

## The son of a Yisraeli woman went out – and he was the son of an Egyptian man... the name of his mother was Shlomis bas Divri. (24:10,11)

*Chazal (Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra 32)* state that *Klal Yisrael* was redeemed from Egypt due to its high standard of morality. Indeed, not one Jewish man or woman was involved with an Egyptian, except for Shlomis bas Divri, who is singled out in the Torah. This is our Torah's way of teaching that no other Jew or Jewess had sinned. A powerful statement, attested to by the Torah. How did they do it? It is not as if *Klal Yisrael* was perfect. Veritably, the people clung steadfast to certain traditions and lifestyles, but to rise above the moral turpitude that was the symbol of Egyptian culture demanded superhuman commitment. From where did they derive this extraordinary adherence to morality?

*Horav Chaim Kamil, zl*, quotes the *Talmud Megillah* 29, where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai states that, wherever the Jewish people have been exiled, Hashem's Divine Presence has accompanied them. This was especially true in Egypt. The *Maharasha* questions the proof from Egypt, since it was obvious that Hashem revealed Himself often to Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon in Egypt. He explains that Egypt was unique in that the bar of *gilui Shechinah*, the revelation of Hashem's Presence, was raised there to the point that it was on a scale equitable with the Divine Presence in the *Mishkan* and the *Bais Hamikdash*. This now applies everywhere that we have made our home. Hashem is always there with us. (Perhaps some of us must look a little harder.)

We now understand *Klal Yisrael's* secret for success during the Egyptian exodus. *V'Hi sheamdah l'aavoseinu*, it was the *Shechinah* accompanying our ancestors in Egypt that protected them from falling into moral bankruptcy. They did not defile themselves due to the merit that the *Shechinah* was among them. With this in mind, we can never say that we are unable to cope with the spiritual challenges that confront us in *galus*, exile. We are not alone. We have Hashem in our midst. Can we ask for more? Do we need more than the ultimate *siyata diShmaya*, Divine Assistance, of Hashem's Presence?

We often feel lost in a generation whose societal culture has descended to such a nadir of depravity that it would probably be the envy of the Egyptians. While it is true that Torah study is thriving like never before, the challenges to one's spirituality presented by various media and technology – in tandem with a society in which everything goes – is like nothing we, as a people, have ever experienced. Knowing that Hashem is with us in this last *galus* is encouraging.

*L'sitcha Elyon* relates that *Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl*, *Kaminitzer Rosh Yeshivah* and author of *Bircas Shmuel*, once spoke to an assembly of *yeshivah* students concerning the spiritual descendancy of the generations (*yeridas ha'doros*). He quoted David *Hamelech's* enjoinder to his son Shlomo (*Hamelech*): "Towards the children of Barzillai... act with kindness, and they shall be among those who eat at your table, for, in this way, they befriended me when I fled from Avshalom,

your brother” (*Melachim* 1,2:7). This is an enormous reward for the little food they shared with him! For this reason, they have the merit of being guests at the king’s table and having ready access to him at all times?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* began by bemoaning the spiritual difficulties that confront the *yeshivah* student on an almost daily basis. On the other hand, the opportunity for spiritual growth at such a time is unparalleled, quite like David *Hamelech*’s predicament, compelled to flee for his life lest Avshalom overtake him; indeed, he was a prisoner in his own country. While people respect the king, they fear the repercussions from the king’s enemies, lest they allow the king into their home, lest they show him any form of favor. It is specifically at such a time that he who opens his door for the king – even if he gives him very little – earns exalted eventual reward! This is what Barzillai did – and this is why he was so rewarded. It was all in the timing. There was an unparalleled window of opportunity – and he seized the moment!

“This is the situation in our generation,” declared the *Rosh Yeshivah*. “It is the generation of *Ikvesa d’Moshicha*, (the heel of *Moshiach*). Every *ben Torah* who toils diligently to study and teach, to observe and perform, regardless of its negligible value in comparison to (what was expected and performed in) previous generations, is sufficient for him to be among those who gaze upon the King and eat at His Table!” It is a time for seizing the moment. This could also be the reason for the unique *siyata diShmaya* that we are accorded today, unlike any other previous time.

When the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, visited *Yeshivas Toras Chesed* in Lodz, Poland, the *Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Sender Diskin, zl*, asked the venerable sage to speak words of inspiration to the students. The *Chafetz Chaim* acquiesced. “I have always been troubled,” he began, “and I have ruminated over this a number of times. The saintly *gaon, Horav Akiva Eiger, zl*, lived not long ago. Yet, in greatness in Torah, he is without peer. It is obvious from his responsa and novellae that his Torah study was blessed with unusual *siyata diShmaya*. His questions are earth-shattering; his expositions are so brilliantly put together that they bring boundless joy to those who study his words. I have wondered what was the secret – the reason – for such *siyata diShmaya*, which is unfounded in the generation preceding him – or after him. Why did he merit to become a *gaon* among *gaonim*?

“I have thought about this very much, and I have arrived at one conclusion. During the generation of *Rav Akiva Eiger*, the scourge of the *Haskalah*, Enlightenment, reared its ugly head (author’s translation). The apostasy and heresy which they spawned were devastating, destroying the lives of many of our unsuspecting co-religionists. The *shuls* were emptied; *yeshivos* were closed due to lack of attendance (anyone who studied Torah was labeled a primitive parasite). The Torah was cast aside to a corner, like a pitiful orphan. It was specifically in this generation, when the study of Torah had waned so miserably, that *Rav Akiva Eiger* rose to prominence. Every generation is allotted a certain amount of *siyata diShmaya*. He was there to take extra portions – because, sadly, no one else came forward.”

The *Chafetz Chaim* concluded, "Today, it is not much different. We are living in a time when those who hate the Torah will do anything to prevent the *ben Torah* from achieving his goals. The *siyata diShmaya* out there is multifold and available to whoever seizes the opportunity! He will be blessed by Hashem with uncanny success in Torah!"