

MAZAL TOV!

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of B'shalach. After two hundred and ten years of arduous slavery, Bnei Yisroel [the Children of Israel] left Mitzrayim [Egypt]. Paroah, faithful to the pattern he exhibited during the plagues of vacillating between submission to Hashem and rebellion against Him, decided to pursue Bnei Yisroel and attempt to bring them back after he had willingly sent them out.

"Mitzrayim chased after them and caught up with them camped by the sea. [14:9]"

Following Hashem's instructions, Moshe extended his hand over the sea, causing it to split. Bnei Yisroel then proceeded to cross what had been the sea, on dry land. In a final fit of blind insanity, the Egyptians chased after Bnei Yisroel into the heart of the split sea. Not for long. As the last Jew left the sea and the last Egyptian entered, Hashem instructed Moshe to again extend his hand over the sea, sending the waters back to their natural course. With the subsequent death of the entire Egyptian army, Bnei Yisroel were finally and irreversibly freed from the slavery of Mitzrayim.

"Az yashir Moshe uBnei Yisroel... [Then, Moshe and Bnei Yisroel sang...][15:1]" At that point, a song of praise was sung to Hashem.

Let's try to understand this slavery and the song that it ultimately led to.

Most of us are familiar with the term 'mazel tov' that is extended at happy occasions. It is usually and inaccurately defined as either congratulations or good luck. In fact, the words 'mazel tov' refer to one of the deepest concepts involving the way that Hashem runs this world. It was this that left Moshe wondering why the righteous sometimes suffer even while evil prospers.

[The following is based on the Sifsei Chaim.] The word mazel means to flow. The messengers through which the directives given by Hashem flow down to this world are the seven mazels. These, also known as the constellations, are comprised of the sun, moon and five stars [see Rashi on Shabbos 156A]. They don't determine anything on their own but rather serve as the pipelines through which Hashem's will flows and is implemented.

The two main basis's upon which Hashem decides what will be sent down to each person on this earth are 'mishpat--judgment' and 'mazel--flow.' Mishpat comes about as a heavenly reaction and response to our actions. That is what we expect from Hashem. Mazel, on the other hand, refers to that which flows down regardless of one's actions.

Every neshama [soul] is sent down to this world to fulfill its unique role in giluy haYichud [the

revelation of Hashem's Oneness]. This had been the mission set before Adam HaRishon [Adam, the first man]. When he failed to bring this about on his own, his collective neshama [soul] and its mission was divided amongst all of the souls throughout all the generations until Moshiach [Messiah]. In order for this jigsaw puzzle to be complete, each piece, each neshama, has to fulfill its role.

The root of each neshama--which part of Adam HaRishon it comprised--determines its unique role in the giluy haYichud. Some souls have the assignment to bring about this giluy haYichud while living comfortably, remembering to focus on Hashem and not their luxuries. Others are assigned to bring about giluy haYichud while living lives of difficulties and hardships, accepting their lot and still loving Hashem.

We could say that mazel is the cards we are dealt. We then choose how to play our hand. Any further cards that are dealt are either based on how you played that first hand (what we referred to as 'mishpat'), further mazel or a combination of the two.

In the words of the Talmud [Niddah 16B]: The angel in charge of pregnancy stands before Hashem and asks: What will be with this child? Strong or weak? Clever or slow? Rich or poor? However, righteous or evil is not predetermined. That is in the hands of the individual--not heaven.

Accordingly, the prophet Yirmiyahu [9:22-23] taught: *"Let the wise man not glory in his wisdom, let the powerful man not be praised for his strength, let the rich not glory in their riches. Rather, he that glories should only glory in this, that he understands and knows Me (Hashem).*

The wisdom, strength and wealth are predetermined, unearned and undeserving of praise. How one chooses to use those things is all a person really 'owns.'

With that we have an understanding in 'mazel tov.' At critical junctures in a person's life--births, circumcisions, bar/bat mitzvahs, and weddings--we wish them to be granted pleasant circumstances within which they will be charged with serving Hashem. We wish them to have a 'good flow.'

Let us now return to our parsha. A heavenly decree required that Israel suffer through slavery in order to build a nation worthy of receiving the Torah. It wasn't the actions of individuals that brought this heavenly response of slavery. It wasn't mishpat--it was mazel. Long and tortuous mazel. It was incredibly difficult to accept and comprehend. Even Moshe challenged Hashem asking Him why He brought such evil onto the nation [5:22].

All the creations of the entire universe sing the praises of Hashem, accepting all that flows down to it. Mankind, standing at the apex of that creation, the lone creation that has free will, has difficulty joining in that song. Bad things happen to good people. The world can be a very tough place. It's hard to sing sometimes...

"Az yashir Moshe uBnei Yisroel... [Then, Moshe and Bnei Yisroel sang...][15:1]"

Az... Then... Az is spelled 'aleph', 'zayin.' The numerical value of 'aleph' is one and of 'zayin' is seven. At last, Bnei Yisroel understood and believed with perfect clarity that One (Hashem) stands above in absolute control of the seven mazels (constellations)[Kli Yakar] and that even that which seems to make no sense is the loving flow directed by Hashem. When they were able to fully appreciate this giluy haYichud that could only have been brought out through the tortuous ordeal they had endured, then mankind finally joined in that praise-song to Hashem sung by the entire universe.

Good Shabbos,
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