

# THE REASON THE JEWS WERE NOT LED THROUGH THE LAND OF THE PLISHTIM

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

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## The Reason the Jews were not led through the Land of the Plishtim

The parsha begins with the pasuk [verse], "It happened when Pharaoh sent the people that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Plishtim, because it was near (ki karov hu), for G-d said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war and will return to Egypt. '" [Shemos 13:17]. I have translated the 'ki karov hu' in line with Rashi's interpretation, that the word 'hu' references the land of the Plishtim and the word 'karov' is referring to geographical distance.

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos provide a totally different interpretation. Their translation of 'ki karov hu' is 'for the nation of Israel is like a relation of the Almighty'. The word 'hu' refers to the nation and the word 'karov' means relative ['family member'] as in the pasuk "...to the children of Israel, His intimate people (am krovo)" [Tehillim 148:14]. The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosfos interpret that as a result of the intimate relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, G-d did not lead them by way of the normal travel routes of other people (the Coastal route by way of the Land of the Plishtim).

Sometimes G-d treats His children in a fashion that to them seems inexplicable. The reason for this is 'ki karov hu' - because He has a special relationship with them. It stems from the fact that He has a different plan for His close people.

Rav Simcha Ziesel Broide, head of the Chevron Yeshiva comments that many times in life we are taken on circuitous paths. We encounter bumps in the road and we begin to wonder "why is the Almighty doing this to us?" Sometimes we have to remind ourselves 'ki karov hu'. Despite the fact that this path does not seem to make any sense to us and it would be so much easier and so much nicer if 'x', 'y', and 'z' would happen, but 'ki karov hu'. G-d has a different relationship with those with whom He is close.

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## No Coasting: Both Marriage and Business Require Constant Effort

There are two phenomena in the teachings of Chazal that are equated with Krias Yam Suf [the splitting of the Reed Sea]. Rav Shizbi teaches in the name of Rav Elazar Ben Azaria that one's livelihood (mezonosav) is as difficult to achieve as the splitting of the Reed Sea [Pesachim 118a]. Rabbah bar bar Channah teaches in the name of Rabbi Yochanan that appropriate marital match-making (zivugim) is as difficult to achieve as the splitting of the Reed Sea [Sotah 2a; Sanhedrin 22a].

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky taught that the term 'zivugim' doesn't only mean making marital matches (shidduch), it refers to marriage in general.

Everyone knows that just because a person made a living yesterday, there is no guarantee that he will make a living today. Making a living is something that a person must engage in constantly. He always needs to come up with new creative ways to keep and earn his livelihood -- new avenues of business, new markets, etc., etc. Even if a person has a salaried position, he always needs to maintain his status and remain current with new trends and developments in his field or profession. There can be no stagnation or "coasting along" when it comes to making a living. It has to be worked on, on a constant basis, day in and day out.

This, says Rav Yaakov, is the connection between a livelihood (mezonosav) and a marriage (zivugim). There can be no coasting in a marriage, just as there can be no coasting in a business. A business can go bankrupt after 30 years, and so can a marriage. A business must be constantly nurtured and expanded and taken care of and maintained. The same is true of a marriage. Marriages and livelihood are both as difficult as Krias Yam Suf. They both require perpetual maintenance.

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## Life Is Better For Those Who Are Not Bitter

We learn in the parsha "They came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter (ki marim hem); therefore they named it Marah." [Shemos 15:23]

In a classic Chassidic insight as well as Kotzker interpretation, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk [1797-1859] translates the words 'ki marim hem' (because they were bitter) as referring not to the water, but to the people. Bitter people will find complaints about everything. No matter how good the water tasted, a negative and bitter person will always find some reason why he can't drink it.

Attitude is a great determinant in life. To bitter people, everything is bitter and to people who aren't bitter everything is possible. One of the great truths of life is that there are only two types of people in this world: Those who see the glass as half full and those who see the glass as half empty.

The proof of this axiom is the manna [mannal]. There was nothing better to eat in the history of mankind than manna. There was no waste. It never caused stomach problems. It was tasty. According to the Medrash, it tasted however the person who ate it wanted it to taste. If he wanted dairy it was dairy; if he wanted meat it was meat. It was spiritually elevating. How could anyone complain about manna? And yet the people said, "We can't take it any longer - manna for breakfast, manna for lunch, manna for

supper - it is too much! We have mon coming out of our ears already!"

The complaints are fully spelled out in Parshas Behaloscha: "The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also turned, and they wept, and said, 'Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we would eat in Egypt free of charge, the cucumbers, and the melons, the leek, the onions, and the garlic. But now, our life is parched, there is nothing; we have nothing before our eyes but the mon!'" [Bamidbar 11:4-6]. The Torah then continues in the next pasuk: "Now the mon was like coriander seed and its color was like the color of the b'dolach."

Rashi there [Bamidbar 11:7] says "He who said this did not say that. Israel said 'We have nothing before our eyes but the mon' and the Holy One Blessed is He had it written in the Torah, 'Now the mon was like coriander seed, etc.' as if to say, 'See, you who come into the world, what My children complain about. Yet the mon is so valued.'"

G-d, as it were, says: "Let the record state the facts. Let the record show what My children are complaining about. Let mankind know for all time, that people who can complain about the mon -- the greatest substance ever given to man -- will complain about anything!"

What is the reason for the complaints? Because THEY were bitter. It was not the problem of the water or the problem of the mon. It was the problem of the people. For bitter people, everything is no good. For positive people, everything is wonderful.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas B'Shalach are provided below:

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