

Parshas Beshalach

40 years predicted in this parsha, but don't we know that the 40-year journey (was also) a punishment for the Miraglim?

The Jews were going to travel in the desert for 40 years it would seem regardless of whether there was a story of the Miraglim, this is due to what takes place in this parsha, which is that the Jews were not united on how to proceed to traverse the Yam Suf. There were 4 parties, each representing a different approach to how one can live. The Rebbe suggests, that the one that is successful is the mentality that moves/pushes forward. The generation that left Egypt could not have gone straight to Israel, according to the Mechilta, because each person would have focused on mundane things and forgot about the Torah. As well, we know, because of the Egel, and other events that took place, the generation that left Egypt required a certain type of preparation to enter the land. Furthermore, it may have been possible to expedite the travels in the wilderness, but the miraglim showed it wasn't possible. Which applies to us today that we can expedite the coming of Mashiach (even with a prescribed time for Mashiach to come as the Gemara and Rosh Hashana explains that through charity and prayer we can stave off negative- or could be worse things- even when we don't always understand in the moment the outcome.) Learning Torah and infusing it into our lives is a method of protection as we see in the Haftora, and something that we learned from the Jews ultimately travelling into the

desert as part of the journey into the Land of Israel before building the Beis Hamikdash (which took about 400 years until it was built).

When the Miraglim took place, it was another event that showed their inability to reconcile the mundane, and so Hashem recounted measure for measure that just as the Miraglim had spied for 40 days, so to the Jews would have to remain in the desert for 40 years. But the Miraglim took place 2 years into their travels, so, the math wouldn't work out, if they hadn't already been destined to remain in the wilderness. Now I can understand the Rebbe's approach and conclusion about the positive spin on the various "sins" that seemed to have taken place, and the Rebbe's approach to this parsha. The tachlis is to uncover spirituality in this world, which takes work and effort. Each narrative of the Torah is a lesson for us today for the same. We can always (especially with how the Rebbe clarified) find the theme in each event that takes place¹.

(The theme of 40 is not novel. The story of Noach, 40 days-40 nights. Moshe on Har Sinai 40 days, Mikveh is 40 seah, there were 40 days of repentance after the Egel. 40 is extremely important in the spiritual composition of the universe. There are 4 worlds each with 10 sefiros, this is 40. The letter mem which numerically equates to 40 is the middle letter between Aleph and Tav of the word Emes – truth, a name of Hashem, and the method of us agreeing with truth. There are 4 levels of physical beings, domem, tzomeach, chai, midaber, each with 10 sefiros in them that can be

¹ The Jews entering the land of Israel was imminent, and proscribed, they just required more preparation.

Unlike our time in golus, which can be expedited through Torah and Mitzvos.

revealed. There are 4 directions, and 4 elements- earth, wind, fire, and water. Yakov had 4 wives which birthed the 12 tribes. There were 4 matriarchs, there are 4 species on Sukkos, and 4 sons in the Hagadda etc. etc.-each level of 4 being comprised of the 10 sefiros, which equates, as a set, to 40. The growth of the Jews in the desert therefore was paramount to their success then, and our success now as a nation. The Torah and the Man penetrated the very fiber of our being, that it has kept us alive, thriving, and surviving no matter what is happening externally to us.

The power of the sea to go against in grain, thematically fits with the “plow forward” mentality the Rebbe describes is required in this world. Water cannot and does not counter its nature to flow to the most settled point. The power of the sea to split was a promise at the beginning of creation (and if it didn’t return to its state, Hashem would obliterate the world to nothingness – as stated in Bereish Rabba) because the concept of the splitting of the sea, i.e., going against nature is a lesson. (Which is likely why the Gemara in Berachos explains that 2 things are compared to the splitting of the sea, success in business, and finding a shidduch).

The gemara in Berachos tells us that we need to say a bracha at the location of the splitting of the sea, but we don’t know where the location is. Perhaps, the reason is because this is an explanation of the Az Yashir prayer. We know based on Mishlei 24:17 and Ovadia 1:12 we aren’t allowed to rejoice over the downfall of our enemy. In Megilla 16a when Haman asks this of Mordechai, Mordechai posits that this is specifically about rejoicing over a Jew who is an Enemy. Yet we see elsewhere (Gemara

Sanhedrin 39b) that when the Malachim were rejoicing over the downfall of the Egyptians, Hashem states, that when my handiwork is drowning, you sing praises? We have a halachik obligation to thank Hashem when we are saved from travesty (gomel), not praise Hashem for destruction of enemies. This means that Az Yashir is not a praise for destruction rather a prayer of thanks. The Rebbe explains from the three opinions in the gemara in Sotah 30b about how the song was recited as three methods in leadership. The final opinion of Rabbi Nechemia which implies the Jews submitted fully to the collective, said the words, and made the words their own from their own essence. The song of redemption is for that time but is for the future as well. Which is likely one of the reasons we say it every day in davening, and the compilers of the Siddur added the final lines from Ovadia and Zecharia about Mashiach (i.e., when we conquer Esav, and that Hashem will rule and “on that day” and Hashem will be one and His name will be one. The 2 echad’s represent 2 times 13- the numerical value of echad, which equates to 26, the holiest name of Hashem. Which is the name through which Mashiach will manifest, and all the revelation of spirituality will take place. While Az Yashir and the splitting of the sea was an event of historic times, it was an everlasting event of historic proportions that stays with us and is relevant all these years later.

The Haftora is read from Shiras Devora, which was the rejoice that took place after Sisra’s armies were defeated by Barak. The Shira is obviously connected to the Shiras Moshe and Miriam from our parsha. Furthermore, the events leading up to the defeat, and the winning of the war are more like the story of the Jews after the

exodus from Egypt. Meaning salvation does and will come. Haftora seems to always provide insight into prophecy from the time, and for us today as we await the coming of Mashiach. The background to the travesties befalling the Jews at the time, was their waning from practicing Torah. Through which Devora brought them back and allowed them to successfully win over the enemy. One of the miracles that took place is that Hashem made Sisra's army confused. We are never really allowed to attribute a punishment to the Jews for a lack of mitzvos, it's not in our power today (for example we cannot say that the Holocaust happened for a specific reason), but what we do know is that learning Torah and living a Torah life does protect us (possibly from worse outcomes, even if in the moment negative things may be happening). Therefore, the theme of the parsha, the Haftora, and the need to allow Torah to penetrate our very fiber, so we can reveal the goodness that exists in everything is still true, and applicable today.

The gemara in Megilla 14a describes Devora as the wife of Lapidos (who was her husband) but more, she used to make wicks for the Mishkan in Shiloh, and she was a catalyst for raising up the flame of spirituality in the Jews. Like her namesake Devora the wetnurse of Yakov who was integral to Yakov returning home (after Yosef was born-knowing that the future conqueror of Esav). Her location is stated, as a future reference to the Devora of our parsha who held council under the tree, out in the open, in order not to violate the laws of Yichud (with men).

What I believe we see is the interconnectivity of everything in the Torah and every event is by divine design and

divine providence. Furthermore, the past narratives and historic events are recounted not solely for their historical significance in history, but for the laws and narratives which we can apply to our lives today, all these years later, as we await, and work towards the coming of Mashiach.

Good Shabbos