In this week's Torah portion we read of the last stage of the Exodus; the splitting of the sea followed by the monumental song of praise and thanks to G-d that the Jews sang afterward (15:1-19).

Interestingly this song is introduced by one of the clearest promises in the Torah that the dead will raise: "Then will sing Moses and the Jewish people this song:" (15:1 See Rashi).

This Shabbat falls out on 'Tu' B'Shvat; the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shvat, which is the Jewish New-Year's-Day for fruit trees (first Mishna in tractate Rosh Hashanna).

The Midrash (book of homiletic Torah interpretations) links the splitting of the sea and fruit trees. It explains that when the Jews were crossing the dry land in the middle of the sea, trees suddenly sprouted from the ground, produced fruit which the Jews fed to birds that happened to be there and which accompanied the Jews in their song to G-d.

But has this got anything to do with the raising of the Dead?

And even more... why do the dead have to rise at all? What is the point of coming to earth from heaven in order to live eternally in bodies?

And what has it got to do with the splitting of the sea and Tu B'Shvat?

To understand this, here is a story.

Perhaps the most mysterious personage in Judaism is Elijah the prophet.

He lived ALMOST THREE thousand years ago in the time of the first Holy Temple and... he did not die! Rather he rose, body and soul, in a fiery chariot to heaven (Kings 2:2:11) and since then has regularly reappeared in the physical world.

The Talmud, Kabala and Chassidut are replete with stories of how he helped people and revealed secrets of the Torah to worthy recipients hundreds and even thousands of years after his 'passing'.

In fact, he is supposed to be present at every Jewish circumcision and it will be none other than he that will come to prepare the world for and announce the arrival of Moshiach! (See Rambam Laws of Kings 12:2). And even today he appears to the truly deserving and reveals secrets of the Torah.

It so happened that some 300 years ago one of the pupils of the Baal Shem Tov (Besh't for short) had a strong desire to see Elijah. He knew that it would require much preparation and purity of mind and soul and he also knew that the Besh't usually discouraged such endeavors but he felt himself ready and worthy... and certainly asking couldn't hurt.

And to his surprise when he asked, the Baal Shem Tov readily agreed!

It happened to be just days before Pesach (Passover) so the Besh't gave him a long list of things to do to prepare himself spiritually, told him to load a wagon with food, wine, matzot etc., travel to a certain house in a nearby village and spend the first two days of Pesach with them; there he would see Elijah for sure.
The Chassid filled the Besht's orders to the letter and early the next morning he was knocking on the door of a poor, almost dilapidated hut in the nearby village.

"Shalom!" he announced as a middle aged woman answered the door. "I am a Chassid of the Baal Shem Tov and he sent me here to spend the two Seder nights of Pesach with you. And you don't have to worry about food", he said as he pointed to his wagon "I've brought it all with me, enough for you and your family and I assure you it's of the highest standards of being kosher for Pesach."

Her husband came to the door and they couldn't believe their ears and eyes. They invited him in and began to carry in and prepare the food he had brought.

The Seder night was unforgettable, the woman, her husband and their five children had never been in the presence of one of the Baal Shem's holy pupils and had never seen so much food! They drank the four cups of wine, explained each sentence of the Hagadda with joy, sang and even danced till the wee hours of the night.

But no Elijah.

The Chassid didn't forget for a moment what he had come for. Perhaps Elijah would appear in the form of a beggar at the door, perhaps it was the man of the house or his wife or even one of the children. The Talmud tells us how he even appeared as a gentile.

At every stage of the Seder our hero was on edge, peering into every corner, at the windows at the children for some hint, something unusual. But nothing happened.

So it was the second night; the Seder was wonderful, exciting but no revelations.

Of course the Chassid was terribly disappointed. The Besh't was never wrong. If he said that Elijah would be revealed it must be true. Elijah was there for sure but somehow he must have missed it.

He thanked the family for their hospitality and despite the hour (usually no one traveled at night in those days) jumped into his wagon and sped back to the Besh't to pour out his heart.

"I don't understand it" the Besh't said. "He must have been there. How could it have been that you didn't see him? Tell me exactly what you did, every detail of both nights!"

Our Chassid related every detail, what he did, said and even thought.... and when he finished he gazed expectantly into the Besht's face waiting for a reply.

The Besh't thought for a few seconds and answered, "Go back to the house where you were, stand by the window and listen to what the woman says to her husband. There is hidden the secret."

Without hesitation the Chassid ran back to his wagon and set off for the house he just left. An hour later he was standing outside in the cold moonlit night trying to hear what was being said inside without being noticed. Sure enough he heard the woman speaking. He concentrated with all his being to make it out.

"Nu, Shiomo" She was talking to her husband. "Nu, what do you think of our guest? What do you think?"

"What do I think?" he replied "I think it was a miracle from HaShem! That's what I think. I think we should give thanks to G-d and to the Holy Baal Shem Tov for sending us such a wonderful guest! And so much food! It was amazing!! What a Pesach!!"

"No no!" She replied emphatically, "You don't understand. Did you get a good look at him? Well I did .... that that was no Chassid. That was Elijah the prophet! That's right. That's who it was!!! Elijah the prophet in person!!"

Suddenly the Chassid understood, the Besh't was telling him that if Elijah doesn't appear then he himself has to be Elijah.
This explains our question.

When the sea split all the water in the world split as well (see Rashi on 14:21) including the spiritual worlds (which are likened in Kabala to the ocean). To the point that even the simplest Jews saw visions higher than the greatest prophets of Israel (Rashi on 15:2). Namely they saw above the spiritual; G-d Himself (Zeh Kaili etc.)!!

In other words, when the sea split everything that was concealed became revealed and all potential good became actualized.

That, explains the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was why the earth grew trees and the birds ate the fruit and accompanied the Jews in their song: each level of mineral (earth), plant (fruit trees), animal (birds) and human (Jews) revealed its potential to rise to a higher and eventually the highest level possible (sing to G-d). Above even the spiritual.

So also the raising of the dead.

Man was created originally to live forever; it was the sin of the tree of knowledge that covered this potential and brought death to the world.

So potentially each of us has the ability to live eternally... but it will only be revealed after Moshiach changes the priorities of mankind and brings the raising of the Dead.

But the way to hurry all this is... as the Chassid in our story discovered ... to be Elijah ourselves. Each of us must be the bringer of good news: We must learn and think about Moshiach, talk about Moshiach and do what we can to hasten the Redemption, do more good deeds, speak more good words and even think more good thoughts.

As the Lubavitcher Rebbe said time and time again from the day he began to lead world Jewry over fifty seven years ago: Ours is the generation of redemption. Moshiach is here. All we have to do is open our eyes and do all we can to bring....

**Moshiach NOW!!**

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