

פרשת בא תשס"ז A Little Leap of Faith

A young girl brings home her תתן to meet her parents. At one point during dinner the mother tells her husband, "After dinner, go find out about this young man."

The father and young man repair to the living room while mother and daughter are in the kitchen. "So," the father asks, "what do you do? What are your plans?"

"I am a yeshiva bachur."

"Admirable, but how will you provide for my daughter?"

How will you pay for a house for the two of you?"

"I will study and God will provide," the young man says.

"And how will you buy her the kind of clothing she desires, and where will you get the money to buy a car?"

"I will study and God will provide."

"And children? How will you support them?" the man asks.

"God will provide."

Later that night, the mother asks "So nu? How did it go?"

"Well," he tells her, "There's good news and there's bad news. The bad news is that he has no job and no plans."

"What's the good news?" the mother asks.

"The good news is that he thinks I'm God."

When we tell that joke; when we laugh at that joke, we do so with a sense of smugness. After all, we're not that yeshiva bachur. We're the father-in-law, with the job and the house and the money. But when we look at that joke a little more carefully and honestly, we see that it's not the yeshiva bochur who's mistaken. Rather, it's the father-in-law. You see, that young man might in fact take money while from his in-laws he's learning in kollel to make ends meet. But he really does believe that *God will provide*. And he's willing to make sacrifices, give up comforts in life, never eat in a restaurant, have a small house – to truly be poor in order to study and live a Torah lifestyle. And in the end God will provide. But what about the father-in-law? He doesn't make those sacrifices. Sure, he works and earns, but he's got a great car, a lovely home, eats out several times a month, vacations where and when he wants. But what does he believe? Where does he place *his* faith? He doesn't believe that God provides, and it's not that his future son-in-law thinks that he's God. *He* believes that he is God.

Often, we in our community lead two very different lives: our life 'in here': in shul, in spirituality, in davening and learning; and 'out there,' the life that we live out in the big bad world. These two lives have very different mottos and values.

- In here we prostrate ourselves before God – it's all up to Him. Out there, it's all up to us.
- In here, we place ourselves at God's mercy. Out there, the buck stops here and we have to "look out for number one."
- In here, we say things like *טובה פרנסה לנו* – "God, please give us a good livelihood," and *שמע קולנו חס רחם עלינו* – "please hear our voices, and have compassion upon us"; but out there, we say *אם אין לי מי לי* – "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me," and forget the second half of the statement *אם אני לעצמי מה אני* – "if I am only for myself, then what am I?"

In here we live a life of faith, devotion and dedication. But somehow, when we get to the real world – the world of bills and work and finances and reality and obligations, that faith dissipates, and our declarations of dedication and devotion become much more difficult to demonstrate. It's easy to have faith in shul. It's much harder to believe when you have to put dinner on the table and your children need shoes. This is precisely the challenge the Jewish people face as they prepare the leave Egypt.

In a very real way, the Jews don't really have very much to do with their own redemption. Yes, they must slaughter the קרבן פסח. They must declare their allegiance to God, flying in the face of their Egyptian masters. But throughout the first nine plagues, the Jews don't really have to do much of anything. They just sit on the sidelines, watching the show – and a very good show it is. It must have been nice to watch the people who have tormented you for two hundred years finally getting what's coming to them. And when the time comes for them to leave, that's not much of a decision either. The Torah tells us that *הארץ מן השמים* – the Egyptians literally kick the Jews out of the country. Had a Jew on that night said, "Wait a minute! I don't want to follow Moshe into the wilderness. I'm staying right here!" the Egyptians would have said, "Oh no you don't. Get out.

We don't want you guys anymore, and you're not staying another minute."

So what do the Jewish people do? How do the people demonstrate their faith when they're just so many extras in the saga? To answer that question, we should ask another question. We know what we remember about מצרים. We remember the plagues and the splitting of the sea and the great miracles. But what does *God* remember? What happened during that fateful time that stood out not in our minds, but in God's? The prophet Yirmiyahu tells us precisely what God remembers about that night.

הלך וקראת באזני ירושלם לאמר, כה אמר ה', זכרתי לך הסד נעוריה, אהבת כלילתיך--לקתך אחר במדבר, בארץ לא זרויה.

Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: Thus says the LORD: I remember for thee the affection of thy youth, the love of your espousals; how you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

What in the world is Yirmiyahu talking about? We just said that they had no choice, so what's so impressive about following God into the wilderness? The answer comes from Rashi on this week's Parshah.

The Torah tells us that after the Jewish people leave Egypt and have traveled for a while, they need something to eat. What do they eat? Matzah.

ויאפו את-הבצק אשר הוציאו ממצרים, עגת מצות--כי לא חמץ: כי-

גרשו ממצרים, ולא יכלו להתמהמה, וגם-צדה, לא-עשו להם.

And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.

All of this leaves us with a very fundamental question. Moshe had already told them that they'd be leaving that night. They knew that they'd never be coming back. If so, how in the world could they leave, without even preparing a sandwich for the trip? Why don't they prepare food for the way? This, says Rashi, is precisely what God remembers about that night. God remembers our faith.

This tells us the praise of the nation of Israel

That they did not say "how shall we go out into the desert without provisions," Rather, they had faith and they went

שלא אמרו היאך נצא למדבר בלא צדה

אלא האמינו והלכנו

God remembers that they had control over something. Instead of forcing Moshe to wait until they had baked their bread; instead of wondering and stalling and asking what we would consider a legitimate question – "Hey, what's for dinner tomorrow?" – they just go. לכתך אחרי. – "You followed me into the desert, into a land that was not sown." And that's what God remembers.

God remembers not the great protestation of faith nor the fancy declarations, but the little leaps. He remembers not so much when we say that we believe – what we say in here – but when take those little leaps that prove that faith – out there.

Someone once asked Rav Moshe Feinstein whether a Jew is allowed to buy life insurance. After all, isn't that a lack of faith? After all, if we really believed that God will provide for our needs, would we feel the need to pay a company to provide for our families' well-being after we're gone? Rav Moshe answered unequivocally, that it's not a lack of faith to buy life insurance, and that we should have faith that we should have enough money to pay the premiums each month. But the question, to my mind, raises a fair point: where is our faith? Can we really say that "in God we trust?" What are our little leaps? If I get sick, I have health insurance. If I lose my job, the government pays for unemployment – at least for a while. If something happens to my house, I've got homeowners. If I get into an accident, I call my auto insurance company. We're so completely covered, that it becomes easy not to need God, and to not take those little leaps.

We're all about to do our taxes soon. Did we really give ten percent -- this past year, or when the time came to write that check, we just felt that we didn't have enough? For some of us, yeshiva tuition is our little leap, wondering if and how we're going to pay that money. Each of us has times in our lives when we must make a choice: to take a new job, or start a new career, or go back to school, or begin a new chapter, and we're paralyzed by fear – not so much of the known, but the unknown. Fear of the wilderness. That's what God wants us to do – to take that little leap; to write that check, or take that job, or take that risk and follow that dream, and really feel like that yeshiva bochur, knowing that if I really am doing the right thing, *גוט וועט* – God truly will provide.