

BESHALACK
JANUARY 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the most difficult things to tell a person is that he is suffering from illusions. We all have dreams and we all need dreams. However, we have to live in the real world. We have to see the world the way it is, not the way we would like it to be. Unfortunately, in our modern world we have divorced reality from dreams. We have created a dichotomy, a sharp division between those who dream and those who do. Life is difficult and there are many things in it we do not want to see. Especially, in America where we feel that everything is possible, we refuse to accept the fact that we are limited in any way. That's one of the main reasons why Americans have such a hard time dealing with death because death tells us all that not everything is possible.

Dreams have to do with idealism, with change, with making things better. and dreams are an essential part of every person. Without dreams, without a song, a person is not important. His life really does not have meaning because he cannot believe that he will make a difference. If nothing can change, then he obviously cannot be a vehicle of change. He cannot impress a higher standard of values on the world. Cynicism or escape is the inevitable result. However, believing that we can accomplish things that are patently impossible, that we can realize our dreams without any effort leads to great (disillusionment and even mental illness. Just because we want something does not mean we can have it. In order to achieve our dreams, we must work at them and we must go step by step always assuring that previous accomplishments are stable before going on to higher levels.

In America today, we are suffering from a great many illusions. We think we can have happy marriages and still run around. We think we can have a government which supplies all our needs without paying any taxes. We

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believe we can have a strong army without any need for a draft or even a high level of defense spending. We believe that we can accomplish everything without any need for self-discipline. Judaism teaches us that we must dream but that dreams must be accompanied by self-discipline. We Jews, almost more than any other group in American society, ^{have} ~~has~~ realized the American dream mainly because we were willing to work for it. We were willing to get the education and spend the time and the hours in order to achieve it. However, the dream has turned out to be hollow. Material things, alone, never satisfy. They are only tools to help us fulfill our dreams of what the world should be. We still need spiritual Jewish dreams. Material things divorced from dreams lead to grasping, selfish, ugly people.

In the Torah portion, Beshalach, we learn about what happens when dreams are divorced from reality. The Jewish people had just been redeemed from Egypt. They, though, were not yet free because Pharoah's army was still intact and was pursuing them. G-d, though, split the Red Sea and the Jewish people crossed it unharmed. The waters then collapsed upon the pursuing Egyptians and Israel was free. They immediately burst into song. Their dreams were being realized. They now could proceed to the promised land. Immediately afterwards the mood completely changes. The rest of the Torah portion is concerned with complaints. They complain about the lack of water, about their dull food, and generally about life in the desert. They go so far even to say, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots". What went wrong here? Why had their dreams turned to such hopelessness? They had completely divorced them from reality.

There are two types of dreams in the world. There is a dream which says everything will be perfect if only I can achieve one thing. There is a hope which is unlimited, a hope which says that I can, with one act,

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dramatically change the world and I can rest from then on. There is another type of hope which is a limited hope which is a limited dream which says that if I prepare myself, if I work, I can make things a little better each day and by so doing, I can make things significantly different for myself and for my family and for future generations, but I must work at it day after day, after day. The Israelites thought that freedom would transform them. They would have no more problems. Freedom only gave them an opportunity to make things better. It did not solve all their problems.

Today we have so many youngsters who turn to dope and drink and immorality because they feel hopeless. They want instant happiness. They want their dreams fulfilled immediately. This is impossible. There is nothing that can be achieved without hard self-disciplined work. Learning is fun but only after you have mastered a subject-not when you are ~~engaged~~ ^{studying} in it. Marriage is rewarding but only after you have worked at it. Dreams can never be separated from life. If they are, then cynicism ensues and hopelessness and guilt take over.

✓ We have another song of Moses recorded in the Torah in the Torah portion, Haazinu. Moshe leaves a farewell message to the Jewish people. He does not leave them a prose message because the song of Judaism, the dreams of Judaism are what allows it to continue. He ~~knows~~ ^{knows}, as we know, that Jews stop being Jews when they no longer believe that Judaism has anything to offer the world. Jewish dreams are essential for the survival of the Jewish people but Jewish dreams cannot exist in a vacuum. They cannot be fed by one-time contributions. They must be nurtured and practiced day after day without let up.

Moshe opens his song by saying, "My lessons shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distill as the dew". The Torah is compared to rain. Many

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times it is uncomfortable. Many times it is unpleasant but without it, just like without rain, nothing will grow. The Torah requires effort. There is no such thing as an easy Judaism, a Judaism which is always laughter and fun. This type of Judaism will be crushed by life. Judaism is a religion of hope but of limited hope. It says we have a wonderful dream. We can achieve it but we must go step by step. We must work at it, sacrifice for it, apply it in all parts of life and then will see that our life will bloom and flower and be rewarding just as the rain makes the desert bloom and flower. Then we will be happy and then we will be satisfied and will be rewarded. Dreams do come true but only after hard work and then, only, if they are not divorced from reality.

