

# DON'T SQUANDER IT

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Beshalach

### Don't Squander It

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #579 Being Motzi Others in Lechem Mishnah & Other Brachos. Good Shabbos!

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Rav Zevulun Groz was a student of the Alter of Slabodka in the Slabodka Yeshiva in Europe. He subsequently made Aliyah and became a Rav in Rechovot. Rav Groz writes that when he first went to Yeshiva, his father sat him down and read him the following Medrash from our parsha:

"Vayehi B'Shalach Pharaoh es ha'am" [And it was when Pharaoh sent out the nation]. [Shemos 13:17]. The Talmud states that a pasuk introduced by the word "Vayehi" always connotes pain and suffering. The word "vayehi" is etymologically related to the word "vay" meaning "woe."

The Medrash compares Pharaoh's plight to a fellow who found a satchel of precious stones, but who didn't know what was inside it. He asked a stranger, "Would you like to take this packet I have in my hand? Take it. It's yours!" The stranger took it, opened it up and found diamonds inside. He began separating the diamonds into small, medium, and large size stones. He set up shop and started selling them at various prices depending on their size. The person who originally gave him the satchel came by the shop and saw that the small diamonds were being sold for \$10,000, the middle size diamonds for \$50,000, and the larger diamonds were selling for \$100,000! When he saw what was happening and understood what he gave up, he tore his clothes in mourning. "I had all this wealth in my hands and I let it slip through, without gaining anything in return! Woe is me!"

The Medrash compares Pharaoh to the man who gave away the diamonds. The diamonds are the nation of Israel that was in his hands. When Pharaoh saw the great numbers of Jews that Moshe was taking out, he called out "Woe (vay)!" It is with these words our Parsha begins: When Pharaoh sent out the people he cried out, "Woe is me. Look what I did!"

The father of Rav Reuven Groz asked his son a question on this Medrash. How does the story of Pharaoh compare to the story in the parable? There is no analogy whatsoever. Pharaoh did not give anything away. He was forced by the Ten Plagues to let the Jews go! His arm was twisted until he said "Uncle!"

The father of Rav Reuven Groz explained to his son that the Medrash does not mean that Pharaoh was saying "woe" that he had to let the people go. That was not up to him. Pharaoh was saying that when he realized what Klal Yisrael was, he said, "I had such a people among me and look what I made them do!"

Consider a person who hires a worker and doesn't know that this worker is a genius, a Nobel laureate, or a virtuoso violinist, and makes him the janitor. He has him cleaning floors for years and years. Suddenly, he discovers that he could have booked this worker in great concert halls throughout the world. He could have made a fortune off of him! "For such a person, I paid minimum wage to sweep floors?"

Pharaoh felt the same way. He said, "I was an idiot! I had a Klal Yisrael and I made them build pyramids! I enslaved them. How foolish of me. What a waste of talent all those years!" Concerning this he moaned "Woe unto me. I did not appreciate what I had when I had it."

This ends the Medrash. What does it have to do with Zevulun Groz going off to Yeshiva? Going to Yeshiva is an opportunity that is like a treasure. As I constantly say -- and I have a folder full of letters from former students who will attest to this -- everyone says after they leave the Beis HaMedrash that they did not appreciate what they had while they had it. Young boys fail to realize that their years in Yeshiva are numbered. It is an idyllic situation. Their physical needs are taken care of. Their parents pay the bills. They do not need to worry about holding down a job. Baruch Hashem, most of the time, they do not need to worry about their wife or children or some family member being sick. The only thing they need to do is to learn and to grow as a Jew.

When one has that opportunity and does not take advantage of it to its fullest advantage, he may one day have the same reaction as the fellow in the Medrash who gave away the packet of diamonds or like Pharaoh at the beginning of the parsha: "Look what I had in my possession and I gave it away! I squandered it."

This is perhaps the most important thing that a father can tell his son when he goes off to Yeshiva. I always say this to my current students, based on generations of students who have come and gone: "Don't squander the opportunity while you have it. Your days are numbered."

