Jewish Tribune – Beshalach

**Money Talks (mine says goodbye)**

Klal Yisroel find themselves in dire straits in this week’s parsha. Trapped between the Egyptian army in hot pursuit and the deep blue sea, they cry out to Hashem. The Medrash tells us that only on seeing רכוש של מצרים בידם, the wealth of the Egyptians in the hands of the Jewish people, did the sea split.

This is very strange. The waters did not give way for the men, women and children of Klal Yisroel, but only for the Egyptian plunder! What does this mean?

Rabbi Pinchos Roberts explains that after decades of slavery and persecution they were suddenly free and very wealthy. But their newfound wealth did not go to their heads, it was firmly in check – it was בידם, in their hands and in their control.

The Yam Suf witnessed this remarkable self-discipline of the Jewish people and only then split its waters.

Rabbi Roberts connects this with a vort of the Noam Elimelech. The Medrash Tanchuma in Parshas Ki Sisa says that when Klal Yisroel were first asked to contribute a half shekel towards the Mishkan, HKBH showed Moshe Rabbeinu a מטבע של אש, a coin as if it was all aflame.

The Noam Elimelech explains that fire is an element which is invaluable to mankind. It provides warmth and heat to cook and literally fuels industry. But that is only when the fire is kept under control. If it gets out of hand, it is destructive and can cause untold devastation.

The same is true with money. If kept in check, money can be an instrument for boundless good. If, however, the owner becomes a servant to it, it becomes a highly destructive force.

This explains another Chazal, which says צדקה מקרבת את הגאולה. What has צדקה to do with גאולה? The answer is that if someone can part with his hard-earned cash it proves he is “free” of the chains of material desire and he will be rewarded with another freedom - the גאולה.

Food for thought in regard to our own relationship with money and living honestly.

Rabbi Dovid Kaplan tells a wonderful anecdote about a girl who lost a towel on a school trip. The mother, upset at the school for their careless supervision over the property of others, called the head teacher.

After apologising and re-assuring the mother that the school would try to locate the missing towel, she asked the mother “What did it look like?”

“It was white,” said the mother, “with Holiday Inn written across it.”

Chazal (Eruvin 65b) tell us that a person’s relationship with money is a good indicator of who that person is. To have newfound wealth and still be in control is impressive indeed.

After decades of slavery and persecution, Klal Yisroel managed to ensure that their newfound wealth did not go their heads. It was בידם, in their hands and in their control. That, says the Medrash, is what so impressed the Yam Suf that it split its waters.

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