

“Hashem shall do battle for you, and you shall remain silent.” (14:14)

If one had to suggest the underlying motif of *Parashas Beshalach*, I think it would be *emunah* and *bitachon*, faithful trust in the Almighty. From its very outset, as the nascent Jewish nation left Egypt, until its closing *pesukim* – describing our triumphant battle over our archenemy, Amalek – the *Parshah* is replete with instances of *emunah* and *bitachon*. Let us focus on a few of these examples.

As *Klal Yisrael* stood at the banks of the Red Sea, the people were overwhelmed by fear, and began to cry. They raised their voices in prayer, entreating Hashem to spare them. Moshe *Rabbeinu* quieted them with the declaration, *Hashem yi'lacheim la'chem v'atem ta'charishun*, “Hashem shall do battle for you, and you shall remain silent” (*Shemos* 14:14). Simply, this implies that the nation’s prayer will achieve efficacy if the people merit salvation. By demonstrating their readiness to enter the waters – thereby showing their willingness to sacrifice themselves for His Name – they would be spared. *Horav Meir, zl, m’Premishlan*, renders this *pasuk* homiletically, with contrasting lessons: *Hashem yi'lachem la'chem*. *Yi'lachem* is related to the word *lechem*, bread, the symbol of livelihood. Moshe was saying to the people, “Can you imagine, a G-d that is always there, Who never forsakes His people? He provides us with our daily *lechem*, bread. Yet, we feel the need to plow, plant and harvest. Where is our faith in Him?” *Hashem yilachem la'chem* – Hashem will provide your *lechem*, daily bread, yet, *v'atem ta'charishun*, “Yet, you still feel the need to plow!” (*Charishah* means plowing.) Where is your trust in the Almighty? Spend your valuable time learning – rather than applying yourselves to the

In a contrasting interpretation, *Horav Meir Premishlaner* reads the *pasuk* differently. “True, *Hashem yi'lachem la'chem*, the Almighty provides your daily bread, but nonetheless, *V'atem ta'chrishun*, You must be *mishtadel*, endeavor on your own, by plowing. You cannot just sit back and wait for the check to come to your doorstep. You must do something to provide the basis for the blessing to occur.

Veritably, these variant renderings apply to two different people. The individual whose *bitachon* is exemplary, whose trust in Hashem is unequivocal and sincere, can live on trust alone. Only *yechidim*, unique individuals, have merited to achieve such an enormous sense of *bitachon*. For the rest of us, *bitachon* goes hand in hand with *hishtadlus*, endeavoring. We must realize that the blessing is not commensurate with the endeavor. Nevertheless, we must do “ours” to demonstrate our effort and determination. Hashem provides the rest.

Certainly, there are different venues upon which miracles manifest themselves based on a person’s faith. A young man from a secular background came before the *Baba Sali, zl*. He was in a wheelchair, the result of an injury sustained as a soldier in the Yom Kippur War. One leg was mobile, while the other one was completely paralyzed, causing him to rely on a wheelchair for

mobility. He came before the sage to seek his blessing.

The *Baba Sali* asked him, “Do you put on *Tefillin* every day?” The young man replied that he did not. “Do you observe *Shabbos*?” Once again, the answer was no. “If this is the case, it is small wonder that you have the use of only one leg. Consider it a gift from the Almighty. The strength we have to function originates from Hashem. If we do not carry out His will, how can we expect to exist?”

When the young man heard these stern words, he began to weep uncontrollably. The *Baba Sali* looked at him and asked, “If I bless you with health, will you accept upon yourself the yoke of *mitzvos*?” “Yes! Yes!” replied the young man. “Hold onto my hands, and I will bless you,” the *Baba Sali* declared. The young man did as he was told, and then kissed the hands of the sage. “Rise up from your chair and walk across the room,” the *Baba Sali* instructed. To everyone’s surprise, and to the shock of the young man, he crossed the room on his own, as if he had never had an impediment!

Afterwards, the *Baba Sali* remarked to his grandson that when a Jew wholeheartedly accepts upon himself to correct his shortcomings, the force of the *emunah* exhibited by this acceptance will intercede on his behalf before Hashem to grant him a miracle. True belief generates true response.

The power of faith is awesome, maintaining the ability to transform the most grave circumstance into one of joy. The following episode substantiates this idea: The parents of a young child were distraught. Their six-year-old son would wake up in the middle of the night and cry incessantly. They had taken him to specialists to seek an explanation and cure this malady, to no avail. They turned to *tzaddikim*, righteous men, for blessings and/or amulets – all to no avail.

One day, the mother – a simple, trusting soul – found a page torn out from a *Chumash* lying on the street. She felt that this was a Heavenly sign. After cleaning off whatever dirt was on the page, she placed it beneath her son’s pillow that night, hoping that this holy page would be the “amulet” through which her son would be cured. Lo and behold, the child had his first restful night! He slept through the night without incident. The parents were overjoyed until the father looked at the verses printed on the page. The torn page was from the *Tochachah*, Rebuke, written in *Parashas Ki Savo*: “Hashem will strike you with madness... and you will be frightened night and day” (*Devarim* 28:28,66).

“How could you use this page? Do you know the terrible curses that are stated here?” the frightened husband asked. “I did not read it,” she replied. “It is a page of *Chumash* and that is all that counts. The holy words and letters will provide an amulet for our son.”

