

And it came to be when Pharaoh sent out the people that G-d did not lead them by the land of the Plishtim. (13:17)

Developing a relationship/bond with Hashem is a process. It does not just happen. There are ups and downs and challenges to our faith which we must overcome. Some do so successfully; others do not. In an inspirational and informative thesis, **Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl**, (*Pri Tzaddik*) elucidates an insightful comment made by the *Zohar HaKadosh* concerning the opening *pesukim* of this *parsha*.

Parashas Beshalach begins with the word *Vayehi*, “And it came to be.” *Chazal* teach that this word imparts a fundamental lesson in Biblical exegesis. Whenever the word *vayehi* appears in the Torah it conveys a message of sorrow. Something is not right. When *Klal Yisrael* left Egypt after 210 years of brutal slavery, they should have been effusive with expressions of joy. The scene should have been one of incredible celebration. Yet, the Torah writes, *vayehi*; something was amiss. *Klal Yisrael* had feelings of sorrow when they left their captivity. Why? The *Zohar* explains that when the Jews left Egypt, they were broken in spirit, feeling the darkness of death within them.

This is incredible! After suffering oppression for over two centuries, being treated as sub-humans, their children slaughtered, the Jewish People should have been ecstatic. Sorrow should have been the farthest thing from their minds. The *Zohar* teaches otherwise. The Jews who left Egypt were so sad that, in order to energize and elevate their spirits, Hashem invigorated their souls by allowing them to hear the songs and praises emanating from the Ministering Angels who, together with Hashem, were reveling over the redemption of His People from Egypt. Yet, the people, who should have been filled with joy – were not.

How are we to decipher this enigmatic reaction to freedom at last? *Rav Tzadok* explains that this reaction is par for the course, a natural adjustment, which is to be expected when one seeks out a relationship with Hashem. There are four stages in this developing relationship. If we follow along closely, we can understand how some people become inspired, but have difficulty following through to the end game.

At the initial phase, Hashem unlocks a person’s mind by illuminating his eyes and heart with a great spiritual light and lucidity of vision. Suddenly, he sees with clarity, understands with an acuity that he had never before achieved. In the early stages, this enlightening experience is temporary, and the seeker is elevated to previously unreachable heights. He is beyond his normal capacity to absorb without Hashem’s intervention. By doing so, Hashem reveals to the person the reality of His essence, confirming for him that Hashem’s sacred light fills the world. Hashem does this so that the person will get a taste of reality, thus empowering himself to personally continue his spiritual ascent to his unmerited enlightenment of Hashem, by sanctifying himself of his own volition and accord.

Phase two reflects the withdrawal of phase one. When an initial experience is unmerited— is a gift which is not based upon achievement—with time, the temporary clarity begins to fade as the radiance diminishes. At this point, without human participation and commitment to ascend the ladder of spirituality, this phase will include increasing darkness and less clarity of vision.

When the “bubble” bursts, because the person did not follow through or because he could not deal with the rising challenges of the temporal nature of his revelation, he becomes deflated, setting into a feeling of morose disconnectedness. Phase three presents a person who begins to doubt the significance and veracity of his initial spiritual awakening. Maybe it had not been real. He becomes disappointed, depressed, without joy, reflecting on earlier periods in his life in which he failed to live up to the demands of sacred living. He remembers his past, so feelings of guilt and shame creep in. This experience can be used constructively, if, as a result of his guilt, he senses a feeling of genuine humility, acknowledging his own inadequacy and spiritual dysfunction.

The seeker is now at a crossroads. Does he permit the guilt to take him down, to bring him to an abyss that quite possibly might be lower than his original self? Or, does he work through his issues, and, with profound humility, prepare it for the fourth phase of establishing a concrete commitment to growth, by forging a faithful and unwavering fidelity to Hashem.

Having said this, *Rav Tzadok* explains how these four stages played out during the Jews' Exodus experience. The first phase of their spiritual journey occurred on the night of the fifteenth of *Nissan*, when Hashem slew the Egyptian firstborn and the Jews were privy to unprecedented and unparalleled miracles. They were dazzled by the unquestionable revelation of Hashem, as He intervened in their liberation from the grips of slavery to which they had been subject for 210 years.

Sadly, all good things do not always last. The miracles of the Exodus also began to wane, and, as *Klal Yisrael* prepared to leave Egypt, the Jews felt alone and vulnerable. Where were the miracles? What happened to the remarkable wonders which had turned them on? They yearned to once again experience the revelation, to feel Hashem's closeness. In phase two, they felt sorrow, loneliness; Hashem had concealed himself from them. They were on their own and were not yet prepared for this reality.

Klal Yisrael now realized that Hashem had given them a wonderful gift, of which they were undeserving. Were they worthy of these glorious miracles? Did their past behavior warrant such an outpouring of Hashem's Revelation and intervention? In phase three, they felt ashamed and remorseful over their past iniquitous behavior, their lack of gratitude to the Almighty. They acknowledged that, for the last two centuries, they had been descending increasingly lower into the abyss of assimilation. Had it not been for Hashem's last minute rescue, they would have become a part of the Egyptian landscape, a nation of slaves who were spiritually no different than their cruel masters. The illumination that energized them on that special night was gone. They had to decide in which direction they were going: disconnect or commitment; falling prey to guilt or ascending upon the ladder founded on the grounds of humility.

After going through the painstaking process of introspection, the nation decided to take the initiative and reconnect with Hashem on their own, in such a manner that it would represent permanent conviction. After an honest spiritual calculation, they were now ready to accept Hashem's guiding Providence with total loyalty and complete submission, with no strings attached, to move beyond their past shortcomings in order to focus on the future.

This is what is meant by the sorrow that subdued the people as they left Egypt. Once the excitement that was engendered by the initial revelation – which was the result of the miracles – waned, they entered into the stages of concealment followed by disconnect. After the conclusion of the night's miracles, the people felt forgotten, lost, alone. They began to realize that they were unworthy of all that had taken place on their behalf; they were now overwhelmed with feelings of sorrow and regret. Hashem saw that they had reached their low point, resulting from personal remorse. They were now prepared to make the decision to forge their own independently generated relationship with Him. Hashem sought to imbue them with the realization that a meaningful relationship with Him is the result of a process that begins with revelation, then concealment, followed by deliberate steps towards establishing a lasting commitment to the Almighty.

This, of course, explains why some who commence the journey are waylaid and cannot overcome the stages of concealment and disconnect. It takes courage to overcome the obstacles and challenges, and strength to make an enduring commitment. The rewards of achieving the realization of the dream, however, are well worth the difficult journey.