

G-d went with them by day in a Pillar of Cloud... and by night in a Pillar of Fire... so that they could travel by day and by night. (13:21)

When *Klal Yisrael* traveled in the Wilderness, they were protected by miraculous forces with which Hashem provided them. A Pillar of Cloud paved the way for them by day, and a Pillar of Fire lit up the road for them at night. Thus, the Jews were hampered neither by obstacles on the road, nor by the darkness of night. The *pesukim* seem to underscore the need for the people to travel at night, as opposed to straightforward day travel. On the other hand, the Torah later (ibid 19:5) states: "And I bore them on eagles' wings, and I brought them to Me." *Rashi* observes that in the first stage of their journey from Ramses to *Succos*, they covered this impressive distance in literally an instant. When eagles were the mode of travel, they were able to cover the 120 *mil* (a *mil* is about 3,000-4,000 feet) in an unusually rapid manner. Why was it necessary to travel at night? They were able to reach their destination in no time at all. Apparently, the journey of *Klal Yisrael* in the Wilderness had a special purpose, one that went beyond just "getting there." The actual journey was purposeful.

Indeed, in his negotiations with Pharaoh, Moshe *Rabbeinu* alludes to the ultimate purpose of the Exodus: "When you bring out the people from Egypt, they shall serve G-d on this mountain" (ibid 3:12). *Har Sinai* was the "mountain" upon which the Torah would be given to *Klal Yisrael*. This was the *raison d'etre* of the Exodus, the driving force for its occurrence. The Exodus occurred in four progressive stages, culminating in the acceptance of the Torah. We commemorate this four-stage experience through the medium of the *Arba Kosos*, four cups of wine, which we drink at the *Seder*.

A *halachah* associated with the four cups of wine appears enigmatic. One is permitted to drink other wine between the first and second cups, and between the second and third cups. It is prohibited, however, to drink other wine between the third and fourth cups. The *Shem Mishmuel* suggests a profound symbolism which is represented by this *halachah*. We are being taught that the first three stages of the redemption, during which Hashem relieved *Klal Yisrael's* suffering, are intimately and indivisibly connected with the final stage, during which Hashem took *Klal Yisrael* to Him as a people. In this manner, He elevated the people to the status of nationhood, with the Torah serving as the covenant of their relationship. Thus, we may not drink other wines between the third and fourth cups, in order to emphasize the need to connect the dots; the whole purpose of the Exodus was to facilitate nationhood. To ignore this connection is to undermine the very underpinnings of the Exodus. If accepting the Torah was not a given, *yetzias Mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt, might not have occurred.

Thus, the forty-nine day period between the Exodus and *Mattan Torah*, the Giving of the Torah, had one single purpose: to prepare the people for the great event that would take place at the end. *Klal Yisrael's* journey from Egypt to *Sinai* was much more than a physical trek; it was a spiritual passage, during which the newly-redeemed slaves would be spiritually elevated and transformed

into a nation of prophets prepared to receive the *dvar Hashem*, word of G-d, in a Revelation unprecedented and unparalleled in the history of mankind. Had *Klal Yisrael* not physically and spiritually traveled by both day and night, this sequence leading up to the *Mattan Torah* would have been interrupted, thereby impugning the feasibility of the Giving of the Torah. Therefore, the Torah informs us that Hashem led *Klal Yisrael* both by day and by night, in order to teach that their spiritual development was an unimpeded and uninterrupted journey whose duration began with the Exodus and culminated at *Har Sinai* when Hashem gave them the Torah.

This idea, explains the *Shem Mishmuel*, is supported by a *halachah* pertinent to *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, the Counting of the *Omer*, which takes place daily from *Pesach* (second night) until *Erev Shavuos*. According to the prevalent practice, if one forgets to count on any one given night, he may no longer fulfill the *mitzvah* in its entirety, preceded by a *brachah*. In other words, if he has missed a night, he may continue counting on subsequent nights – but without a preceding blessing. The reason is clear. The days of the *Omer* are a period of time when we emulate the journey the Jews took in the Wilderness – from Egypt to *Sinai*. As mentioned, it was much more than a “trip.” It was a spiritual rite of passage during which the nation prepared itself for the Revelation. There may be no interruption during this time; otherwise, the preparation (symbolized by the counting) is defective, obviating our ability to achieve maximal opportunity.