The husband, however, could not accept this. He went to the venerable *Rav* of the Sephardic community, *Horav Yaakov Mutzafi, zl*, to seek his guidance in the matter. The sage told him he had no reason to worry. This is the power of pure *emunah*. His wife’s faith was so positive that it could

transform curse into blessing, tragedy into joy.

There is one more story I have been saving for last. It is about a *Kollel* fellow in *Yerushalayim*, a scholar of note, who viewed and lived his life through the lens of *bitachon*. He confronted challenges with total equanimity; nothing fazed him. His trust in the Almighty was consummate. Thus, he was able to live in near-abject poverty as if he did not have a care in the world. Somehow, his family survived the daily financial pressures. The man never worried, because *Hashem ya'azor*, "The Almighty will help."

It was time to marry off his eldest daughter who was a lovely girl, a *baalas middos*, paragon of character refinement, and G-d-fearing. However, even the finest of girls requires an apartment. It was the accepted norm that an engaged girl's parents pay for the new couple's apartment. A *shidduch*, matrimonial match, was arranged with a fine Torah scholar, a young man who was truly the young woman's equal. The father of the *kallah*, our hero, promised an apartment for the wedding. They had selected a small "hole-in-the-wall" that would suffice for their needs. It cost "only" \$60,000.

The *kallah's* mother looked at her husband as if he had suffered a breakdown, "Where will we obtain \$60,000? We hardly have enough for our own simple, daily expenses!" Her husband assured her that she need not worry. "Hashem will provide the necessary money in time for the wedding." He returned to his idyllic life of Torah study. The subject was closed – for the time being.

We must understand that the husband was not a fool nor delusional. What he did possess was a profound sense of *bitachon*. If Hashem could provide their daily bread, He could likewise provide \$60,000. It was all based upon their merit. As the wedding date loomed closer, however, there still was nary a penny in the till. The wife was getting more nervous, while her husband was serene as ever, continuing to delve into the tomes of *Talmud* which were his life. Realizing that her husband had no plans for any *hishtadlus* of his own, his wife decided to speak with *Rebbetzin* Elyashiv, whose husband, the *posek ha'dor*, had a tremendous influence on her husband. *Rav* Elyashiv informed the husband that he must make some form of *hishtadlus*. He should not just sit back and wait for a miracle. The *gadol ha'dor* had spoken, and the husband's response was immediate. He went to one of his good friends who was the executive director of a large girls' school and solicited his assistance. Perhaps he could tell him the name of one of his donors, someone from whom he could endeavor to obtain the \$60,000 that he needed almost immediately.

The director shared with him the name of one of his American donors. What he did not bother telling him was that this man's annual donation was fifteen dollars! The *kallah's* father immediately sent off a letter explaining his present need, and solicited his assistance to the tune of \$60,000. The letter was sent. Having performed the required *hishtadlus*, he returned to learn with his *chavrusa*, study partner, in the *Kollel*. The wedding was in two weeks. He trusted that Hashem would provide them with His beneficence. "How" and "when" were unimportant. It **would happen!**

It was a few days before the wedding, and as usual, the father of the *kallah* was engrossed in his learning, while his wife and daughter were beside themselves with worry. They would have to call off the wedding. The embarrassment would be traumatic. What could they do? They could not possibly come up with \$60,000 in the next three days. That afternoon, an envelope arrived from America – the return address was the man to whom their father and husband had written earlier. With trembling hands, they opened the envelope. Words cannot describe their shock, joy and utter disbelief to discover a check for \$60,000 in the envelope! The wife immediately ran to the *Kollel* to inform her husband of the exciting news. A miracle had surely occurred!

The *Kollel* fellow took the news in stride, accepting what he had been sure about all along. He trusted in Hashem, and his faith was affirmed. He immediately wrote a warm letter of gratitude to his new benefactor – and returned to his Torah study. Meanwhile, his friend, the executive director of the girls' school, was shocked and in a state of disbelief. If this is what the American donor sent to an unknown *Kollel* fellow, he would surely give him much more! This time he decided to fly to New York and visit the American benefactor in person. Upon arriving at his home, he was shocked that the man lived with his wife and young daughter in a small, simple apartment. There was nothing about it that bespoke any allusion to wealth. Perhaps the man lived frugally.

“Let me tell you my story,” the benefactor began. “For many years, my wife and I prayed for a child. Finally, we were blessed with a little girl. She was the center of our lives. At the age of four years old, we enrolled her in nursery school. Everything seemed to be going so well in our lives until, one day, we received the call that every parent dreads: our baby had been hit by a car! The situation was grave. We rushed to the hospital as they were wheeling her into surgery. The surgeon was brutally honest with us. Hope for a successful outcome was, at best, slim. We began to pray fervently. All the tears that we shed to have this child were renewed, as we entreated Hashem for a blessing: ‘Please let our baby live!’ I then made a vow that half of the money that we had placed in a savings account for her dowry would be given to *tzedakah*, in the hope for a complete recovery.

“Hours elapsed, and finally an exhausted, but smiling, surgeon came out to speak us. The surgery had gone well. He was cautiously optimistic. That very day, I went to the bank and withdrew half of my account. It amounted to \$60,000. I declared that the first needy person to approach me would receive this money. That night, we came home to find a letter in our mailbox from a *Kollel* fellow in *Eretz Yisrael*. He was marrying off his daughter and had no money to pay for her apartment. I felt it was Hashem’s way of providing the dowry for one girl with the dowry of another. Thus, he was the one to whom I sent the entire check.”

This is a true story of *bitachon* that we can “take to the bank.”