

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 21

Beshalach, Sicha 1

The Context:

After the sea had closed over the Egyptian pursuers, the gold, silver, and precious stones that had adorned the Egyptian cavalry washed up on the shore. The Jewish people remained there to collect the spoils, until Moshe forcibly commanded the people to leave the sea and continue their journey.

This is the meaning of the verse, “Moshe led Israel away from the Red Sea...,” which Rashi understands as, “He led them away against their will.” (Rashi on Shemos 15:22)

The Question:

At the splitting of the sea, the people had experienced an unparalleled Divine revelation. They were able to “point and say, ‘This is my G-d.’” (Shemos 15:2) They were also en route to receiving the Torah at

Sinai. Suffused with such intense Divine awareness and purpose, how could they have been distracted by the Egyptian bounty to the point that Moshe had to forcibly tear them away from the glittering shore?

The Explanation:

In His prophecy to Abraham, G-d had promised that his children would be slaves in a foreign land but would leave with great wealth. (Bereishis 12:14) Therefore, when the time came for the Jews to leave Egypt, G-d commanded the Jewish people to ask their Egyptian neighbors for their gold and silver (Shemos 11:2) so that “they emptied Egypt like an abyss in the sea without fish.” (Shemos 3:22, Berachos 9b)

Thus, the Jewish people were under the impression that they were commanded to take possession of Egypt’s wealth whenever the opportunity presented itself. The immediacy of G-d’s presence that they experienced only heightened their fervor to fulfill His command.

When Moshe informed them that the time had come to continue on, even though riches still remained at the shore, the people understood that G-d's command was now suspended. But to their spiritual instinct and understanding, moving on was "against their will" because they were still moved by the urgency of G-d's command. Rationally, they understood G-d's will had now shifted to another goal, but they had to tear themselves away from their previous emotional and spiritual investment because they were so passionately dedicated to fulfilling G-d's will.

The Deeper Dimension:

By possessing as much of Egypt's wealth as possible, the Jewish people were elevating the Divine sparks — the spiritual potential — within each of these material possessions. This was the Divine plan behind the exile and the Exodus — for the Jewish people to wrestle with the lowest elements of the material world, the Egyptian empire, and extract its spiritual potential, thereby elevating the materiality to G-d.

Therefore, the people were zealously preoccupied with collecting the Egyptian spoils, for this was the entire purpose of their national ordeal — to transform the bounty of those who enslaved them to G-dliness.

When Moshe told them to leave the seaside, they understood that G-d wanted them to move on to receive the Torah, but they were so invested in the spiritual work of transformation that they had to tear themselves away from it in order to prepare for their next task.

The Lesson:

Some of us are called on to work with the material world, revealing the G-dliness within it; others are called on to work within the world of spirituality and Torah. But each of us must still engage in both tasks. When we are engaged in one sphere, we must be so dedicated and focused that when the time comes to begin work in the other sphere, it feels like we are tearing ourselves away against our will. Yet, we have to take that same passion with us to the new task, so that when we must move on from there, we again feel like we are tearing ourselves away from our life and our passion.

Secondly, if the Jewish people were so fanatically preoccupied with elevating the sparks of material objects, not wanting to leave any potential spark untouched, how much more so must we never cease our work of reaching out to other Jews until each and every Jewish soul is reconnected to his or her Judaism.
