In this week’s Torah reading we find the inspiring story of the Splitting of the Yam Suf (literally the Reed (not Red) Sea) and the salvation of the entire Jewish nation.

The Torah tells us that just before the miracle when the Jews were standing with the raging sea before them, the entire Egyptian army closing behind them and nothing but flat desert on both sides ….. they got very nervous and accused Moses of trying to kill them (14:11).

In fact, with no solution in sight, they did what Jews always do when they are uncertain … Politics! In this case they broke into four parties.

One party favored return to Egypt, one wanted to fight the enemy, one wanted to pray to G-d and the fourth wanted to jump in the sea so as not to return to Egypt. (Mechilta Shmot 14:13)

The Rebbe explains that all of these ideas including fighting and praying which seem to be noble pursuits, were inappropriate. The proper response should have been total reliance on G-d and Moshe His servant, not surrender, fight, prayer or suicide which are natural reactions stemming from different personality natures.

And in fact, the answer was soon to come, G-d said to Moses, "Stand still (no suicide) … You won’t see the Egyptians again (no return) G-d will fight for you (no war) and you be quiet (no prayer). Tell the Jews to go!" THEN the sea split. (14:13-15)

But at first glance this is totally not understood. Why didn’t G-d just split the sea BEFORE they got there and save the aggravation? What was the point? Why did He drive the Jews crazy?

To answer this question here is a story.

Once, in the early days of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s leadership, (which began in 1950) a young religious Jew entered the Rebbe’s office and begged for a blessing that he be exempt from military service in the Korean war).

The young man was very nervous and was careful to explain to the Rebbe that he was a normal Jew, didn’t believe in Rebbes or Chassidim especially not Chabad, but the reason he came was that he had tried everything else, had letters from doctors and psychiatrists but nothing worked and now he was desperate.

The Rebbe looked at him and asked, “Have you ever had trouble with your back?” “Yes! Yes Rabbi” The young man exclaimed as he opened a small briefcase he was carrying, put a pile of neatly arranged papers on the Rebbe’s desk and pulled one out. ”In fact, here is a doctor's report that....”

“No good” said the Rebbe. “What about your feet? Have you ever had problems with them. ”Oh Yesss! Sure! See?” He pulled out another paper from the pile. ”I already showed these to the army. But maybe now. Here’s the paper.

“Well then, what about your eyes?” the Rebbe asked.

“Eyes? I have terrible eyes.. see… here is a doctor’s report!”

What about your teeth?” The Rebbe asked.
"Teeth? No." the young man answered, "I have papers proving that I've had troubles with almost everything else, but not my teeth. In fact I've never even had a filling!

"Good" continued the Rebbe, "Tomorrow at the draft board tell them that you have troubles with your teeth".

"But... but" Stammered the poor confused fellow, but he realized that it was too late; the Rebbe was finished talking to him.

Standing on the sidewalk before the Rebbe's Synagogue our hero chastised himself. "Ah!! I shouldn't have said those things about not liking Chabad. Acchhhh! I'm a fool! What am I going to do now?? I'm finished! If I tell them I have teeth problems they'll put me in jail!!"

The next day he found himself again standing for the who-knows-how-manyith-time in the drab, scary draft center room before a uniformed army officer. But this time he had no excuses. The officer mechanically read his papers, looked up at him like a farmer looks at a cow and reached for his rubber stamp to seal the young man's fate.

Suddenly our hero shouted "MY TEETH!"

"What?" Said the officer, "Your teeth? Why did you wait till now? You already tried every other trick! Look at all these doctor's letters. Teeth? Go to the dentist, room 215, he'll see through your lies in a second! You'll be back here soon and I'll see to it that you sit in jail for this nonsense!!"

Our hero was soon standing alone in the dentist's room shaking like a fish out of water.

"Ah ha!" Exclaimed the dentist as he looked up from his 'patient's' papers. Without getting up he closed his office door with his foot so no one outside would hear, narrowed his eyes in hatred, looked at the young man and almost whispered, "Goldberg eh?" He hissed through his teeth, "I know you Jews. You'll want free dental care and you'll always say you can't work or do anything because of your teeth! The U.S. army doesn't need parasites like you." In a fury he grabbed his 'Unfit' stamp and brought it thundering down on Goldberg's draft papers.

"Now GET OUT!!"

"Oy! A MIRACLE" Goldberg whispered to himself as he left the room and walked as rapidly as possible toward the exit trying not to look like some weird dervish. "The only thing that worked was teeth! Oy!! A miracle!!!

He took the first cab to the Rebbe's headquarters in Crown Heights and requested the secretaries to give him permission to thank the Rebbe face to face. Just for a second.

"Sorry, we can't do it" was the answer. "If every one got in to say thank you it would take twice as much of the Rebbe's time. Just write a note and we'll take it in at the first opportunity."

When the note was brought before the Rebbe he looked up at the secretary that brought it, smiled and said. "My Father-in-law (the previous Rebbe) was always careful to do miracles that could be explained in natural terms so that the one that was saved would choose of his own free will to believe in G-d.

"But I saw that this young man was so closed minded that he would explain any miracle according to nature. He would NEVER connect it to G-d unless I did a miracle that was impossible to explain naturally."

The Rebbe almost 'forced' the young man to realize the nearness of G-d.

Now we can explain our question; why did G-d make it so hard on the Jews at the Sea?

The essence of man is free choice. Religion or anything else that is forced on man never really enters his 'soul' and becomes part of him. The only way that can happen is if it comes from his
own personal free choice.

That is what was lacking from the Jews when they left Egypt.

Indeed, the name of this week’s Torah portion is “B’Shalach’ which means Pharaoh ‘SENT’ and forced the Jews from Egypt. The Jews never REALLY had a choice. Sort of like Goldberg in our story, G-d did it to this way to at least force them to attributing miracles to Him.

But when they reached Yam Suf they had to decide between themselves or G-d; egotism or Judaism. Was the freedom accompanying leaving Egypt a GOAL, or was it just a MEANS to receive the Torah and serve G-d.

Those who thought it was a goal felt they could finally act naturally: the fighters wanted to fight, the cowards wanted to return, the spiritual wanted to pray etc.

But Moses reminded them that freedom was only a means. The TRUE goal was to go forward and receive the Torah and the ‘tribulation’ of the sea was only to accustom them to choose G-d (like Goldberg in our story) and not pay attention to obstacles.

Similarly we must not get sidetracked.

Today, in the time of Moshiach, G-d will do miracles for the Jews that will be impossible to explain away (something like the 39 Scud-missile direct hits that, just as the Rebbe predicted, didn’t injure anyone and the thousands of missiles fired since then on Israel from Gaza and Lebanon that did no damage).

But these are only a means to our REAL job and goal, according to the Moshe of our generation, the Lubavitch Rebbe, is to DO GOOD; to spread the light of Torah and Mitzvot, including the seven Noahide commandments to the gentiles and bring the ultimate redemption.

There are those, just like back then, that want to follow their own natures. They would rather make ‘peace’ (ie not change the world but join it), fight (spend all their energy battling injustices and evils), pray (and abstain from giving a helping hand), or drown themselves (in the sea of Torah and ignore the world).

But this is not the way to bring Moshiach and heal the world.

The way to do it is to ignore the difficulties, realize, as Goldberg in our story did, that G-d wants us to succeed and the Rebbe only wants to open our eyes.

We must keep the true goal in mind and do everything we can; even one more good deed, word or even thought can bring...

**Moshiach NOW!**

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