### **Remembering the Exodus**

We say in our prayers (in the paragraph preceding the morning Shmoneh Esrei), "From Egypt you have redeemed us; from the house of slavery you have brought us forth; all their first-born you killed; and the Reed Sea you split." This is a fulfillment of the halacha requiring us to mention the

Exodus during the daily morning prayer.

However, the sequence appears to be incorrect. The killing of the first-born should have been mentioned first. Only after that event took place were we able to move on to the next phase: "From Egypt you have redeemed us; from the house of slavery you have brought us forth."

This question is strengthened when we look at the narration of the Exodus mentioned in the evening prayer. In Ma'ariv we say: "who smote with His Anger all the first born of Egypt; who took His nation Israel out from their midst for eternal freedom." There, the sequence is correct.

Another question may be raised. In Shachris, we say the first-born were killed (haragta). In Ma'ariv we only say they were smitten (haMakeh es bechoreihem). Why the difference?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l, addresses both of these issues: It says in the beginning of Tractate Semachos: "And it was in the middle of the night, Hashem smote every firstborn in the Land of Egypt" [Shemos 12:29]. Rabbi Yochanan states: Even though He smote them a fatal blow, from midnight their souls fluttered within them (e.g. - they lingered on) until morning."

The Almighty wanted Klal Yisrael to see the plague of the first-born. The Jews were forbidden to leave their homes until morning [Shemos 12:22]. Had the first-born children died at midnight when the plague struck, the Jews would not have witnessed their death. Therefore, according to Rav Yochanan, although they were struck at midnight, the first-borns lingered until morning and only then did they expire.

In the night-time prayer, we say "who smote in His Anger the first-born of Egypt" because at night they did not yet die. In the morning prayer, we first mention the redemption because the Jews went out from Egypt in the morning. Then we say: "all the first-born You killed" because it was then - - at the time that the Jews were leaving Egypt -- that these first-born (who were smitten the previous midnight) died.

### **The Connection Between Tu B'Shvat and Parshas B'Shalach**

Parshas B'Shalach / Shabbos Shirah always comes out near the holiday of Tu B'Shvat. What is the relationship between the 15th day of Shvat -- the "New Year of Trees," and this week's parsha?

The book Ziv HaMinhagim gives a beautiful explanation of this linkage. Tu B'Shvat is the Rosh HaShanah of trees. Look outside today and gaze at the trees. They appear deader than door nails! Is this the time to celebrate "The New Year for Trees?" There is not a leaf to be seen. It would seem more appropriate to celebrate "Tu B'Shvat" in the springtime when the trees are in full bloom -- April or May.

The answer is that the trees LOOK dead. They LOOK like they will never see another green leaf in their existence. But right now the sap is beginning to run within them. If one travels up to Vermont -- the Maple syrup capital of the world -- he will find Vermonters dressed up in earmuffs boring holes

in trees to extract the sap from the maple trees. This is the time of the year when the sap is flowing within the trees. The leaves and the beauty of the fruits that the trees will produce in the spring and summer are all being prepared right now, in the dead of winter.

The trees represent the idea that even when something looks terribly bleak and looks like it has no future, one should not give up on it. One should not give up on the trees when they look like that, and one should not give up on oneself when things look like that for him.

There are periods in a person's life when the future looks bleak and things look miserable all around. "What will be?" But the salvation of the L-rd comes in the blink of an eye! The Almighty is already "running the sap" so to speak so that salvation may come. For this reason Tu B'Shvat is celebrated in the dead of winter.

It states in Parshas B'Shalach "They came to Marah and they could not drink the water, for it was bitter." [Shemos 15:23] Hashem then showed Moshe a tree and told him to throw it into the water. Why a tree? Why not a rock or a piece of dirt?

The symbolism is as we said before. The people felt hopeless. They were a couple of million people in the desert with no food or water. The natural reaction was: "What is going to be? How are we going to live? What will be our future?"

At that point, Hashem showed them a tree. The tree is the symbol that when all looks futile and bleak, desolate and destroyed, we see that the situation can turn around. Rebirth happens! There can be renaissance and renewal. Throwing the tree into the water was meant as a message to the people: "Don't give up. Don't worry about the desert. Things look bleak now but the salvation of the L-rd comes in the blink of an eye."

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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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