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In the Torah portion, Beshalach, we learn how when the Jewish people were in the desert they ate manna. The manna came down from heaven and it mentions that they collected it Boker. They collected it in the morning. The Rabbis tell us that there were two other times that Boker is mentioned. It is mentioned by the Red Sea and it is mentioned when the Jewish people received the Torah. Everyday is a new day and everyday we should rise to the challenges of the new day. We should renew and reinvigorate ourselves. Every morning we should wake up with confidence that we can solve our problems. The Jewish people in front of the Red Sea were confronted by a terrible problem. The armies of the Egyptians were pursuing them, but they were not to give up. They were to continue to persevere even though things did not look so good. We are never to give up. We are to have Bitochon, faith, confidence that we can overcome our problems. Also, when we wakt up in the morning we should have faith that we are going to make a living. We should do our best and try to earn a living, but we should not just be concerned about earning a living. Boker is mentioned by the manna. G-d will help us if we help ourselves, but He wants us to do more than just make a living. We should not just concentrate all our energies on making a living. There is a third Boker, a Boker that is associated with receiving the Torah. We are to do more in life than just to make a living. We are to help expand the realm of the good by learning Torah. When we wake up every morning we should thank G-d for the opportunity He has given us to be His partner in creation. He has told us that He will help us overcome our problems. He will help us earn a living and, what's more, He will help us learn Torah and become decent human beings. There is so much to know and to appreciate and to learn. Let us all be equal to the task.

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In this Torah portion we have recounted the destruction of the Egyptian army. The Jewish people are now free. They witness G-d's great deliverance. However, immediately afterwards we have a list of complaints. How is it possible that these people who witnessed G-d's great miracles in Egypt and who on the Red Sea saw His deliverance should now sink so low as to even say, weren't there enough graves in Egypt that You had to take us out into the desert? The Rabbis say that the lowliest handmaid had a greater prophetic vision than did all the later prophets yet they turned to complaining one complaint after another. This seems a terrible indictment of them. Actually, though, when we read the Torah portion we can see that we are being told something very important. Three times the word Boker, or mourning, is used. Once it is used on the Red Sea. Another time it is used with the manna and the third time it is used in next week's Sedra when the Jewish people receive the Torah. Boker means mourning. It means the dawn of a new era. There are three things which are required for the dawn of a new era, freedom which the first Boker symbolizes, visions of the future, dreams all wrapped up in that first Boker. Secondly, visible sustenance is needed. A person has to have a way of making a living. Thirdly, in order to have a new dawn we must have just rules which govern society and allow us to have good interpersonal relationships. The Jewish people had dreams. They had their freedom but it would all go for naught if they could not earn a living. A person cannot live on dreams alone. Most certainly dreams cannot be effected without morality. Today, too, we see Jewish dreams being awakened, a dawn of a new era. Israel is once again free. However, unless she has the wherewithal to allow her people to earn a living it will all go for naught. People cannot stay in a country if they cannot earn a living. There are many people here in Houston who have their roots in Israel because during World War I there was a terrible famine and many people had to leave. We are called upon to

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help raise money so that Jews throughout the world and especially Israel can earn a living. We are also called upon to support Jewish educational institutions because without Torah there, too, can be no dreams. You can always tell a man's heart by looking at his hand. The story is told about a fellow who went to the doctor. He told him he had terrible chest pains. Immediately the doctor took something and wrapped it around his hand. The man said, "Doctor, what are you doing? It's my chest that hurts not my hand". The doctor said, "I'm taking your blood pressure". We, too, can tell if a person has a good Jewish heart by whether he sticks his hand in his pocket. We all need to contribute to make sure that the Jewish dream lives. We should not be like the fellow who staged a benefit and gave a rousing performance before a packed theater. He then made an appeal. The response was very poor. He then said, "Today I was making an appeal for the poor. Unfortunately, they are all here". Let none of us be poor in deed or spirit and let us do our share.

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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 tool. He could no longer work. He no longer had his tools. Elisha said, "Horaim, lift up, oh sea". He had dropped his tools in the 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 has to learn 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 our 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 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 Shabbos. We learn it from the repetition of the word Hayom three times. The Rabbis teach us that the reason we have

these three meals is to remind us of the three aspects of Shabbos. Shabbos teaches us that (1) G-d is the creator; (2) that He gave us the Torah and that (3) we are working for the future, for the Messianic era. A person has to feel 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 compare the Hebrew schools to the public schools. They try to claim that since the Hebrew schools were not teaching skills properly, the children were not learning anything in them. This was false. Then they cut the Hebrew schools from six days to three days stating that 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. 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 he was very successful. He said, yes, he was very successful. They asked him if the cannibals 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 that.

