Beshalach

Exile, Rachmones, Unity and Joseph's Treasurers

The rabbis teach us that every exile that the Jewish people endured was for the purpose of teaching us something very important about how we are to live. The rabbis say that the Egyptian exile was to teach us the importance of *Rachmones*. The Jewish people learned from the Egyptian exile that they had to be compassionate to everyone. They were transformed from a *Merahaim* to a *Rachum*, which mean that they were transformed from a people who could potentially be compassionate into a people who by their very nature needed to be compassionate. The Egyptian exile was meant, according to the rabbis, to instill into the soul of every Jew the need to be compassionate. Without compassion even the *Torah* can be twisted and turned and used to harm people. The Jewish people had to learn how to be compassionate before they could receive the *Torah*.

The rabbis also teach us that the Babylonian exile was meant to teach the Jewish people the futility of idol worship. After the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people had no need any more to worship idols. They realized that paganism had no worth. The rabbis tell the story of how, after the Babylonian exile, the Jewish people complained to G-d saying that "it was Your fault, G-d, that we worshiped idols. If You would not have given us the *Yetzer Hora*, the selfish inclination, we would not have worshipped idols." G-d said, "All right, I will take it away from you." Immediately after G-d removed it from them, nobody wanted to get married, nobody had any ambition, nobody wanted to build a house, even the chickens were not interested in laying eggs. Again the people complained to G-d saying, "G-d, the world is not working. You have to do something," at which point G-d gave them back the *Yetzer Hora* but not in as strong a portion.

The first Temple, the rabbis say, was destroyed because the Jewish people in their pursuit of idol worship committed the three cardinal sins: murder, incest (sexual immorality), and idol worship. After the Jewish people returned to build the second Temple, we do not find these sins with any great frequency among the Jewish people.

The second Temple, the rabbis say, was destroyed because of the sin of senseless hatred. People held their ideological positions so strongly that

they would not book any opposition, and they allowed their ideological positions to destroy Jewish unity and, even in many instances, to override their compassion, which is a necessity for the observance of the *Torah.* The rabbis go so far as to say that if you find a Jewish person who is not compassionate, doubt whether he is a Jew.

In the *Torah* portion *Bashalach* we learn how the Jewish people left Egypt. We learn how they had, in the previous *Torah* portion *Bo,* asked, at G-d's insistence, their Egyptian neighbors for gold and silver vessels to compensate them for their 210 years of hard labor in Egypt. These vessels they took with them when they left Egypt. Moshe, on the other hand, the *Torah* tells us, did not take any gold and silver vessels. Instead, he took the bones of Joseph because Joseph had made the Jewish people swear saying "that when G-d will remember me, you will bring my bones from this place with you." "Bones" in Hebrew also have the meaning of "strength." Moshe knew that he had to take up Joseph's strengths when he left Egypt. Joseph was the epitome of the Jew in exile. He lived all his adult life in exile. Joseph made it big in Egypt, but his very success made the Egyptian slavery almost inevitable. When Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, he tells them, "And now you did not send me here but G-d." He says this because he recognized that his brothers had done *teshuva.* They had acted totally differently in a similar situation. In the first situation, they had reacted to a favored son, Joseph, by plotting to kill him and then eventually by selling him into slavery. In the second situation, they had reacted to another favored son, Benjamin, by trying to save him from slavery. Joseph was confident that, since the brothers had done teshuva, they would be forgiven. Joseph goes on to say, "And G-d had made me a father to Pharaoh and a master to all his household and a ruler in all of Egypt." What's the difference between a father to Pharaoh and a master to all his household and a ruler in all of Egypt?

When a father gives advice to his son, a good father always gives advice to his son which is in the best interests of the son and not necessarily in his best interests. In fact, sometimes a father, by giving his best advice to his son, is acting against his own interests. For example, when a father advises a son to take a position far away from him because he knows that this position is better than any position he can offer his son, it deprives

him of his son's talents and of his company. The father is acting only in the interests of his son and not at all in his own self-interests. A master, or an employer to an employee relationship, is an altogether different relationship. An employer employs an employee only as long as that employee benefits him. The employee almost always is told that if he will be loyal and work hard, he will have a good job and he will be able to do well for himself and also for his employer, but that is not true. An employer will only keep an employee as long as he is making money off that employee. When an employer finds he is not, he lets that employee go, no matter how long he has worked for him or how hard he has worked.

Some companies have tried to promote loyalty by saying that they will give total loyalty to their employees. This was the Japanese model. However, this model is breaking down even in Japan. Employees always feel terribly betrayed after they have given 100% to their employer, only to be laid off through no fault of their own. Employees really should not give 100% to their employer, maybe only 60% or 70%. They should reserve 30% or so of their energies to take care of themselves in case they are laid off. The employer does what is good for the employee, but only if it is also good for him.

