

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

B'SHALACH

Shirat HaYam climaxes with prayer for the future:

Nations heard and shuddered... fear and dread falling upon them... until your people crossed over... You will bring them and establish them in... the place You dwell in, in the holy places that you have founded (15:14-17).

G-d will be King for ever and ever (15:18).

The Rashbam and Ibn Ezra both view "G-d will be king for ever and ever" as a separate prayer. Once Am Yisrael settles in the Promised Land, G-d should be recognized as King over the entire Creation. The Shira tells us that during K'ri'at Yam Suf, nations sat up and paid attention to the absolute power that G-d was dramatically demonstrating. As the Ramban brings out, G-d was showing that He is Master of the Universe by supporting those who serve Him and destroying those who rebel against Him. So may it be way into the future generations that G-d will heed the good deeds of the righteous and the sins of the wicked, supporting those who strive to do what is right according to the spiritual principles of the Creation. Thus G-d will be King for ever and ever.

Yet the Mechilta, a much earlier Midrashic source, is not entirely happy with the future tense - HASHEM YIMLOCH L'OLAM VA'ED, that G-d will be King for ever and ever. This Midrash sees this look into the distant future as a cause for criticism. Had Moshe and the people declared: "G-d rules for ever" no nation would be able to threaten them. As the Chatam Sofer expands, even within the Shira, there is an implication that the impact of Y'tzi'at Mitzrayim would not be permanent, that Am Yisrael could suffer churban and galut, as the whole world's recognition of HaKadosh Baruch Hu as King was expressed as being in the future only. Many unpleasant things might well happen on that long journey towards the future, with the ultimate destiny being a mere dream.

There is a vital lesson here. It is to keep eyes on the final destiny - always, however far into the future that might be. In life's work. Whatever the project is. It might include a quality mastery of Shas and Poskim. It might be discovering and innovating a cure for a particular form of cancer. It may be leading a team to tackle a particular crisis in the community, for example shidduchim barriers for those in their late 20s and 30s. It could very likely be raising a family as fully-fulfilled B'nei Torah and Yir'ei Shamayim. Whatever

the project, visualize yourself as having reached the goal and then plan and do what it takes to get there, even if it takes many years. Bear in mind that there are many supportive intermediate targets on the way. All these goals not only yield the proverbial pot of gold (and very much more) at the end, but their intermediate markers pay rich dividends on the grounded and single-minded focused journey to the objective.

Let's briefly look at a possible example. Torah learning has always been part of your life, but now you're seeking serious quality mastery of Shas and Poskim. That doesn't happen overnight. Work and family severely limit available fatigue-free hours.

Shas and Poskim are mentally demanding. Shas before Shacharit tackled at Daf Yomi (for example) or Amud Yomi rates take 7½ or 15 years respectively, with the additional challenge or remembering what you've learnt (I write brief summaries for quick regular review). Whilst most dapim can be reasonably grasped in an hour or two, some demand formidable patience, persistence, and endurance. Similarly with Poskim. A page of Mishna B'rura for half an hour between Mincha and Ma'ariv can be monumentally challenging after a frustrating day at work or in the home, when it's quite a struggle to

keep eyes on the Siddur during Mincha. In addition, Gemara and Halacha are not in a vacuum; you want to be conversant with Torah Bichtav, perhaps going through the Parasha plus a couple of chapters of Nach on Friday nights. You also want to get a sense of the times and events in which our Torah sources developed and unfolded and - most important - the mussar: the ethical, spiritual, and personal development principles that are shine brightly through our traditions and bring perspective to our Torah learning in terms of it being a positively life-fulfilling force.

Overwhelming, indeed. But constantly seeing yourself as Torah-conversant with Quality Mastery of Shas and Poskim is a vital of the journey in itself. In making it your destiny, you make it your identity, as you're striding the way, and a very long one at that. You're not just learning when you feel like it. You're looking at that destiny along the path of work and focused commitment. You see each step, each daf and halacha mastered as another brick in your own Torah-constructed palace. You form deepening personal connections as you gravitate to those with similar goals and to those who can help you to that reality.

This then is a vital key. To constantly and consistently see your identity as

already being inside your target as you strive to achieve it making it part of you, step by step. Imagining yourself already there enables you to slowly gravitate to there, and taking the challenges and frustrations in the strides to that destiny. 