

Bo

In today's Sidra we read: "But all the Children of Israel had light in their dwellings."¹ The Almighty punished the Egyptians with a darkness so thick that the people remained in the position they were in at the moment of their affliction, but the Jewish people enjoyed light. After Pharaoh finally allowed the Jews to leave Egypt, and they left in a hurry. G-d commanded the Jews to eat the roasted lamb with Matzoh and bitter herbs: "And they shall eat the flesh in that night roasted with fire and unleavened bread, and with bitter herbs they shall eat it."²

Chazal say that the *moror*, which means bitter herbs, must be chewed up, before swallowing;³ if he swallowed it first without chewing, he did not fulfill the commandment. "The main mitzvah is to eat bitter herbs, "*Chazeres*" which has a tendency to leave a sweet taste as you put it into the mouth, but, when it is chewed up, you feel the real bitterness.⁴ The entire wandering of the Jewish people began with a "*mosok*" a sweet taste. Joseph was nominated to be the Viceroy. He reached the heights of personal glory and achievement, but, after Pharaoh died, came the "*moror*", the bitter times, the enslavement, and the servitude. Yet, the Jews maintained the *or b'moshvosom*. They maintained their Jewish identity, they did not change their names, nor their language. With the Jews in Spain and Portugal it was the same: *t'chiloso mosok*, a golden era. The Jews were allowed to prosper financially and spiritually; however, the end was *moror*. They were expelled from Spain penniless, thousands were burned at the stake, but those who died, went up with the *sh'ma* on their lips. The Jews were invited to come to Poland, to develop the industry and commerce, a *mosok* beginning, but what treatment the Jews received in Poland later. Discrimination and pogroms were a daily practice; yet, what an illuminating Jewry it was.

Yeshivoth and Talmud Torahs, institutions of kindness and charity, functioned by the thousands. "*Ulchol b'nai yisroel hoyo or b'moshvosom.*" The Jewish home was permeated with a heavenly light despite the darkness outside, despite the "*oyav mibachutz*" who threatened the very existence of the Jews. The *kol hatorah* never ceased to vibrate loud and clear.

Those of us who have had the privilege of spending some years in the Yeshivoth, knew quite well that Torah was the opposite of "*Chazeres.*" Rather, "*T'chiloso mar:*" To leave father and mother, and to be alone, without the warmth of the immediate family was no picnic, but we understood what the Sages said,⁵ "*Kach he darka shel Torah:*" "This is the way of Torah, eat bread with salt, drink water by measure, sleep on bare ground, and live a life of hardship while you toil in the Torah." Learning a new '*sugya*' and to comprehend its meaning, was indeed a chore. The brain worked unceasingly, but "*sofo mosok.*" How sweet, how delightful an experience it was, to know that I got it. Today, unfortunately, many of our brethren read books that are filled with schmootz,—*t'chiloso mosok*—but the "*sofo*" is *mar*. The results are disastrous. The children copy their parents, and instead of having the house illuminated with Torah, the house is engulfed in darkness and confusion. To bring back the joy of being, and living as a Jew, those who went astray, who went wandering in strange fields, collecting sour grapes—we say to them "Return O Children," "*K'va itim la-Torah,*" Set aside an hour a day, fill your soul with some satisfaction and achievement.

FOOTNOTES

1. Shmos 10:23, Rashi
2. Ibid 12:8
3. Pesachim 115b
4. Ibid 39a
5. Avoth 6:4