



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

מורינו הרה"ג ר' אברהם גורביץ שליט"א

פרשת בשלח

וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם וְכוּ'. וַיֵּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מַה נִּשְׁתָּה. וַיִּצְעַק אֶל ה' וַיִּזְרְהוּ ה' עַץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שֶׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ. (שמות טו, כב-כה)

And they went for three days in the wilderness but did not find water... The people complained against Moshe, saying, "What shall we drink?" He cried out to Hashem, and Hashem showed him a tree; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There he established for (the nation) a decree and an ordinance, and there he tested it. (Shemos 15:22-25)

This week's *parshah* tells about the incident of Klal Yisroel leaving the Yam Suf and traveling through the wilderness for three days without finding any water. As a result, they complained to Moshe about the lack of water. Moshe cried out to Hashem, and He showed Moshe a tree, which he threw into the water, making it sweet and drinkable.

The Gemara (*Bava Kamma 82a*) states:

"וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בַּמִּדְבָּר וְלֹא מָצְאוּ מַיִם" דוֹרְשֵׁי רְשׁוּמוֹת אָמְרוּ אֵין מַיִם אֶלָּא תוֹרָה שְׁנֵאמַר (ישעיה נה, א) "הוֹי כָּל צָמָא לְכוּ לַמַּיִם", כִּיּוֹן שֶׁהָלַכוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּלֹא תוֹרָה נִלְאוּ, עָמְדוּ נְבִיאִים שְׁבִינִיהֶם וְתִיקְנוּ לָהֶם שְׂיֵהוּ קוֹרִין בַּשַּׁבָּת וּמִפְסִיקִין בְּאַחַד בַּשַּׁבָּת וְכוּ' כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יֵלִינוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָמִים בְּלֹא תוֹרָה.

"And they went for three days in the wilderness but did not find water." The expounders of verses stated: There is no meaning for the word "Water" other than "Torah," as it is stated: Ho! Everyone who is thirsty, go to the water – i.e. Torah. Since they went three days without Torah, they became exhausted, whereupon the Nevi'im that were among them arose and instituted to read from the Torah on Shabbos and suspend on Sunday etc... so that the people not be kept for three days without Torah.

Noting that water is often a metaphor for the Torah, Chazal interpret that the Yidden neglected Torah study – i.e. water – for three days and this is why their spiritual level deteriorated to the point of rebellion. Based on this, the Nevi'im enacted that the Torah should be read on Shabbos, Monday and Thursday, to ensure that three days would never elapse without Torah. The Maharsha (*ibid.*) explains that the source for Chazal to interpret the incident in this way is from the words of the *possum* which conclude: *שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט*, *There he established for (the nation) a decree and an ordinance*. The sweetening of the water did not suffice to appease the pain of Klal Yisroel, and only through teaching them Torah was their tranquillity restored. This indicates that the suffering was not merely physical but also spiritual, caused by the detachment from the Torah for an extended period.

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* emphasises that there are several important lessons to be learned from this occurrence. He cites the Chofetz Chaim, who observes that the following *possum* recounts how shortly afterwards Klal Yisroel reached Eilim, where there were twelve springs of water. If they had only waited a little longer, their deliverance would have come effortlessly. This teaches us a valuable lesson for life: those who are patient and trust in Hashem will not experience pain or anxiety. Often, the salvation we seek is just around the corner, and with faith and perseverance, we can merit it without

difficulty. The Torah imparts this lesson to remind us that impatience and intolerance are symptoms of disconnection from the Torah.

R' Eizel Charif *zatzal* raises a question about Klal Yisroel's behaviour. They had recently witnessed the amazing miracle of the splitting of the Yam Suf, which solidified their *emunah* in Hashem. They had even reached a spiritual high point and sang the *shirah*. So how could they have so quickly lost their faith and complained about their situation in the desert? How could they have descended in *madreigah* so rapidly? He answered this question with a profound insight; *Emunah* cannot be sustained without Torah study. Since Klal Yisroel had not been engaged in learning Torah, they were unable to maintain the *emunah* they had acquired and when faced with difficulty complained against Moshe.

We further see a reference to the power of the Torah in the way the water was sweetened. The *possuk* says *וַיֹּרְהוּ ה' עֵץ*, and Hashem showed him a tree, and the Yalkut Shimoni states that this refers to Torah as stated in Mishlei (3:18): *עֵץ חַיִּים הִיא לְמַחְזִיקִים בָּהּ*, Torah is a tree of life for those who grasp it. (Man in this world is akin to one drowning in a raging sea grasping onto a tree branch as his only method of survival. Similarly, the only way for a Yid to survive the raging influences of *olam hazeh* is by grasping onto the *עֵץ חַיִּים* of Torah.) The branch that sweetened the bitter water illustrates the power of the Torah to create a sweeter life for those who are connected to it.

R' Moshe Karelitz *hy''d zatzal* (a brother of the Chazon Ish) quotes a Midrash that explains the words *וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם*, and the water became sweet, to mean that the bitter waters were transformed intrinsically into sweet ones, rather than just having sweet substance added to them. It wasn't as if a sweet ingredient had been mixed into the water camouflaging the bitter taste, rather its innate properties had been modified to be sweet. This is a lesson that Limmud HaTorah transforms one's life by providing meaning and significance, resulting in a life of inherent sweetness. This cannot be achieved by any other worldly pleasures or enjoyments. Although such pleasures may create temporary pleasantness, they only serve to mask the emptiness inside, just like alcohol and other substances disguise worries and troubles. Only with Torah can one experience true joy and meaning in life.

To summarise the lessons we have mentioned:

- 1) Torah has the power to help one cultivate patience and tolerance when awaiting Hashem's salvation, which is often just around the corner.
- 2) Only with Torah can one fully utilise the *emunah* they had acquired.
- 3) Connecting with Torah is like a drowning man clutching onto a branch as his only means of survival.
- 4) Learning Torah transforms one's life, imbuing it with meaning, significance, and sweetness, unlike other pleasures that only mask pain and suffering.

May we be *zoche* to all the blessings and inspirations that come from being constantly connected to Torah, leading us to a life of true fulfilment and satisfaction!

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