Alternatively, we learn another lesson based upon *Klal Yisrael's* continuous day and night traveling. To put it simply: sometimes one must travel at night. Day travel is so much easier and more convenient. While there is less “traffic” at night, our vision becomes stigmatized, as we have less clarity. Symbolically, day represents clarity of vision, full understanding and intellectual appreciation. Night, on the other hand, symbolizes ambiguity, obfuscation and intellectual uncertainty. The nation followed G-d without knowing what would happen to them, or how they would survive the elements. Nonetheless, they trusted the Almighty and followed – without question.

The nation's strong faith was recognized by Hashem, comparing the love they had for Hashem to that of a bride for her husband (*Yirmiyahu 2:2*). This expression of faith is much like traveling through the night, at a time in which lack of clarity and certainty prevail. Thus, when the Torah says that the nation traveled by day and by night, it is a commentary on the strength of their unparalleled faith.

People experience various tests to their faith. It is most difficult when one must grope his way through a maze just to survive. It is completely another, when everyone gives his unasked for advice, expressing his doubt and negativity, deriding one's decision to go forward – telling him “no” all of the way. This is how *Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl*, the architect of Torah education in this country, explains *Yirmiyahu HaNavi's* praise of *Klal Yisrael*: “I recall for you the kindness of your youth... your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unsown land.” The last phrase – *b'erez lo zeruah*, “into an unsown land,” a land where the “lo,” no/not is sown! A land where negativity prevails, where every challenge appears formidable. *Rav Shraga Feivel* knew

quite well the psyche of the American Jew who felt that Torah *Yiddishkeit* could not be sown in America. He neither acquiesced to such defeatism, nor permitted his students to defer to it. He encouraged, cajoled and convinced, imbuing them with a fiery passion and indomitable drive to build Torah in America – despite the prevalent attitude of negativity and pessimism.

The powerful status quo, the result of overwhelming assimilation, had destroyed the self-confidence of the American Jew. Indeed, the overwhelming concern of the Orthodox Jew was to avoid sinking into the morass that had enveloped so many of his co-religionists. They knew fully well that, while they might be able to keep their heads above water, what about their children? Who could save them? The dilemma confronting Rav Shraga Feivel was unprecedented. He knew one thing for certain: unless something was done soon, American Jewry would be history. He never gave up fighting the “no”. This is why he succeeded.

Horav Simchah Wasserman, zl, once applied the comparison between Noach and Avraham *Avinu* to explain why Rav Shraga Feivel triumphed in an area where so many others had failed. [I should add that failure is a strong word. Perhaps, it would be better to say that they did not undertake or make the attempt due to fear of failure. Veritably, one can achieve no greater failure than he who does not even make an attempt.] While Noach succeeded in preserving his own spirituality – in a generation where depravity and hedonism were the norm – he sadly was unable to save anyone other than his immediate family.

Avraham *Avinu*, however, spread his knowledge of Hashem, teaching monotheism to an entire world. Wherein lay the reason for Avraham’s success and Noach’s failure?

Rav Simchah explained that it was a matter of perspective. Noach viewed the generation of the Flood as impervious to reproach. He saw them as what they were; he only added that they were resistant to any form of change. He saw a reality before him which was probably consistent with the truth, and therefore, he gave up without a fight. Avraham, however, refused to accept the status quo. He did not see the situation as immutable; therefore, he set about to create an upheaval that would forever alter human existence.

American Jewry during Rav Shraga Feivel’s tenure desperately needed another Avraham *Avinu* – an individual who could look “no” in the face and continue. Only by ignoring the status quo could they transform America. Rav Shraga Feivel was that leader who overcame negativity armed with the fierce and passionate love of Hashem and His People. The present Torah world is the beneficiary of his tenacity. We are his legacy.