

SEA THE MIRACLE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

On the Seventh Day of Pesah we celebrate the crossing of our people through the Sea Of Reeds on the dry path that G-d miraculously provided that night over 3300 years ago. After almost one year of miracles that brought down the kingdom of Egypt and brought about the release of our people from bondage -- the people stood at the sea with their backs to the wall as the Egyptian chariots pursued the newly liberated masses. "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness?...it is better for us to serve in Egypt than we should die in the desert," cried the crowds to Moshe. It is difficult to understand how a people who witnessed so many mind-boggling natural wonders could suffer such a great lapse of faith so soon after the night of Pesah.

The puzzle becomes more mysterious when we study the events of following the crossing through the sea. Our Sages teach, "A maidservant at the sea saw revelation more clearly than the Prophet Yehezkel, who saw the secrets of Heaven." We have difficulty understanding the greatness of the spiritual heights reached by the people at the sea -- the vision was so clear that they said, "This is my G-d" -- pointing at Him as they spoke. Yet shortly thereafter Moshe had to force the people to travel away from the shores of the sea.

The verse states: "Moshe caused the Children of Israel to journey from the Sea of Reeds." [Shemot 15:22]

Rashi clarifies, "He (Moshe) caused them to journey against their will, for the Egyptians adorned their horses with ornaments of gold, silver and precious jewels, which the Jews found in the sea.... Therefore, Moshe had to force them to travel against their will." The people who were lifted to the heights of spirituality were plunged down to Earth by their baser physical desires only moments later. The conclusion is that witnessing awesome miracles does not change a person and does not guarantee that one will not fall prey to one's base desires and inclinations. The enemy, the Evil Inclination, is very powerful.

The days of Pesah are days where one can free oneself from the shackles of the soul that distance one from one's Maker and spiritual growth. The war against one's base desires is a lifelong series of tests. The word for "test" in the Holy Tongue is NISAYON, which is from the root of the word NESS to elevate. The trials of life are served by G-d in order to give a person an opportunity to go higher and to grow closer to Him. The tests are "custom made" to suit the individual at the time of the test. No one is given a test that he or she does not have the ability and the potential to pass. If one does

succeed then one rises one step higher and closer to G-d. The next test is more difficult but the person being tested is also stronger and better equipped to win the battle. In life, one confronts situations which are extremely trying and that can drain one emotionally. The message is "Don't give in. Keep on pushing with all you've got to overcome the challenge and reach the next rung of the ladder that climbs Heavenward towards spiritual freedom. You can be free!"

The holiday of Pesah is a time when we do not eat the "yeast that is in the dough". The Sages call the Evil Inclination "The yeast that is in the dough."

We spend the week doing G-d's bidding and refraining from many pleasures that are permitted all year long. This restraint is a springboard that can give one the power to win the battles one is sure to confront throughout the coming year. As we reach the closing of this beautiful week let us take advantage of the opportunity for growth, the kind that is achieved step by step -- the kind that can take one higher permanently not merely for a fleeting moment. Freedom from the Evil Inclination is on sale this week. Get out your spiritual credit card and stock up for the year -- "CHARGE!"

DID YOU KNOW THAT

During the days of "SEFIRAT HA-OMER" we observe some restrictions that are signs of mourning for the death of 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiba who died in the days between Pesah and Shabuot. Marriages are not allowed. Engagements are permitted. Dancing and live music are forbidden. Many authorities also forbid recorded music.

Men may not cut their hair. Many authorities include a restriction on shaving within this prohibition. If, one usually shaves, and by not doing so might adversely affect one's position in the business world, he may shave during the Omer. Trimming the mustache is permitted. Women are not included in the prohibition regarding haircuts and may have their hair cut during the Omer. [Source Gateway to Halacha page 125-127]

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