

# *Parshas Bshalach*

## *The Secret of Our Success*

The memory is one that is seared. I was five years old and our Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Witty, announced a special “trip” the class would be going on: A flight to Israel. No, we were not *really* going, not in the physical sense, rather it was to be a day dedicated to the Holy Land which would begin with a simulated flight –seat belt sown on to our chairs and a video recreation of flying through the sky - and finally a tour of our sacred country. The day of the announcement we all got tickets for our flight, mine was a rectangle cut out of maroon construction paper. The euphoric – almost narcotic –feeling I experienced in my anticipation was the type known only to children and chased by adults the rest of their lives. I remember coming to school that next morning with my mother; I remember the smell of my construction paper tickets and how when holding them I felt like Charlie holding his ticket to the chocolate factory; I remember buckling myself in; I remember the announcement for “take off”; I remember climbing through the air, and then....nothing, my memory of the incident ends there.

Today we read about the our nation’s first step on *their* journey to Israel, the moment they receive their golden tickets (that so many will soon squander), and *their* excitement and anticipation. How they handled that moment was critical, for them and for us.

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Until this point in the Torah, the Bnei Yisroel was a silent character, we hear from them only in testimonials and statements made by the A-mighty and Moshe. Even at the moment when Moshe reveals the Exodus and its Laws their response –at least as is recorded in the Torah- is not in words rather that they bowed and prostrated in thanks.

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In a most majestic moment, today, we are introduced for the first time to this collective character in the narrative of the Bible with a song: “*Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song to say...*” They finally speak<sup>1</sup>, and ***it was spectacular***. What a nation! What a people!

Then, immediately after, they spoke for the *second* time, but in this instance their words would not be a song that transcends time, rather a complaint: “...*And the nation complained to Moses...*”

What happened? What, pray tell, could have changed in the disposition and temperament of this nation only moments after they revealed themselves as a deeply spiritual and grateful people?

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Perhaps many here, even those who are doctors, are unaware of a newly identified condition: S.W.S or Sudden Wealth Syndrome, from a devoted website:

*In our work at the Money, Meaning, and Choices Institute we have seen increasing numbers of people with a cluster of issues and symptoms associated with the stress of sudden success or wealth. We have coined the term "Sudden Wealth Syndrome" to describe their shared psychological issues. Many of these people have struck it rich in the silicon valley gold rush-- through their entrepreneurial ventures and corporate stock options. Others have achieved sudden wealth as a consequence of inheritance--being the heirs to the largest inter-generational transfer of wealth in American history. Many of these are people who did not come from wealthy families -- and are not used to having money and dealing with the values issues and life choices that money brings.*

Although our reflexive reaction to this may be cynicism, upon further reflection we may recall the many stories we have read about lottery winners and their sad, pathetic consequences that was born out of their newly attained fortunes. Wealth is one thing; *sudden* wealth however is an entirely different beast<sup>2</sup>.

When we think of the generation of the Exodus we so often reflect on the freeing of slaves, of a nation born, but we forget, or do not wish to consider, another

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<sup>1</sup> Although it would appear that this is not the case –for we hear them complain before the Yam Suf–most commentators understand that as the rabbleroising of a few.

<sup>2</sup> See for example [abcnews.go.com/2020/Story?id=3012631&page=1](http://abcnews.go.com/2020/Story?id=3012631&page=1).

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element to their story: this was a poor nation. Although for us, in our reading, we go from the story of Yoseph to slavery and Moshe in a few short Pesukim, and, by that time redemption is well on its way, that is *not* how it occurred. Hope was a distant city and comfort a far away and almost invisible shadow. They then were not just freed but became extraordinarily and fantastically wealthy in the process. Their masters were dead and if not they were pleading with them to leave, and, in the process, throwing everything they owned – what surely these slaves had envied and never dared dreamed of attaining – in their path. Now, still struggling with how to identify themselves, they see their old masters fast approaching and fear the forced return to slavery, surely thinking that this was all, of course, to good to be true. Yet, amazingly, the sea splits allowing not only safe and dry passage but drink as well (see Mechilta for other examples of the miracles within the tribal walls of the split sea) all the while killing the vestige of their foes. Then, in an unparalleled mollification, they had the absolute closure of seeing their adversaries dead, floating in the water. It did not end there. The Zohar teaches that the booty and treasure that continued to wash up on shore – which was even greater than the spoils they took before they left - made it difficult for Moshe to get them to move on and leave<sup>3</sup>.

How does *one* person respond to such swift reversal of fortune? How does a *nation*?

When you spend your entire life struggling to identify yourself based on who you are, and then, Keheref Ayin, *you* are no more, and, when *all you know* is starvation and abuse how do you define yourself when confronted with satiety and comfort?

So, like a stranger in a strange land, not knowing the code of ethics or the language of content, they complained. Perhaps it takes only a moment – a day or two – to assume that all is coming to you, or, perhaps, they just did not know better, either way we can not continue to allege surprise at their actions.

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, he teaches, that the Shechina had to leave them and head to the desert in order for them to follow, hence the name Midbar Shur/envision, which represented their longing to bask in the glory of G-d.

Perhaps this is why we focus on the seemingly innocuous and even irrelevant element of this story of the Matzah. For, it was in their *rush* to freedom, their *sprint* to safety and fortune that came great risk and their ultimate challenge which followed them through the desert and into the Promised Land.

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Every week in the YI of Buffalo we read the Blessing for the Medina which contains the phrase, "Raishes Tzmichas Geulaseinu". We do not need to pretend that that idiom is without controversy but we can agree on the beauty and safety of such a vision: avoiding the immediate leap of the Exodus for a steady and magnificent crawl toward the finish line.

How quickly we go from the walls of Yeshiva to Wall Street, from being guided by parents to independence, but we are not alone. This is a challenge as old as our nation itself. It was our first challenge and will be, perhaps, our last.

On the other side, we have the Yeshiva boy or the Baal Teshuvah who embodies "too much too fast", which although better than "too little too late", carries severe penalties.

Let us come full circle by maintaining balance in the face of the sudden changes of life, and let us be blessed to struggle with this through the prism of success that this *Goldena Madinah* affords us.

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## כי לא בחפזון יצאו ישעי' נביב

In the era of Moshiach, we must demonstrate that we alone can bring ourselves to high levels on our own time and with caution instead of a forced redemption that we may not be spiritually ready for and the immediacy we may be forced to endure. Indeed, let the immediacy come, but with our own steady resolve that shall precede it.

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