

## The 7th Day of Pesach: The Great Lie is Revealed But Also a New Truth

Dear Friends,

This week the drasha is a little longer than usual, but very important nonetheless.

Why important? Because the 7th day of Pesach is revealed as the biggest deception in the Jewish people's historic narrative. But there is also an invitation to unparalleled freedom.

The story of the exodus from Egypt is based on a shocking lie. Moshe lies intentionally. He lies to Pharaoh, and he lies to Bnei Yisrael. The deception is revealed on the 7th day after the Exodus, on the holiday that marks the end of Pesach.

Understanding this lie will explain many things: it will explain why Pharaoh changes his mind after allowing Bnei Yisrael to leave, determined to have his army bring them back to work. It explains the rebellion of Korach and his company. It explains the reason for the long journey which continues until all of the miserable, deceived generation of the Exodus die off and a new generation is born, one that does not know the lie. It also explains why Moshe does not enter Canaan at the end of the journey (although this is a topic for another drasha).

At the Burning Bush Moshe experiences a spiritual awakening! He encounters the Divine dimension. On this occasion he receives a clear, unequivocal message regarding Bnei Yisrael: **“And the LORD continued... I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”** (Sh'mot 3: 7-8)

The Divine message is clear: the intention is to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt and bring them to the Land of Canaan. But when Moshe approaches Pharaoh he never - ever!!! - mentions this plan. No. The only plan Moshe negotiates for is a seven day vacation for their religious festivities: **“Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness... The God of the Hebrews has manifested Himself to us. Let us go, we pray, a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God...’”** (Sh'mot 5: 1-3)

Moshe requests permission to go out into the desert three days' walk away in order to sacrifice to God. Clearly, at the end of the festivities they were coming back to work. Three days there, one day for the celebrations, and three days back - one week exactly. Moshe

never tells Pharaoh of the intention to leave Egypt. Not once. He doesn't even hint at such a possibility.

It was over this plan that ALL of the torturous negotiations take place, including the ten plagues.

Furthermore, the Egyptian people and the Israelites also do not know about the plan to escape. This is evident in the order that Bnei Yisrael receive before the final plague. They are told to borrow silver and gold items from their Egyptian neighbors for the festivities in the desert. One does not borrow something if one does not plan to return it. Clearly Bnei Yisrael would not have cooperated had they known that they were not going to return what they were borrowing.

Pharaoh finally understands he has been deceived when, after seven days, the Israelites do not return: **“When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled... he took six hundred of his picked chariots, and the rest of the chariots of Egypt and he gave chase to the Israelites...and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea...”** (Sh'mot 14: 5-9)

This is also the moment in which Bnei Yisrael realize that they, too, have been deceived: **“As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness’?”** (10-12)

Bnei Yisrael realize that they have been kidnapped! They regret having believed this man who convinced them to go out into the desert to worship the mysterious God of freedom who was revealed to him. All in all, their life in Egypt was good, and working for the Egyptians was certainly better than a cruel death in the desert!

After crossing the Sea of Reeds there is a sense of relief, even euphoria, but this passes quickly. Celebrations, songs, and dances erupt spontaneously as they see the Egyptian army, the greatest army in the world, tossed in the waves of the sea. But these are quickly replaced by the terrible understanding that they have been removed from a safe place of habitation and food, and taken - deceptively - into the dry and desolate desert. From this point and until the death of the last of those who leave Egypt, Bnei Yisrael do not cease longing for the place from which they were kidnapped.

This explains the great rebellion of Korach and his company against Moshe and Aharon a year and a half later. They vent their pent up anger that has been bottled up inside of them: **“Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us? Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out those men's eyes?”** (Bamidbar 16:13-14)

Why? Why is it that the most famous story of Western civilization, the story that has provided inspiration for multitudes of oppressed people throughout history, is based on such a serious deception? Why didn't Moshe speak truthfully to Pharaoh and to his people?

Was it a lack of faith in his mission or in the source of the message? Clearly, Pharaoh was not under any circumstances going to agree to release Bnei Yisrael all together if he had such a difficult time allowing a one-week vacation! Perhaps Moshe feared that God would not keep His promise. Or worse, that the "spiritual" God was not truly stronger than Pharaoh's physical and military might? Or perhaps he was concerned that Bnei Yisrael would not agree to leave Goshen if they knew it was for good?

Most classic interpreters agree with one or more of these explanations. I would like to suggest another possibility.

The Torah commands us to celebrate the 7th day after the exodus: **"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival of the LORD."** (Sh'mot 13:6). Why? The actual day of the Exodus makes perfect sense, but what happened on the 7th day that necessitates an additional festival? It is not to celebrate the parting of the Sea of Reeds, because when it was decreed that miracle had not yet taken place.

Notice that the 7th day is a "festival of the Lord", in other words, it is a festival of the Divine, of the Divine plan. The seventh day is the day of truth, the day in which we understand that there is a much bigger plan afoot than the one we thought we knew!

What is that plan, you may ask? Escape? Embark on a journey to the Promised Land?

I would like to humbly suggest that neither option is the answer. My suggestion may be confusing and perhaps disappointing. The plan is... that there is no ONE plan!

**Freedom lies in the deep and difficult understanding that there is no ONE plan. There are infinite number of possibilities for an infinite number of possible futures. And except for the one that appears before us at any given moment - all the rest concealed from our awareness.**

**The 7th day symbolizes that in God's world everything is possible, but the one plan that will come to fruition is the one WE believe is possible.**

The seventh day of Pesach in Sh'mot is parallel to the consecration of the Sabbath in Bereishit. On Sabbath eve it was declared that everything has been created - all possibilities now exist, and they are all good: **"And God saw ALL that He had made, and found it very good."** (Bereishit 1:31) Shabbat is the celebration of infinity. The Sunday that follows marks the day in which WE choose OUR path from among the infinite possible ones available.

Hence, the seventh day of Pesach may be the most important day of the holiday. It is like Shabbat.

Moshe, the greatest prophet, didn't lie! He brought Bnei Yisrael to “**Pi-hahiroth** [literally, the mouth of freedom], **between Migdol and the sea**” (Sh'mot 14:2), where they had to make a choice.

Ever since then, it is there that we stand - at the entrance to freedom - suspended between two choices (there are many more), each marking a different belief: “the Egyptian army” - i.e. the flesh pots, along with the enslaving forces of life - on the one side, and the Sea of Reeds - i.e. the sea of infinite possibilities.

Both are terrifying choices!

On the seventh day of Pesach Moshe invites us to find freedom in the deep understanding that we have been lied to. There is no plan! Or rather, there isn't ONE single plan. There are infinite possibilities.

Do you remember how, at the Burning Bush, the God of Moshe said His name was? “I will be what I will be”!

But there is another freedom enfolded here - a compassionate one: given the infinite paths, we have the freedom to accept the choices we have already made in our lives. **We made the best choice that we could, given what we knew at that moment.** We can now release all regrets and all sense of guilt.

From this moment forward, we are free to choose again, but always based only on what is revealed to us at the moment.

Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha