This week's section tells of the glorious crossing of the entire Jewish nation through the 'Red' Sea. But it opens on a strangely sour note: When G-d led the Jews out of Egypt He took them a roundabout way because He feared they would return to Egypt!

In other words, after G-d surrounded them with wondrous protecting 'clouds of glory' and decimated their enemies with ten miraculous plagues the Jews still had doubts!

And these were the believers! Rashi tells us that four fifths of the Israelites died in the plague of darkness because they didn't want to leave.

What went wrong? What can we learn from this today?

To understand this here is a story.

It was a cold autumn evening in the Ukraine but that didn't stop Rav Yaakov. He stood on the stump of a tree that he had propped up in the snow under the Baal Shem Tov's window and started tapping. And he would keep tapping until the Besh't (short for Baal Shem Tov) taught him the secret he so desired to learn; to understand the speech of the birds.

He had read in esoteric Kabbala books that one of the ways that heavenly decrees 'break' into this physical world is through the chirping of the birds, and if one understands this chirping he can predict the future. He also heard that the Baal Shem Tov knew this secret and since then he didn't give the Besh't a moment's rest. He had to learn the secret.

And why not? Rav Yaakov took great pride in himself. He had a keen mind, knew all of the Torah and most of the Talmud by heart and had even finished the mystical works of the Ari Zal several times. Not only that, he was rich and an excellent businessman; a man of action!

He had four laden ships waiting at the docks to sail to distant places and a fortune in stocks and bonds in his home. There was no reason why a superior person like himself shouldn't begin practicing some of the mysteries he read about.

The Baal Shem Tov appeared at the window, opened it and again repeated: "Rav Yaakov, please. I told you countless times already that this knowledge will only harm you. Please leave me alone I have a lot of work to do. Forget this idea and just be a regular Jew."

But Yaakov would not take no for an answer. Obviously the Baal Shem had a personal agenda. Probably he didn't want to his share hard-earned secrets. In any case here was no place for selfishness. He would continue to pester the Besh't until he got what he wanted.

It never even entered his mind that perhaps the Besh't was a completely different type of person.

"All right" the Besh't said sadly, "If you insist, I'll teach you what you want." He closed the window, walked to his front door and let Rav Yaakov in.

He was an excellent pupil; quick to understand and quick to translate his understanding into action. In one month he had completely mastered the esoteric skill he so desperately desired.

He prepared himself for another week just as the Besh't told him to, went into the forest and listened. Suddenly it all made sense!! Every chirp was like a letter of the alphabet and soon the
woods were filled with strange and wondrous messages: What is happening in China, what will happen tomorrow in France, who will live, who will die, Rav Yaakov's house will burn down tomorrow ...

Wait!! What was that he heard!? They were talking about him!! "Gevalt!" he whispered to himself as he turned and ran from the forest in the direction of his house holding his head in disbelief. "Gevalt, Gevalt!! My house!!"

He called his servants together and excitedly ordered them to make a constant, non-stop check of every inch of the house for the next two days; there was to be no fire lit anywhere on the premises. And sure enough it paid off! One of the old maidservants left a candle burning in her room that fell to the carpet while she was sleeping and they extinguished it before it set the house ablaze.

"Nu nu!" Rav Yaakov thought to himself as he lit up his pipe, "looks like this knowledge is not so bad after all. I just saved my entire house and everything in it; millions of dollars in valuable documents! Thank G-d I was stubborn!"

A month later he again entered the forest. Again he concentrated according to the formulas he had learned and again the air filled with news: What would happen in Russia, what just happened in Japan, who will live, who will die, that Rabbi Yaakov's ships would all sink in an ocean storm.....

This time he smiled quietly to himself, calmly spun around, walked briskly to his waiting carriage and sped off to the docks.

"Yes, you heard me correctly" he ordered the captains of his ships, "No one is to set sail until further notice. I don't care how much money we loose. My ships remain here! Is that clear?!" The captains begrudgingly shook their heads in agreement and Rav Yaakov rode away in his carriage. The next day a sudden sea storm sunk every ship at sea. Tens, maybe hundreds, of ships went down but not his. Rab Yaakov just lit his pipe when he heard the news, leaned back in his chair and smiled again.

A month later he was back in the woods again. Again he closed his eyes in deep concentration and again the birds announced: What would happen in England, what just occurred in Italy, who would become rich, who would become poor, that Rav Yaakov was going to die next week ........

He began to sweat. He opened his collar, it was hard to breathe. He took out his handkerchief and desperately wiped his brow and the back of his neck. What would he do now?! Where could he run?!

He began pacing like a madman. He fell, then stood up, ran to his carriage and sped off in the direction of Mezibuz the home of the Baal Shem Tov.

The cold wind whipped at his face but he was burning hot. In a few hours he was knocking at the Baal Shem's door. One of the Chassidim opened told him to wait, returned after a few minutes and told him the Besh't would see him.

"I told you no good would come of it." The Besh't said once he closed the door behind him. "You see, it was written in the heavens that you had to loose half of your fortune or die. If you would have lost your home that would have been the end of it. The same thing if you let your ships get sunk. But now ....."

The Besh't put his head down on the table, and the room was deafeningly silent. He slowly looked up at poor Rav Yaakov and said,

"Listen, I'm not promising now, but perhaps if you give away all your money and resolve yourself to a life of poverty it will be considered in heaven as though you are dead. It is your only chance."

Rav Yaakov learned that the Baal Shem Tov was something more than he had ever imagined.
This answers our question.

After the splitting of the Sea the Torah tells us that the Jews had "Faith in G-d and in His servant Moses." (14:31)

The simple meaning is that the people had faith in Moses as a prophet. But it doesn’t seem to really fit here. First, didn’t the Jews believe in him before this? Second, why is he mentioned together with G-d? And third, after they crossed the sea the main tests of faith were behind them, what faith was required now?

But the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that the splitting of the sea was a preparation for the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. And it seems to me that the greatest preparation was realizing that Moses is totally above understanding.

So when the sea split and they saw all the spiritual worlds opening up (See Rashi on 15:2) suddenly they realized that Moses was ABOVE all of it; above even the highest spiritual awareness.

Like Rab Yaakov in our story, they realized that the only way to really relate to Moses (and and we should relate to the Moses of each generation) was exactly like one relates to G-d; with pure faith.

So because they lacked this essentially necessary faith in Moses, G-d had to lead them on a devious path to freedom for fear they would return to Egypt.

And all this is a preparation for the revelation of Moshiach, the ultimate Jewish leader who must be treated with the ultimate Jewish faith. Then the ENTIRE CREATION will be filled with the knowledge of G-d exceeding all reason and understanding.

Moshiach NOW!!

Copyright © 1999-2019 Rabbi Tuvia Bolton. All rights reserved. No unauthorized reproduction or copying of this material shall occur without prior permission. To subscribe go to www.ohrtmimim.org/torah