

Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH COVID-19: PANEL DISCUSSION

Should be available soon as rebroadcast from web site of Bikur Cholim of Greater Washington.

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when mentioning Beshalach? For me, the main theme of the parsha is emunah, or faith. I consider the events in the parsha to be a university level course in destroying an Egyptian overview and developing faith in God. "As you have seen Egypt today, you shall not see them ever again (14:13)." Events in the parsha show a defeated and humiliated Egypt and contrast with a loving God who listens to the concerns and complaints of the Jewish people and cares for each of them.

After leaving Egypt, the people arrive at Mara, where there is plenty of water, but it is too bitter to drink. God directs Moshe to put a certain tree in the water, and the water becomes sweet (15:22-26). Their next stop is Midbar Sin, where they run out of food. God has Moshe tell the people that He will deliver food – quail in the afternoon and special food (manna) every night from the sky (16:1-8 ff.). The miracle of the quail and manna was a way to show that God cared for each Jew and took care of the needs of each of them.

The people next camped in Rephidim, where again there was no water. They had to travel some distance to Har Sinai, where God told Moshe to strike a certain rock, and it would give water (17:5-6). While the main group went to collect water, Amalek snuck up on the stragglers in Rephidim and attacked them. Moshe had Yehoshua lead a battle against Amalek while he climbed Har Sinai and held up his arms. When the people looked to Moshe's arms, pointing to Hashem, the Jews were able to repel Amalek. In all these examples, the point of the crisis and solution was to teach the people to look to God as the source of caring, protection, and sustenance.

One somewhat hidden story illustrates true faith in Hashem perhaps better than any other. The morning after crossing the Sea of Reeds, the people looked out and saw that the Egyptian army and horses were drowned and the feared chariots were destroyed. The people sang a song to Hashem (15:1-18). Miriam then led the women in a second song, in which they accompanied themselves with drums (15:20-21). Note how the Torah introduces Miriam: "the prophetess, sister of Aharon." When did Miriam become a prophetess? Look back at 2:1-10, a time when Miriam was the sister only of Aharon, because Moshe was not yet born or was just an unnamed baby. According to Midrash, Moshe's parents had divorced to avoid giving birth to a son whom Paro would kill. Miriam convinced her parents to re-marry so their yet unborn daughters would live and perhaps their son or sons would survive. (Since Miriam's father was the most highly respected Jew of the generation, other families followed his example of divorcing and then re-marrying.) According to Midrash, Miriam was a prophetess whose prophecy was that her parents would give birth to a child who would save the Jews.

When her family could no longer hide the baby brother, the mother put the baby into a teva (same name as Noah's ark) and put the teva in the river. Miriam hid herself and watched to see what would happen to her prophecy. Paro's daughter came, saw the teva, and had her maidens bring it to her. She recognized that it was a Jewish baby. Miriam went and

offered to find a wet nurse to care for the baby. Paro's daughter agreed and later adopted the baby, whom she named Moshe.

Miriam had true faith in God, that He would save the Jews, bring a child to her parents to save the Jews, and that God would protect him from danger, despite Paro's decree of death for all Jewish babies. When it came time to leave Egypt, Miriam had enough faith to have the women bring drums so they could sing a song of thanksgiving to God.

Miriam's emunah mirrors another example of strong faith in Hashem, despite threat of death. When God told Avraham to bring his only son, the son he loved, Yitzhak, and sacrifice him at a spot that He would designate, neither Avraham nor Yitzhak hesitated. Avraham knew that God had promised to make a great nation from his natural child or children. God had also directed Avraham to send away Ishmael, virtually guaranteeing that God's promised blessings would come through Yitzhak. Neither Avraham nor Yitzhak knew how God would have Avraham go through with sacrificing Yitzhak and keep the promise to Avraham. Despite not knowing what was to come, Avraham and Yitzhak continued up the mountain and binding Yitzhak, with complete faith in Hashem. Miriam's example mirrors that of Avraham and Yitzhak. Indeed, I would argue that Miriam's emunah exceeded that of Avraham and Yitzhak – but that is a story for some future time.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, taught me to look for signs of Hashem in action when things worked out for me for the best, especially in unexpected ways. For one growing up in a non-religious home, developing emunah is challenging and can take years of study. We sought to teach this lesson to our boys by sending them to Yeshiva, and we hope to help our children bring this message to our grandchildren. To me, Beshalach is perhaps the best parsha in the Torah to illustrate the power of true faith.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Beshalach: Words of Remembrance
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week's portion begins with the event that merits the title of the book – Exodus. The Jews finally are chased from Egypt. Hastily, they gather their meager possessions and with the gold and silver that the Egyptians miraculously gave them they flee.

