

## Parshas Shmos 5764

Moshe's mission begins with a vision of a burning bush, on fire but not consumed. That must have been marvelous and moving to behold. I know that it was; because we on our mission to **ישראל** saw the same thing. And I want to share that vision with you.

The Torah describes the scene as Moshe first beholds the bush:

וירא מלאך ה' בלבת אש מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בוער באש והסנה איננו אוכל. ויאמר משה אסורה נא ואראה את המראה הגדול הזה מדוע לא יבער הסנה. וירא ה' כי סר לראות ויקרא אליו וגו'.

The pasuk seems to emphasize משה's decision to go and look at the סנה. It might simply have said: ... ויסר לראות ויקרא ה' אליו ... . Why all the detail: Moshe decides to go and look, and ה' sees that he is going to look, and so on.

The **מדרש תנחומא** elaborates on this emphasis and says:

אמר לו הקב"ה נצטערת לראות, חייך שאגלה אליך...

In other words, הקב"ה revealed himself to משה because he took the trouble to go and see the burning סנה.

Why was that so praiseworthy? Who wouldn't go and see such a marvel, if only out of curiosity? Why should that deserve reward?

I believe that the answer is that Moshe understood that something of tremendous significance - something not of this world - was taking place at the סנה. That much he could tell - and sense -even from afar. He knew that if he went to see it he would be face to face with a spiritual revelation. But he also knew that in you can't just be a sight-seer. The שכונה in the סנה is not a tourist attraction. For Moshe to go and see it would mean for him to be changed by it, to have his life changed, perhaps beyond recognition. And that might have given him pause.

But he went anyway. ויאמר אסורה נא ואראה. - he was prepared to go and see something that would change him, that would change his life, that would change his destiny. That was a fateful and a courageous decision. And because of that decision הקב"ה revealed Himself to משה.

**One cannot see the סנה בוער באשה and not be changed. One cannot see the bush standing up to the fire and be unmoved. One cannot see the שכונה on fire and remain indifferent.**

We went to ארץ ישראל last week to see extraordinary things. And we did. We went to be moved, and we were.

But the most extraordinary things that we saw were the people: People whose courage and whose אמונה and מסירות נפש for ארץ ישראל is beyond imagining. We visited communities that are under constant fire, and yet remain undaunted.

They are the סנה בוער באש, the bush that is engulfed in fire, and yet is not consumed, and continues to flourish and grow. And we were privileged to see them.

And every one of us was changed by that sight.

Every day that we spent in ארץ ישראל was a revelation, but perhaps the most incredible day was Sunday, when we traveled to the Jewish communities of גוש קטיף, in the Gaza strip.

We saw Jews living in tiny communities - 200 families, 80 families, 60 families, 13 families - surrounded by a sea of murderous enemies, and fortified only by their conviction and their faith.

We saw the people of נצרים, 63 families surrounded on all sides by Palestinians, the only access road attacked so often that it can only be traversed by armed convoys. And we met their children, wonderful חניעוודיקיע children, and they sang for us, and we danced with them. And we got back into our armored bus and waited for the armed convoy to take us back.

And we looked back and marveled at that סנה בוער באש והסנה איננו אוכל.

We met the people of כפר דרום, like ר' שאול בר אילן, who leads a כולל of young men studying for סמיכה. And he showed me his house, where he has been living for a year, and the marks of the four mortar shells and the one Kassam rocket that have fallen right around his home in that year. And he told me how convinced he was that the גאולה was taken place around us, and how grateful he was to be part of that process.

And they too are a סנה בוער באש והסנה איננו אוכל.

We traveled to שירת הים, a tiny village – less than a village, two rows of abandoned Egyptian buildings, 6 km from the Egyptian border. Four years ago four young people took them over, after terrorists killed their friend. That is a common pattern in the territories - after a Jew is killed, his friends put up a new settlement, in defiance. Now, four years later, there are 13 young families in שירת הים, perched on the beach, surrounded on all sides by Palestinians - even the beach side is dangerous, because terrorist can come in by boat. I cannot forget

the sight, as we left, of a young mother swinging her baby as she turned back towards that tiny cluster of buildings, surrounded by implacable enemies.

And she, too, is part of that סנה בוער באש והסנה איננו אוכל.

We talked with a social worker who works in גוש קטיף, and he told us of the pressure of living under fire, of women who make sure their house is tidy each morning, so that in case they are killed in the course of the day people will not come into their homes and find them messy; of teenage children who wet their beds each night; of 3,800 mortar shells that have fallen on the small towns of Gaza since September of 2000; and of the incredible courage of people who remain, and the many new families who have moved in, despite the fear and the terror. Incredibly, there are more young people waiting to move in than there are homes available.

Nor is such נפש מסירות limited to גוש קטיף. On Tuesday we traveled to שמרון, and we stopped in קדומים, where we spoke with the head of the town council, Daniella Weiss. She described how she first went to settle in שמרון, with four sleeping bags for herself, her husband, and their two small children. And now, her children are following in her footsteps, staking out communities on hilltops. And she told us how her son-in-law was killed, when a terrorist snuck into her daughter's home. And she told us how her daughter was in the house, hiding behind a desk, holding her hand over her small daughter's mouth to keep her from betraying their presence. How she saw the terrorist's shoes, saw him turn away, at which point she ran out of the house. And she told us, with tears in her eyes, that her daughter had married again, and that she was the שדך. And she explained to us despite what they happened her family remain in שמרון, because if Jews run in שמרון, in the heart of ארץ ישראל, then they will soon be running everywhere.

And she and her family are also a סנה בוער באש והסנה איננו אוכל.

And one cannot see that without being changed.

I know that I was. I will not be able to read of terrorist attacks in Israel without thinking of those many victims whom we met and who shared their stories and their tears with us; I will not be able to read of children under fire without thinking of those bright young faces in נצרים; I will not be able to hear the word settlements without thinking of the brave people of כפר דרום, and שירת הים, and קדומים, and all the other places that we saw.

I do not know if the settlements are wise; but I do know that their people are unbelievably brave, and that they are filled with נפש מסירות for the land of Israel and its people. נפש מסירות that powerful has to be considered a historic force in its own right. Indeed, the Gemara in ברכות says that נפש מסירות has the force to effect miracles.

And if that is so, then we can expect miracles in ארץ ישראל.

I hope and pray that they will come soon, and that just as the סנה בוער באש that משה saw was the harbinger of גאולה, so too this סנה בוער באש that burns today in ארץ ישראל will portend the גאולה for which we yearn, when כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים אראנו נפלאות, אמן.

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