

## **Beshalach – 5782**

Vayehi Beshalach Paroah et HaAm. Both the Hertz and the Eitz Chaim chumashim translate the Hebrew Beshalach in such a way as to imply that Pharaoh let the people go but the Stone Chumash uses the word sent and of course, we automatically tend to think of the action as letting go because that is what Moses repeatedly asked of Pharaoh, to let the people go and of course we all hear the words of the famous Black African spiritual in our heads which again, uses let rather than sent. But I did a search in my old and well used Alcalay Hebrew English dictionary of the root Shlach. or lishloach and aside from the above, it also adds transmits or releases or dismisses. In my own mind, I believe the implication is one of releasing or sending away. Which then raises the question if we don't think of this as being given our freedom but rather being sent away or dismissed, what exactly are we being released to. It conjures up in my mind the image from so many movies of a criminal coming out of a gate and the gate closing behind him or her and then wondering what comes next. I believe that the rest of this week's parsha outlines very clearly for us often in images we are left with of just what that freedom is going to look like and how it is meant to be lived.

There are four very vivid images of what lays ahead for the Children of Israel, now all of a sudden, the nation Israel. The first image is that of the wall of water created by the parting of the Red Sea or the Sea of Reeds as some would have it and the Egyptians hard on the heels of the departing Israelites. Those walls of water also imply danger, able to fall on top of the heads of the Israelites at any moment seemingly. One can imagine that passageway as our journey through life, often fraught with dangers and

pitfalls ready at a moment's notice to entrap us, like the Egyptians were entrapped by the mud at their feet. The world can be seen as a dangerous place and we in the west are fooled into complacency about those dangers faced by others. I watched a documentary last night called For Sama about a Syrian journalist living in Aleppo and struggling to make a life for herself and her family during the siege in 2016 and how her doctor husband tried to keep the last hospital in that city open and functioning in the face of constant bombing. That is not a life of peace and tranquility.

The next image is that of Moses three days after the parting of the sea being besieged by his kinsmen because there was only bitter water to drink. That alone can be a continuation of the image of the fragility of life even immediately after a great celebration. Following hard on the heels of that image is that of the cry for sustenance because there is not anything to eat seemingly. In both these challenges, HaShem shows Moses how to turn the bitter into sweet and provides just enough to eat on a daily basis with the quail and the manna. We are meant to understand that we subsist on this earth of ours not through our own actions but those of others. We have to be thankful for the bounty of the land we exist on, the planet we inhabit, but we are reminded bluntly in the parsha that we are not meant to grab more for ourselves than anyone else. Not that we cannot enjoy but that enjoyment, that pleasure is not meant to come at someone else's expense. The Israelites were given only enough food to live and if they tried to take more than their fair share, it turned bad on them.

The final image is of the battle with Amalek who attacked the Israelites out of spite, in a show of power, without being provoked by the newly freed nation of spies. HaShem instructs Moses to hold his arms out over the struggle below led in battle by Joshua and when his arms got weak, Moses

had accomplices to help him keep his arms stretched out so that the day would be won by the Israelites. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, of blessed memory, whose divrei Torah I regularly read each week, discussed how Amalek represents hate for hate's sake. I was struck by the fact that the parsha begins with an outpouring of love of HaShem in the Song the Israelites sing after they are rescued from the pursuing army of the Egyptians and closes with the image of pure hate of Amalek attacking at the end of the parsha.

This is what our forefathers leaving Egypt were being dismissed into – a world of limited resources, requiring much effort to derive use of a world of dangers on all sides and able to become prominent at any time and being beset by hate without any ostensible reason and confronted only with power and collective action. But, as we shall see in the very next parsha, Yitro, what we do have on our side, if we choose to benefit from it, is our faith and our traditions. At Sinai, we begin an exploration of the ways in which we as a people will be able to hold together and not just survive but thrive living according to the covenant that we agreed to accept. Our courage, our faith, our pursuit of justice, our adherence to the laws given to us have been our guide from the parting of the Red Sea all those millennia ago even until today. There is no reason why we cannot derive benefit from those same things well into the future as well.