A ruler, on the other hand, only does what is good for his country. He does not care what is good for the individual businessman or farmer or professional. We have just had an illustration of this in this country where every economist has said that the GATT treaty will in a short time add $1,700 to every person's income. If this is so, why did so many people fight it so hard? The answer is because certain industries are going to be wiped out in America. The textile industry probably will not be able to compete. Other industries will compensate for the loss of the textile industry, but those people who own textile businesses did not want to lose their businesses. A ruler looks out for the total good of the country, not for individual interests, at least he should; otherwise, his country will end up like the countries of South America where, until very recently, they were controlled by a very few rich people who did not want to change their ways, who did not want to lose some of their money so their country could develop.

When Joseph's brothers told Jacob that Joseph was alive, they said,

"And he was a ruler in all of Egypt." Jacob's heart fainted and he did not believe them. He did not believe them because he could not believe that his Joseph was such megalomanic that he only thought of the interests of the country without thinking of the interests of individuals also. This could not be his Joseph. Therefore, when the brothers then told Yaacov everything Joseph said, how Joseph was also a father to Pharaoh and a master to his household, then his spirit was assuaged, and he believed them.

The rabbis tell us in a *Medrash* that Joseph left three treasures in Egypt. One treasure was found by Korach and one treasure was found by the Roman emperor Antonius, and the third is stored away to be found in Messianic Times. The first treasure that Joseph left behind was the treasure of Jewish unity, based not only on compassion but also upon forgiveness. He warned his brothers against letting selfish interests destroy the Jewish people as it almost had done when they had sold him into slavery. The first Temple was destroyed basically because of selfishness. The people selfishly took advantage of their fellow Jews to increase their wealth, etc. Korach was a representative of this type of selfishness. He led a refold against Moshe which almost succeeded. He masked his selfishness behind slogans and behind name calling. The second treasure Joseph left behind was taken by the Roman emperor Antonius, who was a friend of Rabbi Yehuda Hanosi. In fact, according to the *Medrash*, after Antonius died, he left a large fortune to Rabbi Yehuda Hanosi. Antonius used to consult him about many matters. However, after Antonius died, Roman persecution increased until most of the Jews were driven from the land of Israel. Jews had still formed a majority of the population of the land of Israel for three hundred years after the destruction of the Temple. It was a senseless civil war between the two sons of Alexander Yanai approximately 130 years before the destruction of the temple that had let the Romans in in the first place. Pompei was invited by Hyrcanus, one of the brothers, to settle the civil war and he just decided to stay with all subsequent Jewish kings being no more than Roman puppets. These Jewish kings were more interested in pleasing the Romans than in taking care of their own people's business, Herod, etc. This was, of course, what Joseph did, too, in Egypt. He was more interested in furthering Pharaoh's interests than in furthering his own interests. When he forced all the Egyptian people to sell to Pha-

raoh all their land and when he moved them all around the country in exchange for food during the years of the famine, he acted against his own people's interest. True, he destroyed the nobility and made Pharaoh the absolute rules of Egypt, but this also cost him the loyalty of the Egyptian people. True, Joseph had actually lessened their taxes by having them pay only 20%, but he had destroyed their independence and later the Egyptian people were not going to lift a finger to help the Jews when they lost their independence. This error of looking out more for our host country's ruler's interests than for our own interests has been repeated time and again in Jewish history. The Jewish people had it very good in Poland for 500 years until 1648. Poland rules from the Baltic to the Black Sea. We were the tax collectors for the Poles. When Chelminitsky led the Ukrainians who were Greek Orthodox in a rebellion against the Catholic Poles, he took out his ire on the Jewish people. One-third of the Jews were killed in that uprising.

Joseph's second treasure was the lesson that Jews should look out, not only for the interests of others, but also we should look out for our own interests, too. The relationship to foreign rulers should not be that of a father, but hat of an employer to an employee.

The third treasure that Joseph left was his dreams. He inculcated into his children and into the rest of the Jewish people the idea that they should never give up their Jewish dreams, dreams which speak about how eventually peace, brotherhood, and harmony will reign. These dreams will eventually be realized if we all constantly work for them. The rabbis tell us that the purpose of this long exile from the destruction of the second Temple in the year 70 was to teach us about Joseph's treasures. The Jewish people had to learn how to be a father to each other, how to look out for each other's interests, how to have Jewish unity, and how never to call each other names and stir up hatred. We also had to learn how to treat the nations of the world as an employer. We are to take into account the needs of the other nations, but we also must remember that we have to look out after our own interests, too. This is very important in the current Arab-Israeli negotiations. The nations of the world want Israel to give in to all of the Arab demands, but they would not life a finger to help Israel if she were attacked. In fact, most of the nations of the world think that the Jew-

ish people should have disappeared 2,000 years ago.

