

The Exodus Part II

By: Rabbi Yanki Tauber

Some people experience freedom canoeing across a pristine lake in the unspoiled wilderness. I feel free when my excuses run out.

There's something I very much want to do. But I also don't want to do it. So I blame my wife, my kids, my age, my youth, my childhood, my landlord and my employer. It works for a while -- a day, a month, a year -- but finally, inevitably, there comes the point at which there are no excuses left.

What a relief! I take a deep, exhilarating breath. I feel fifty pounds lighter. Now it's just me and me in the ring -- my inner self and my outer self, my motivated self and my inert self -- and let the better man win.

This week's Torah reading, *Beshalach* (Exodus 13:17-17:16), can be termed "The Exodus, Part II." In last week's reading, *Bo*, we read how the last of the Ten Plagues finally broke the spirit of the Egyptians and, after four generations of slavery, the Children of Israel marched triumphantly out of Egypt, matzahs baking in the sun.

Time for the credits to start scrolling up the screen? Not quite. Instead we get a frame reading "Seven Days Later" and the opening scene of *Beshalach*. The Israelites are walking serenely through the desert, when they look over their shoulders to see the Egyptians chasing after them. Seems that marching out of Egypt is not going to do the trick. We're going to have to split a sea first before we can proceed on to Sinai.

What's going on? Haven't the Egyptians been decisively defeated, their gods shown to be worthless, their proud Pharaoh utterly humiliated? Hasn't he come running in his pajamas in the middle of the night, literally begging Moses and Aaron to take their people out of his land as quickly as possible? Who, then, is this mighty Pharaoh materializing like a mirage in the desert, hot on our heels with an army of war chariots and horsemen?

Chassidic teaching explains that there are, indeed, two distinct stages to the human quest for freedom. That's why we have *Bo* and *Beshalach*. That's why we have the first and latter days of Passover. That's why we have the Exodus from Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea.

There are two types of slavery. There's a kind of slavery in which the chains that shackle our souls are externally imposed -- like when your boss fires you, your landlord raises your rent and your mother-in-law invites herself for the weekend. Then there's the internal slavery that comes from our own, self-imposed shackles -- our anger, our vanity, our laziness, our greed.

14 January | 10 Shevat

Beshalach

Shabbat Begins: 4:04 pm

Shabbat Ends: 5:13 pm

It's easy to think ourselves free when we overcome an externally-imposed limitation. We're shocked and surprised to discover Pharaoh pursuing us after we've escaped his Egypt. But the Pharaoh we see closing in on us in the desert is a Pharaoh that we took out of Egypt with us. We've been freed from the Egypt that closed us in from without, but we have yet to transcend the Egypt in ourselves.

To do that, we have to **split open our sea**, penetrating the depths of who and what we are to uncover our truest self.

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