnel in Crown Heights was used for the ritual murder of gentile babies.

We see evil battling good in the Holy Land and we see the Jews trying to defeat the forces of evil. We saw devastating tragedy on the holy day of Shabbos and Simchas Torah. So many killed, so many hurt, so many held by savages. And people wonder why. We see others giving their lives to fight the evil. And we see the world seek to block Israel from achieving victory over the evildoers. We see an American president and secretary of state seeking to pull defeat from the jaws of victory as they unite Arab countries and lobby Israeli politicians to break apart the coalition, dump the democratically elected Netanyahu, and establish a Palestinian state, which would be an existential threat to the Jews of Eretz Yisroel.

They plant articles in the media blaming Israel as the obstacle to peace and the threat to stability in the Middle East, while they push the long debunked so-called two-state solution. The talking points take hold and people here and in Israel buy into the message that Netanyahu is done and should go.

Moreover, Amaleik is the voice that pushes for compromise on matters of halacha, telling people that they don't have to be so stringent in the observance of mitzvos. The modern-day adaptation of Amaleik's credo of "asher korcha baderech" tells people to take it easy and not spend so much time learning or fretting about matzos and other mitzvos. It tells people to complain about the cost of matzos, as they overspend on their cars, clothes and vacations.

Then there are those who mock good people. They relish finding fault with good people and seek to bring them down. The Vilna Gaon taught that the baalei machlokes are Amaleikim. The Gaon was referring to those who upset the communal equilibrium. Instead of allowing people to follow their proper leaders, a tough guy, or demagogue, or wordsmith, or jester arises and preaches that disagreements are healthy. They convince people to battle someone who did or said something inconsequential with which they disagree and cause division amongst our people and derision of the good. The Gaon says that such people are the progeny of Amaleik.

At the conclusion of the parsha (17:11), as we battled the biblical Amaleik, Moshe Rabbeinu raised his hands, telling us to be strong, to stand tall and proud, and not to be buffeted by the winds of opposition and Amaleik. When Moshe's hands were raised, the Jews were victorious, but when they were lowered, the Jews began to lose.

The only way to effectively battle Amaleik is by the Moshe of the generation raising his hands as a lighthouse for all to follow to safe shores and not become entrapped by the guile, demagoguery and sweet words with which the progeny of our most bitter enemy attempt to lead people away from the path of Torah and mesorah.

We must maintain our fidelity to the truth, to Hashem, to Torah, and to the Moshe who raises his hands high and does not succumb to the pressures brought on him by smaller people.

The Torah (17:12) informs us that Moshe is not able to do it on his own. He requires help. The posuk depicts Aharon and Chur standing alongside Moshe, supporting him and his weary uplifted arms, "mizeh echod, umizeh echod." The task is great, even for Moshe.

Perhaps the heroes of the account with Amaleik are Aharon and Chur. Rather than fatalistically concluding that the Jewish people must be realistic and recognize that they were destined to lose against a much stronger foe, and instead of saying that Amaleik is too strong an enemy for them and that there is no point in fighting on, they grasped Moshe's arms and helped wave them aloft, proclaiming, and bringing about, victory.

Today, too, the heroes are those who stand on the side of Torah and halacha, giving chizuk to all that's right and good.

There is a plan, and it has almost finished unfolding. Our dedication to Torah and its values provides the fuel it needs to reach its joyous end. We may be in a valley now, but the renewed achdus, movement of teshuvah, and increased limud haTorah provide what we need to climb back up the hill and stay there. As the posuk we recite daily following Oz Yoshir states, "V'olu moshi'im b'har Tzion," we will return victoriously atop the Mount of Zion and recite the ultimate shirah very soon.