

ADDRESS

by

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The Lubavitcher Rabbi שליט"א



at the

Yud-Shevat Farbrengen, 5721

— Translation —



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By popular demand we are herewith publishing excerpts from a Sicho by the Lubavitcher Rabbi, שליט"א, on the occasion of Yud Shevat Farbrengen, Motzoei Shabbos Kodesh Beshallach, 5721.



THERE IS a Sicho of the Baal Hahilulo¹ relating to the Sidra *Beshallach* which we read this morning.

The Sicho is about the saintly Maharal of Prague,² the ancestor of the old Rebbe and of the Baal Hahilulo. It was the custom of the Maharal of Prague to instruct the Melamdim during the week of Parshas Beshallach to gather the children in the courtyard of the Shul on that Shabbos and to tell them the story of *Kerias Yam Suf* (the crossing of the Red Sea). The high point of this gathering was to relate to the children how³ the birds joined Moshe Rabbenu and all the people of Israel, men, women, children and infants, in the singing of the Song of Yam Suf; and how, while crossing the Red Sea, in between the walls of water that stood on their right

1) Published in *Kuntres Bikur Chicago* p. 60.

2) 5272-5369. For line of descent from the Maharal down to the Old Rebbe, see *Shalsheles Hayachas, Hayom Yom*, p. 4.

3) See *Tosfos Shabbos* (Quoted in *Orchos Chayim* Section 324).

and on their left, the children plucked fruits and berries from the shrubs^{3*} that miraculously grew out of these walls, and fed them to the birds singing happily overhead. The Maharal further instructed the teachers to provide *kasha* (buckwheat groats) for the children so that they, too, might feed the birds⁴ in remembrance of the Crossing of the Sea. This joyous event was concluded with the Maharal coming out to bless the children.

* * *

It has been emphasized frequently that the purpose of relating a story is for the teaching it contains, especially when the story is published and printed. For, in the words of the Tzemach Tzedek, quoted by the Baal Hahilulo: "The spoken word is for the audience and for others whose ears it reaches; the written word is for universal attention, but the printed word is for all posterity."

Therefore, in relating the above story about the Maharal, and publishing it in print, the Baal Hahilulo's intention was not just to tell us how a great Jew, who lived some four hundred years ago, acted, but that we should learn something useful and practical from it.

3*) See *Shemos Rabboh*, end of Chapter 29.

4) See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim*, end of section 324, 343. Commentaries on it. *Tosfos Shabbos* ibid.

The general lesson that the above story conveys is as follows:

No matter how great a person is — and the Maharal ranks among our greatest; and no matter how great are the things in which the person is occupied — and the Maharal among many other great things has written books which are among the greatest in our sacred literature, there is nothing greater and more important than to educate our children.

(The Baal Hahilulo speaks, in passing, of the greatness of the Maharal. "The great Rabbi Moshe Isserles⁵ (whose ruling in the Shulchan Aruch are our guiding light for all generations) — used to kiss the fingers of the Maharal, who even in his youth wrote books and essays which inspired our people to Teshuvah, and enlightened them as to how to study the Torah with Yiras Shomaim, and how to serve G-d").

For the Maharal interrupted his sacred studies and occupation to see to it that an ancient Jewish custom be reinforced in Jewish life; that the children should know about it and practice it with joy and enthusiasm; and to add further significance to it, he himself came out to the children and blessed them.

5) 5280-5333. Studied together with the Maharal for many years. (See Memoirs of Baal Hahilulo, volume two).

Let us take note of this. For at first glance it may appear that there are more important and more profound things connected with our religious life than teaching children to uphold an ancient custom or tradition. But in fact nothing takes precedence over the Mitzvah "And thou shalt teach them (the words of the Torah) diligently unto thy children." And as stated in the Sifri, "Thy children — thy pupils." And "teaching them" refers not only to obviously basic precepts of our Torah, but also includes teaching them Jewish customs and traditions, even one that involves a bird, and even if it means taking time out on the holy Shabbos to do it. For Jewish customs and traditions *are* living Torah. And this is the way to be truly blessed of G-d.

* * *

True to this principle, the Baal Hahilulo dedicated himself⁶ to the education of Jewish children, to which he gave precedence over all his other lofty and sacred occupations, including those which were for the benefit of the grown ups, of mature mind and scholarship, to whom he revealed the profound secrets of Chassidic teaching and the inner light of the Torah.

Let us be inspired by him and follow in his footsteps.

6) See *Short Biography of Rabbi Joseph I. Schneerson* (Kehot, 1960).

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Of the children who crossed the Red Sea, our Sages state⁷ that they were the ones who saw and recognized G-d before all others. Though Moshe Rabbenu, Aaron, Joshua and all the princes of Israel crossed the Sea at the same time and witnessed the miracles, nevertheless, it was the children who first exclaimed, "This is my G-d!" For these were the children who in the very midst of the hardship and enslavement in Egypt were brought up in the true Jewish way.

Inspired by such children, it was not difficult to give up the "fat of the land" and to go out into the desert, without even any provisions, but with firm faith in the Almighty that He will provide, and fulfill His promise to lead the Jewish people to a life of true freedom which only the Torah and Mitzvoth can offer, and on to the Holy Land.

Marching ahead with such children, Jews have no fear of being threatened by the Egyptians from the rear, flanked by the desert on both sides, and by the sea ahead. For the Sea is cleft asunder and all natural laws and limitations give way. The very waters of the Sea turn into protective walls "on their right and on their left." The whole of Nature is transformed, so that even little birds feel the impact of the Super-

7) *Sotah* 11b.

natural in Nature, and they too, join in the song of praise to the Creator.

* * *

"On their right and on their left" — both flanks must be protected: from the temptation "on the right," and from trials "on the left."⁸

When the Jew enjoys an abundance of material blessings, there is the danger of thinking "my strength and the efforts of my own hand have given me all this wealth,"⁹ forgetting that it is G-d who is the source of all blessings.

Conversely, in material straits there is the danger of thinking that this is no time to worry about spiritual matters, for one's own sake or the sake of one's children, much less for others; that there will be time to think about Shabbos observance, Jewish education, moral and ethical scruples, and the like, when things improve materially.

In either case one must constantly be on guard not to let material considerations overshadow the matters of the spirit. With steadfast determination and faith in G-d, all trials and tribulations will be seen in their true light — as tests of faith in G-d,

8) See *Mishlei* chapter 30, 8-9.

9) The *Samag* counts this among the 365 Lo Saase (*Samag, Mitzvoth Lo Saase* 64).

trials more illusory¹⁰ than real, which must and can be overcome. For the natural order of things can be no obstacle to the fullest observance of the Torah and Mitzvoth which are the direct link with the Creator and Master of the world.

Moreover, as in the case of Yetzias Mitzraim, when the Jews came out "with great wealth," and the bounty of the Sea surpassed even that,¹¹ so is the steadfast and unshaken faith in G-d bound to be amply rewarded.

There is only one way out of "Mitzraim" — it is the way that leads directly to Mount Sinai and Kabbolas haTorah. The children hold the key to true happiness.¹² Given the right education and upbringing, the full opportunity which rightfully belongs to them, the children will lead the way, and in their merits all dangers and difficulties will dissolve and give way to true Nachas and joy, triumph and song, with a full measure of G-d's abundant blessings materially and spiritually.

10) Compare *Medrash Tanchuma* (Vayero) on Abraham's trials on his way to the Akeido.

11) *Rashi Beshallach* 15, 22 (from Bamidbor Rabbah, end of chapter 13. Mechilta Bo 13).

12) *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* chapter 1, 3: Our children are our guarantors.

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