

YOU SHALL NOT SEE THEM EVER AGAIN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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"*Vayehi*" is one of those words that sets a tone from which you cannot escape. Chazal teach us that it flags painful, troubled times. Beginning the *parshah* with the word *veyehi* is a give-away that something is amiss. This is itself troubling. What, asks the Ohr Hachaim, could be amiss at this moment of supernal triumph, as Hashem reached out to dramatically save Klal Yisrael by splitting the Sea? There are other questions. Was it Paroh who sent them out to freedom? Was it not Hashem who led them? Furthermore, the Torah's explanation of their circuitous route seems unsatisfactory. They avoided the direct and well-traveled route for fear of encountering hostile military action along the way, which might demoralize them and convince them to return to Egypt. But if such an incident would not be good for them, surely G-d could see to it that they would not meet up with any! What was there to fear, when all the circumstances of their existence were coordinated by Hashem Himself?

Taking this episode as an allusion to our *avodas Hashem*, we can piece together an approach that will resolve these issues. Conscious of our vulnerability and limitations, we often turn to HKBH for assistance in resisting our *yetzer hora*. Sometimes, we simply entreat Hashem to help us through a battle we fear is too large for us to handle on our own. Effectively, we ask Him to awaken some response within us - for *isra'usa dele'eyla* - that will meet the challenge. While this may see us through a crisis, it does nothing to address the root problem. Without dealing with the very basis and foundation of the *yetzer hora* within us, we are just as vulnerable and exposed the next time. The assistance we receive is more of a band-aid than a cure.

At other times, however, we take on the *yetzer hora* directly. We rouse ourselves, rather than Hashem arousing us. Through this *isra'usa delesasa* arousal below, we succeed in the first steps of taming the *yetzer hora*, in subjugating it to some extent. Hashem indeed helps us complete the process, but His help comes on the heels of, and is preconditioned on, our fighting the first battles with strength we find in ourselves. When we succeed in those opening skirmishes, the *yetzer hora* is fundamentally changed. Its strength attenuated, it remains less of a problem from that point on.

Prior to leaving Egypt our *midos* were coarse and unrefined. We were incapable in such a state, explains the Be'er Avraham, of tapping any reservoir of strength within our own internal chemistry. Our spiritual tools were sent from above; we did not provide them ourselves. All of the *tumah* of

Egypt remained intact and unscathed, and showed itself quickly enough in Egypt's pursuit of them with a mighty army and fearsome chariots.

Full redemption required *isra'usa delesasa*. Hashem afforded them the opportunity to display it by orchestrating the encounter at the shores of the Sea. Those who found the strength to jump into the waters broke the stranglehold of *kelipas Mitzrayim*². They completed the redemption.

Everything that happened prior to that moment was a precursor to this event. Why was it that Paroh "sent" them out? In retrospect, it would seem more efficient for Hashem to have taken them out against the wishes of a protesting but helpless Paroh. But this is not what happened. HKBH carefully brought Paroh to his own decision to let them go, by gradually "persuading" him through ten plagues that turned the customary laws of nature into a broken plaything. Paroh sent them out - but in his mind, it was still his decision that was crucial. If he could make that decision, he could renege on it as well.

A medrash³ reconstructs the dialogue between Paroh and his advisors. The latter point out the magnitude of the loss to Egypt: the spoils they took with them, the presence in their midst of some well-heeled individuals, many wise men, skilled artisans, etc. Paroh rues his granting the Jews freedom - and sets off for the trap that awaited him.

At the Sea, the Jews "lifted their eyes, and behold, saw Egypt journeying after them."⁴ Rashi takes "Egypt" here to mean the guardian angel, the spiritual force of the entire Egyptian culture. At this point in time, that force was fully intact. It's "vehicle" traveled smoothly and efficiently. Through the *mesiras nefesh* of the Jews who jumped in, through their *isra'usa delesasa*, the redemption was completed. "He removed the wheels of their chariots;"⁵ the Egyptian *tumah* machine was immobilized. They could indeed be promised that "As you have seen Egypt today, you shall not see them ever again!"⁶ The *kelipah* of Egypt was permanently denatured, never to return.

Revisiting our opening questions, we now understand that something indeed was amiss at the beginning of the *parshah*. When *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt, redemption was far from complete. The damaging negative force of Egypt was very much alive, and the Jews lacked the ability to do very much about it. Should they see war - should they meet up with the challenge of an encounter with *kelipas Mitzrayim* - they might return to the spiritual position they occupied earlier. Even if Hashem spared them such an encounter, they would have missed the opportunity to rid the world of this *tumah*.

Instead, Hashem "turned the nation towards the way of the wilderness."⁷ All their meanderings, all their tests in that wilderness were part of a Divine plan for them to achieve full redemption through *isra'usa delesasa*. They left Egypt *chamushim*⁸, an allusion to the fifty times that *yetzias Mitzrayim* is

mentioned in Torah, which in turn alludes to their working their way past fifty aspects of Egypt's poison. The 42 "journeys" enumerated at the end of Bamidbar invoke the same idea. Taken with the seven stops through which they doubled back between *Hor HaHor* and *Moseirah*, there were 49, alluding to the 49 days of *Sefirah* that form the body of the 50 day period of spiritual growth each year.

Here, too, the result that we seek comes only through *isra'usa delesasa*, through our own reaching within to find the substance with which to begin the battle. This is the meaning of those journeys.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom pgs. 94-96

² The "shell" of Egypt; i.e. the encrusting of tumah that accompanied Egypt

³ Shemos Rabbah 20:2

⁴ Shemos 14:10

⁵ Shemos 14:25

⁶ Shemos 14:13

⁷ Shemos 13:18

⁸ Lit. armed, but related as well to the word "fifty"