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A leader must have the qualities of showing direction, of being able to make peace within warring factions, of giving comfort and hope to the people. Moshe in this Torah portion, Beshalach, struck the rock because G-d told him to. In the Torah portion in Bamidbar he was supposed to talk to the rock. There the people needed encouragement and hope. Here in our Torah portion they had just come out of Egypt and they needed to be pushed to accept responsibility. Every age has its own problems. The problems of today are not the problems of yesterday. Moshe could not enter the Promised Land because he no longer knew what the people wanted. He could no longer prepare them for the problems of their day. It is my hope and prayer that our leadership will be able to show us the proper direction while always maintaining peace in the Congregation, and also always offering the comfort and hope that we all need. This reminds me of a story of a fellow who had a heart condition. While he was out his wife received a telegram that he had won \$1,000,000 in the New York lottery. She did not know what to do. She was afraid that if she told him he would have a heart attack, so she called her doctor. He told her, "Listen, your husband is going to have a regular examination tomorrow. I'll talk to him and in the midst of the examination I'll tell him about his \$1,000,000 win." The next day the doctor examined her husband and he looked up at him and said, "How are you spending your time now that you are retired?" He looked at the doctor and said, "Oh, I walk a little and every so often I buy a lottery ticket". The doctor said, "What if I told you you won \$1,000,000 in the lottery?" The man put his arm around the doctor's shoulder and said, "Doctor, if you told me I won \$1,000,000 on the lottery I would give you half" at which point the doctor had a heart attack. Sometimes we face the wrong problems. We have to always look at all issues from all sides and solve them in a way that is best for the future.

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In this Torah portion, Beshalach, we learn about the great song that the Jewish people sang after they were saved from the pursuing Egyptian army when the walls of water through which they had walked cascaded down upon the Egyptians. Before, when the Jewish people were trapped between the sea and the advancing Egyptian army, they cried unto G-d and G-d told them, "Why are you crying to me? Speak to the Children of Israel and they shall travel." We believe that G-d helps those who help themselves. This is like the story they tell about a time in the future when astronomers discovered that at the end of 24 hours a huge meteor would strike the earth and a tidal wave would swamp all the land. All the religious leaders of the East got together and declared a day of prayer. All the religious leaders of the West got together and declared a day of fasting. All the Rabbis got together and decided that we all had to, within 24 hours, learn how to breathe under water. Of course, they prayed, too. This, of course, just illustrates that we are called upon to act not just to sit back and accept our fate. Obviously, at the Red Sea G-d helped a lot, but G-d wants us not to give up hope. He wants us to persevere and to try. We are not to sit back and be passive. Other religions tell us we are just to be resigned to our fate. That's why Marx called religion the opiate of the people, but we are to try even against impossible odds to do what we know is right. American Mizrahi Women have done wondrous things. They are caring now in Israel for 16,000 children and they have undertaken many projects when they did not even know how they would be able to find the wherewithal to complete them. They have been fulfilling an important component of our religion. Also, in this Torah portion we learn how when the Jewish people left Egypt Moshe, instead of busying himself with collecting gold and silver as the other people were, concerned himself with collecting the bones of Joseph. Not only did he take the bones of Joseph with him, but they were placed in a prominent part of the camp. The Midrash says that right next to the Ark which contained the Ten Commandments was the Ark which contained Joseph's bones. Why should this be so? By the way, the same word for coffin in Hebrew is also ark. The reason for this is obvious. You honor a person not by getting him a fancy multi-thousand dollar coffin, but by living his teachings in your life and you honor the Ten Commandments and the Torah the same way, by implementing their teachings in your life, not by putting them

in a fancy shrine. What, though, is so important about the bones of Joseph? In Hebrew the word for bones, "Atzmos", also means strengths. They took the strengths of Joseph. Moshe wanted to impress upon the people that they needed these strengths if they were going to be able to build a new life. Joseph was a man who knew that Judaism and the Jewish way of life had something yet to teach the world. He could have assimilated easily. He could have disappeared as a Jew, but even when he appeared before Pharaoh what he said was, "Ivri Anochi" "I am a Jew". This was even more than Moshe because when Moshe ran away from Pharaoh and came to the Land of Midian he did not say "Ivri Anochi", he said "Mitzri Anochi" "I am an Egyptian", and for this reason the Rabbis say he was not buried in the Land of Israel. Moshe is telling them, "You want to build a land, you want to build a new society? Remember you are the continuation already in his time of several 100 years of history. Remember your distinctiveness." We also are to remember from the strengths of Joseph that we are not to hate each other and turn on each other. Joseph was sold into Egypt because of the envy of his brothers. We all have to realize that even though Jews have different views on many things and dreams and aspirations, that we are all Jews and that we must treat and love them all equally. Unfortunately, even in modern Jewish life there are certain even Jewish groups who would cast out other Jews both from the right and the left. There are those who would say that certain Jews are too backward and medieval, while other Jews would say that certain Jews are goyim, etc. This is not right. Joseph treated his brothers well when they came to Egypt. We must learn to treat all Jews well if we are to build a land even if we are to disagree with them. We also learn from the strengths of Joseph that we can be Jews and modern at the same time, that we do not have to give up the technological advances of the world to be Jews. Joseph rose to the highest position in Egypt, but he still remained Jewish. He used modern methods and modern techniques and so can we. Finally, Joseph was able to transmit his heritage to his children. This is an extremely difficult task. It is not easy to transmit your heritage to your children. Joseph, though, was successful in raising Menash and Ephraim to be Jews even though for a long time he was alone in Egypt. The American Mizrachi Women combines all the strengths of Joseph. It

