



Parashat Beshalach - Shirah

17 Shevat 5784 – January 27, 2024

A defining moment of Jewish faith takes place on the shores of the Yam Suf, the Reed Sea, as the fleeing, fledgling nation is cornered into a quick and fateful decision. Trapped between raging waters and a raging Egyptian army, the nation had but few choices to make. Some froze in fright. Others wanted to run back to Egypt straight into the hands of their former tormentors. Others just prayed. Still others wanted to wage war against the former taskmasters. But one group, led by Nachshon ben Aminadav forged ahead. Replacing fear with faith, he plunged into the sea. Only then did the sea split and the Jews cross. The Egyptians pursued. The waters returned, and the enemy was left bobbing in a sea of futility, totally vanquished under the turbulent waters. In defining that moment of faith, the Torah tells us, "Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moses, His servant" (Exodus 14:31). The strange connection between faith in Hashem and Moshe His servant needs clarification. What is the minor role of the servant in relationship to the great role of faith in the Almighty?

After hearing a fiery speech about the meaning of faith, a disciple of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter approached him and asked, "Rebbe, are you telling me that if I have perfect faith in Hashem, He will provide me with all my needs?"

Rabbi Salanter affirmed. "Yes, my son," he smiled. "If one has perfect faith in the Almighty, He will provide for him." The man made a quick reposte. "Good, if that is the case I need no longer work. I will sit and study Torah and rely solely on my faith, and the 20,000 rubles that I'll need to survive will come to me in full as if it were manna from Heaven!" The man went home and began to study Torah. But after one week when the money did not appear he returned to the Rabbi to complain. "I have the faith you claimed to need, and so far no money has arrived!"

Rabbi Yisrael was pensive. "I'll tell you what," he said. "I will offer you 8,000 rubles cash today if you would commit yourself to give me the 20,000 rubles that you are sure will come to you because of your faith." The man jumped from his chair. "8,000 rubles! Sure! I'll take it." Rabbi Yisrael Salanter smiled, "who in his right mind would give up 20,000 rubles for a mere 8,000 rubles? Only someone who does not have perfect faith that he will receive 20,000 rubles! If one is positive that he is about to receive 20,000 rubles, and is absolutely confident that it is coming, he would not, in his right mind, give it up for a mere 8,000! Obviously you have more faith in my 8,000 rubles than in Hashem's 20,000!"

The Torah tells us that the nation feared God, and it believed in Moshe, His servant. Notice that the first and foremost belief is in the Almighty. That immortal faith is the springboard for faith in all the mortal messengers, who are only vehicles of His command.

Normally, more or less, man believes in man much faster than he believes in G-d. On a hot tip, people throw thousands at the market. Ominous predictions of economic forecasters send us into panic. On a doctor's dire prognosis, we react with despair. We forget that the source of faith is in the Almighty. Only then can we believe in his messengers.

Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, z"l, the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva explains that the Jews at the sea reached the highest level of faith. Their following of Moshe was not in any sense due to his charisma or prior leadership. It was due to a total subjugation to a faith in an immortal Hashem. Only then did they follow the lead of a Moshe. That is the faith of those who take the leap. It is a faith they would not trade or deal for any offer in the world.

Good Shabbos!

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