

שמח זבולון בצאתך  
**Pesach Insights**  
In memory of Rabbi  
Zevulun Charlop zt"l



# SAVORING SPIRITUAL SPARKS

*For many years, I had the honor of learning b'chavrusa with Rav Charlop zt"l. The anticipation of Yom Tov and delving into related topics together was always a highlight. He would often share his creative halachic analyses, lomdus, and drashos, encouraging me to incorporate them into my own sermons in shul. Here is one such drasha (delivered in Congregation Bnai Yeshurun, Pesach 5772), rooted in the Torah of Mori v'rabi, Rav Zevulun Charlop zt"l.*

**R**av Zevin recounts the story of the Sar Shalom from Belz, the first Belzer Rebbe, who was often approached by people sharing their *tzaros*, asking for blessings and for him to daven on their behalf. One day, a woman came to see him and listed a litany of terrible troubles, asking for salvation from her predicament. He told her she needed to have *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. Immediately she retorted, "First let me see salvation, and then I will have faith." The Sar Shalom was taken aback, and she explained her stance using a passage from the Torah: at the time of Kriyas Yam Suf, the Torah states:

וירא ישראל את ה' הגדולה אשר עשה  
ה' במצרים ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה'  
ובמשה עבדו.

*And when Israel saw the wondrous power which Hashem had wielded against the*

*Egyptians, the people feared Hashem; they had faith in Hashem and in His servant Moses.*

## **Shemos 14:31**

First Bnei Yisrael saw the mighty hand of Hashem save them at the edge of the Yam Suf, and only then did they have faith in Hashem. She argued that, similarly, she wanted to see the salvation before having faith. The Sar Shalom related that this was the first time anyone, man or woman, had stumped him, and he couldn't refute her proof.

Rav Charlop related this story to me and suggested an approach to answering her proof that sheds some light on our Yom Tov celebration.

The Medrash makes a very striking comment on the passuk (Daniel 9:7) "*lecha Hashem hatzedaka v'lanu boshes hapanim*," to you Hashem is



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righteousness and to us is shame. The Medrash says, "What's this referring to? When Bnei Yisrael crossed the Yam Suf, they carried *avodah zara* with them." How could this be? They had just witnessed one of the greatest exhibitions of Hashem's power, and yet they were still susceptible to straying from G-d?

Similarly, we find a Medrash that says that the seeds of the *cheit haegel* were planted shortly after Matan Torah. How could this be? It seems unthinkable, even postposterous!

Rabbi Charlop pointed out that it's not just in the realm of the Medrash. If we look at Tehillim 106, the passuk says:

אבותינו במצרים לא השכילו נפלאותיך לא  
זכרו את רב חסדיך וימרו על ים בים סוף.  
*Our forefathers in Egypt did not perceive  
Your wonders; they did not remember Your  
abundant love, but rebelled at the Yam Suf.*  
**Tehillim 106:7**

ויושיעם למען שמו להודיע את גבורתו.  
*Yet He saved them, as befits His name, to  
make known His might.*  
**Tehillim 106:8**

What's the common thread in all these cases? What ideas are the passuk and these Medrashim trying to convey to us?

How joyous it must be when G-d brings salvation — when, out of nowhere, G-d miraculously intervenes and shows us His all-powerful hand. What greater gift could there be? How much each one of us would love to so clearly witness G-d's strength and awesomeness, and allow that inspiration to shape us!

Hashem certainly, at times, immediately brings salvation perhaps even before the *emunah* is fully realized, but it comes with a risk. The risk is losing it all too quickly. When we work and prepare for something, we have the wherewithal, the tools to use the gift and hold onto it. But when it's given to us, when we're not holding on tight — when we're ill-prepared — the risk of losing it all is very real and very strong. We can be crossing the Yam Suf and still haven't let go of our idols! We can even witness the revelation at Sinai and already have thoughts of a *cheit haegel* brewing in our minds because we aren't fully prepared.

At times, we may see individuals who, in a moment of inspiration, change their lives drastically, and yet some time later, it seems to completely disappear, and they revert back to how they were.

How does that happen?

Perhaps the reason is this same *yesod*.

When the inspiration is too strong and isn't well-rooted, it is very difficult to hold onto it. When we work hard, prepare, and try to grow, then that change can last. As Ben Hei Hei said, "*lfum tza'ara agra*" or in the modern vernacular, "no pain, no gain."

So why does G-d do it if it doesn't always work? Why the sudden inspiration? The answer is that it's a gift and an opportunity, and it can work — but it requires effort.

I recall a conversation I had with an Israeli cab driver. When I was in Eretz Yisrael a few years ago, I was riding in a taxi, and the driver, a self-identified *chiloni* (secular), proudly told me about his children who had become *chozer beteshuva*. As for himself, he mentioned being in Yerushalayim the previous night for the first time in a while and deciding to go with his wife to the Kotel. He said it was amazing, expressing, "*hircashti chom babeten*," it made me feel so warm in the stomach. If people passively experience spirituality with the perspective of how warm and fuzzy it makes them feel, it can't last. But if we take the inspiration and use it to make positive changes, to act upon it — exerting effort — then the change can last.

So Hashem gifts us occasionally with salvation and revelation, even when we're not deserving — and we need to decide what to do with it. Do we sit back and enjoy the warm, fuzzy spiritual feeling inside our stomachs, or do we concretely find ways to improve our service of G-d?

Perhaps this is the answer to the woman who came before the Sar Shalom. Yes, Bnei Yisrael were saved, and subsequently believed in Hashem — but that's not the best way. It's not ideal; it's what was necessary. If we want to do our part in ensuring salvation, we need to take positive steps forward and hope that when Hashem sees us readying ourselves for Him, He will reach out and save us.

Pesach, particularly with the sedarim, is among the most inspirational times of the year. This presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity: to ensure that not only are we inspired in the moment, but that we have prepared for it in advance and can hold onto that inspiration tightly afterward.

It is not merely about experiencing moments of divine intervention, but about how we respond to them. Do we allow these moments to shape us and drive us toward greater faith and action? Or do we let them fade away, leaving us unchanged?

As we celebrate Pesach and reflect on the miraculous events of our history, let us remember that true salvation comes not just from witnessing divine power, but from actively embracing it, internalizing it, and allowing it to guide our lives every day.

May we all merit to experience the true redemption, both as individuals and as a nation, and may we always strive to be worthy of the salvation that Hashem graciously bestows upon us.

Chag Pesach Sameach!



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