

Not Only When Were Hurt

Once, the king's son, the crown prince, heir to the royal throne, was taken captive by a band of ruthless pirates. The young prince was starved and beaten. He had no day; he had no night. Suffering and persecution were his pastimes. After discovering where his son was being held captive, the king gathered together his bravest and strongest soldiers and set out on a mission to rescue him. A vicious battle ensued, and the pirate band suffered overwhelming casualties. The king was not taking any captives. Relentless in his punishment of the pirates for their brutal treatment of his son, the king did not stop until his son was safely ensconced in his protective custody.

The prince put his arms around his father's neck and cried bitterly, reliving to him the terrible terror and pain that he had sustained in captivity. The king soothed his son as they prepared for the return trip to the capital, where the entire city waited anxiously for their return. After traveling a few miles, the king suddenly ordered an about-face. They were returning towards the pirates' hideout. Upon seeing this, the prince began to tremble with fear. His nerves were already taut from his captivity and affliction, and he started screaming, "No! No!"

The prince saw that they were rapidly approaching the pirates' camp, and he felt faint. The mere thought of another confrontation with his captives was too much for him. As soon as they saw pirates coming out, they quickly turned around and ran. It seemed as if the king was teasing the pirates. As soon as the pirates came close to the king's soldiers, the bridge that they were about to traverse to safety - snapped. The prince could no longer take the pressure; he fainted. To anyone witnessing this ordeal, the question was obvious: Why did the king return to the pirate's camp? He was safe, and he had no reason to go back, but he did. Why?

This question applies to our parsha as well. Klal Yisrael had been in Egypt for 210 years. They sustained cruel persecution, pain and suffering. Hashem finally liberated them from bondage, but, on the way to freedom, He had them return. Why? Chazal ask this question in the Midrash. They respond with a mashal, parable. A young king went out with a small group of followers to hunt. While they were in the forest tracking their intended prey, they heard a cry for help. The king immediately ran towards the sound and discovered a young woman being attacked by robbers. The king raised his sword into the air, and the robbers ran away. The young woman was saved by the king, and he brought her back home. When the king discovered that this woman was herself a princess, he sought her hand in matrimony. The young woman's parents were overwhelmed with joy. It was beyond their greatest dreams. Their daughter's safe return, accompanied by her marriage to the young king, was beyond their wildest imagination.

The princess, however, did not have the same positive reaction as her parents did. She was certainly happy to be safely back home, but she was not yet ready to commit herself for life to her rescuer. So, she remained silent. She conformed with whatever her husband requested, but she continued to remain silent. The king was happy to be married to the princess, but he had imagined a wife who spoke, who did more than nod her head in obedience. The king decided that perhaps a change of scenery might be beneficial. He announced to his father-in-law that he was returning home with his bride.

When the king notified his young wife of his plans, her response was as usual: silence. If she was going to remain silent, the king figured that he would let her travel in her own coach. There was no reason for him to travel with a wife who refused to talk. The king's party left for the royal palace, the king in one coach and his queen in another coach. Suddenly, a band of highwaymen attacked the queen's coach. "Help me! Help me!" the queen screamed. "Please save me! Please."

Like an arrow bursting forth from the bow, the king came to her rescue. He chased away the robbers, who were actually men that he had hired to frighten the queen. He turned to his wife and said,

"I have waited for this moment for some time. I just wanted to hear the sound of your voice once again. When you were attacked in the forest, you screamed for help. I saved you. Then silence. I have never heard from you again. I now know that when you are in pain, you cry out. This is what I was waiting for."

The lesson is obvious. When Klal Yisrael was in Egypt, beaten daily, persecuted and miserable - they cried out to Hashem. He responded and liberated them. The reaction: silence. Hashem had to break their silence to take them out of their reverie. He returned them towards Egypt. They reacted. They broke their silence.

The lesson for us is also obvious. We cry out to Hashem when we hurt. Otherwise, we are silent. That is not the way to treat our Protector. He wants to hear our voices on a regular basis, not only when it hurts.