

Pesach 21, Day 7 “Tower”

Shabbat Shalom. Chag sameach. First, I'd like to acknowledge that today's sermon is sponsored by Ellen and Sharon Geller, in memory of their father, Jack Geller, and uncle, William Potler, whose yahrzeits fall during chol hamoed Pesach.

Today is the 7th Day of Pesach, which corresponds to the specific date of Kriat Yam Suf, the episode of the splitting of the Red Sea. Today we are not just commemorating the Exodus overall; we are celebrating the specific miracle God performed on this day. Today's holiday stands in contrast to Sukkot, when there is no extra holiday at the end; the last day of Sukkot is simply Chol Hamoed.

Whenever we delve into Kriat Yam Suf, we look to the first word of the story, *va'yehi beshalach Paraoth, and it was when Pharaoh sent out the nation*. The sages in Mesechet Megillah tell us that whenever the Torah uses that phrase, it is a cue that something terrible is about to happen – it's like saying *oy vey*. But in this context, when we're reading about the Exodus, what could turn out to be negative?

Moreover, the verses we read today raise another question: why doesn't our Torah portion today end on a high note,

with the monumental episode of the kariat Yam Suf? Why does it continue with a few additional verses about the anticlimactic aftermath, in which the Jews complained about the bitter taste of their drinking water in a place newly named *Marah, bitter*, and God sweetened the water to calm them down?

I think the answer to these questions can be found in an interesting tidbit about today's Haftorah from Shmuel Bet, the 2nd book of Samuel, where Dovid Hamelech sings a song of thanksgiving to God, which ends with the verse, ***Migdol yeshuot malko, the tower of salvation is His kingdom***. It is striking that a nearly identical song and the same verse is found in the book of Tehillim perek 18, with one small difference: in Tehillim, King David uses the phrase, ***Magdil yeshuot malko***. This verse also closes the Birkat Hamazon; however, when we recite Birkat Hamazon on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we say *migdol* as in Shmuel bet, but on a weekday, we say *magdil* like the Tehillim version. Why do we switch pronunciations at these times?

I have heard multiple answers to this question; I will share 3 of them: The first explanation is that the word *migdol* is in

Shmuel, the Book of Nevi'im, Prophets, and *magdil* is used in Ketuvim, which is considered a lower-level text than Nevi'im. Therefore, on weekdays we use the lower-level version in Tehillim, and on Shabbat and Yom Tov we recite the higher-level version in Shmuel bet.

The second answer is that in sefer Shmuel, while the verse is **pronounced** *migdol*, it is **written** as *magdil* because of a phenomenon known as *kri u'ktiv*, where our tradition teaches that some words in the Torah are pronounced differently than they are written. This would make sense according to the Vilna Gaon, who explains that the physical body is reflected in the written Hebrew text, and the soul is reflected in how a word is pronounced. So, during the week, when we focus on the physical, we say *magdil*, the way the word is **written**, but on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we use the way the word is **pronounced**, *migdol*, which is associated with the spiritual.

The third reason given is that *magdil* means *to go up*, and *migdol* means *tower*. So, during the week, we are going up, we're working toward our destination, and when we say *migdol* on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we have reached it, so to speak.

We see from this that because of the work we perform during the week, we attain a certain level by the arrival of

Shabbat and Yom Tov, which allows us to stop and appreciate what we have achieved. In the same way, kriat Yam Suf was the culmination of the Exodus. In that case, however, instead of savoring that moment and remaining on a high spiritual level, we immediately began to complain, causing our downfall. Therefore, to recall this fact, in today's passage we end the Torah reading about the beginning of that decline, and perhaps that is why we start the reading with the sorrowful word of *Vayehi*.

The vital message from today's Torah reading is that we must never take anything for granted – we must solidify our worldly accomplishments by being appreciative when we are blessed to reach certain milestones and distinctive spiritual times such as Shabbat and Pesach. If we strive to take advantage of every landmark we reach, we can build on the foundation of Pesach and make a positive impact on our lives throughout the coming season. Shabbat shalom and Chag Sameach.