Thirdly, this long exile was to each us never to give up on our dreams, never to compromise on them, always to have hope and faith that eventually peace and brotherhood and love and compassion will reign in the world. In spite of everything, in spite of the Holocaust, Arab terror, and the daily cruelty we see about us, these dreams will be realized. Let us all hope and pray that just as Joseph learned about his own treasures from his own experiences, we Jewish people have learned about these treasures during our experiences during these 2,000 years of exile, that we have learned that there must always be Jewish unity that there must always be concern for Jewish interests as well as the interests of others, and that all Jews must always have a fervent belief in Jewish dreams. May this be so.

Vision Requires Values More than Skills

In the *Torah* portion, *Beshalach*, we learn how the Jewish people sang a song at the Red Sea after Pharaoh's army was destroyed. Afterwards, we learn about a series of complaints, complaints about water and food and about the hard life in the desert. Without the song the Jewish people had in their hearts, they could never have endured the hardships.

We, after all, live in reality. We cannot just live on our ideals, but without our ideals, our inner vision, reality would crush us. The Jewish people went three days without water. That is a long time. Inner vision is absolutely necessary in order to overcome life's problems. That's why we learn about the song first. Three places in the *Torah* is the word *"Horaim"* used. It is used in this week's *Torah* portion when Moshe lifts up his staff and the waters of the Red Sea part. It is also used by Elisha when an artisan lost his tools in the sea. He could no longer work because he no longer had his tools. Elisha said, "*Horaim*, lift up, oh sea." The sea is a hard taskmaster. The sea is a symbol of cruelty. Big fish eat little fish. Sudden squalls come up. The sea is unrelenting. There is water everywhere but nothing to drink. The third time the word *Horaim* is mentioned is by Isaiah when he says, "Lift up your voice."

From these different places, we learn what the purpose of education

should be. We learn that education should give people an inner vision. It says, "Lift up, *Matcho*, lift up your staff." "Staff" in Hebrew also means "tribe." A person also had to learn how to have relationships in order to have inner vision. He has to tie his lot in with others. He must have values. The second *Horaim* teaches us we must have skills and the third that we must have the opportunity to be ourselves, to lift up our voice. Unfortunately, in our modern world, we have forgotten all about the first *Horaim.* Our public schools only teach us skills and to be ourselves. They do not teach us any values. Recently a young man came to me who was a Phi Beta Kappa with a very good job. All he did everyday was go from his job to his apartment and then go for walks. He had no goals in life. Nothing was worth anything to him. He had skills but what should he use them for?

In this *Torah* portion, we also learn about the three meals we are to have on Shabbat. We learn it from the repetition of the word *Hayom* three times. The rabbis teach us that the reason we have these three means is to remind us of the three aspects of *Shabbat. Shabbat* teaches us that (1) G-d is the creator; (2) that He gave us the *Torah* and (3) that we are working for the future, for the Messianic era.

A person had to feel (1) that he is wanted, that he is needed, that he is important, that G-d needs him to do a task; (2) that there is right and wrong in the world and (3) that his actions can bring a better world. This young man did not have these ideas. He did not have this inner vision. He was on the verge of suicide. Suicide today is the leading cause of death, after accidents, for teenagers and college students.

In the past, many people have maligned Hebrew schools. It is true that Hebrew schools were not as good as they should have been. They did not teach the proper skills. However, they did teach values. Unfortunately, many people compared the Hebrew schools to the public schools. They tried to claim that since the Hebrew schools were not teaching skills property, the children were not learning anything in them. This was false. Then they cut the Hebrew school from six days to three days, believing for some reason that less is more.

Our public schools, unfortunately, only teach skills. They do not teach values, and unless people have values, they cannot lead happy, fulfilling lives, and many of them will turn out to be menaces to society. Today,

thank G-d, we have day schools which teach our children proper skills and which also teach them values and how to express themselves.

I am reminded of the famous story of a missionary who went to teach the cannibals. When he came back to England, they asked him whether or not he were very successful. He said, yes, he was very successful. They asked him if the cannibals had stopped eating other human beings. He said, "No, but I taught them to use a knife and fork." Unfortunately, that is the story many times with our public school systems. It is only teaching us to use a knife and fork. We need more things than just skills. We need values, and that is what our day schools teach our children, in addition to people skills and how to express themselves. Let's all hope and pray that all our youngsters will have the opportunity to have a day school education.