But one of them, their leader no less, does not take gold and silver. He takes Joseph's bones. The Torah tells us why. Decades prior, Joseph beseeched his children, "pakod yifkod – G-d will surely remember you and you shall bring my bones up with you out of here" (Genesis 50:25).

Slavery can make one forget commitments – especially about old bones. However, despite more than a century of servitude, Moshe kept the promise. What baffles me is the wording of the request and its fulfillment. Why did Yoseph juxtapose the words "pakod yifkod" (G-d shall remember) with the petition to re-inter his bones? It is repeated in this week's portion. "Moshe took the bones because Joseph said that pakod yifkod – G-d will remember you and bring my bones up" (Exodus 13: 19).

It is wonderful that Joseph assured redemption, but is that the reason Moshe took the bones? Didn't he take the bones simply to fulfill a commitment to Joseph? What does pakod yifkod have to do with it? Why is it inserted in both the request and response?

Twelve years ago, our Yeshiva established an audio Torah tape library. I looked in the Yellow Pages and found a company that sold tape labels. A very knowledgeable representative took my call. Clearly Jewish, she had a Brooklyn accent, and spiced her words with some Yiddish expressions. I felt comfortable dealing with someone who I believed, knew about Jewish institutions. I said I would call her back and asked for her name. She answered proudly, "Esther." "Last name?" I inquired. After a brief pause, I received an answer that surprised me. "Scatteregio."

"Scatteregio?" I repeated in amazement. Stepping where perhaps I should not have, I explained my perplexity. "Actually," I offered, "I was expecting Cohen or Goldberg." She paused, "you are right, I am Jewish and my first husband was Goldman." Another pause. "But now I'm remarried, and it's "Scatteregio." She took a deep breath. "But I have a Jewish son, Rick, and he really wants to observe. In fact, he wants me to allow him to study in an Israeli Yeshiva."

I knew that this was not destined to be a telephone call only about tape. For half an hour, I talked about the importance of Yeshiva, and how Rick could be her link to her past and connection with her future. I never knew what kind of impact my words made. I remember leaving my name and talking about my namesake's influence on an Esther of yesteryear. I ended the conversation with the words "Esther, es vet zain gut!" (Yiddish for it will be well!)

Ten years later, during the intermediate days of Passover I took my children to a local park. Many Jewish grandparents were there, watching the next generations slide and swing. An older woman wearing pants and smoking a cigarette was holding the hand of a young boy who was wearing a large kippah and had thick payos (sidecurls). As one of my children offered to play with the little boy, I nodded hello and smiled. With tremendous pride, she began talking about her grandchildren. "Do you know my son Reuvain? He was studying in a Far Rockaway yeshiva until now and just took a job in the city." "Wonderful," I said, "but I don't know your son." She told me about the struggles of making a living, and I had no choice but to listen and smile. Instinctively I responded, "Es vet zain gut!" Things will be fine. Her eyes locked on me. She stared in disbelief.

"Mordechai?" "Esther?" We just shook our heads in disbelief, and to my amazement, she told me that Rick did go to Yeshiva, these were his children, and they were truly her nachas (pride and joy).

I never will know if my words helped turn Rick into Reuvain, but I am sure that the words, "es vet zain gut" assuring someone that things will be all right, was a statement not easily forgotten.

When Yoseph made his children promise that they will take his bones with them, he added an assurance. He promised them that G-d would surely remember them. Even Hashem, appearing to Moshe said, "pakod pakadti," "I have remembered" (Exodus 3:16). Yoseph, too, requested to be remembered. Two hundred years of slavery can take an awful toll on people. It can make them give up their pride, it can make them forget about family, it surely it can cause them to

forget about bones. But when requests are linked with comforting words, they endure. Moshe took Yoseph's bones because they were linked with words of reassurance that remained an anthem of the Jews in exile, "G-d will remember you." And Moses remembered, too.

Good Shabbos!

Beshalach: Freedom for What?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2010

NOTE: Rabbi Linzer's Dvar Torah for Boeshalach was not ready in time for my deadline. For a voice preview of his new Dvar Torah, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR1mBQHTA3ltN5Jtyf_lrw8cPvVMzy01M_BEm6o5wPG5ndtNVIs6RaDK1Yc&v=4KApTs3Knes&feature=youtu.be A transcription of the Dvar Torah, possibly with some edits, will be available on Friday at www.yctorah.org. I have selected a Dvar from Rabbi Linzer's archives.

"And they came to Marah, and they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter... And the people murmured against Moshe and Aharon saying, 'What shall we drink?'" (Shemot 15:23-24).

Parshat Beshalach is the parsha of the apex of the Exodus, as it relates the Splitting of the Sea, the drowning of the Egyptians, and the Song on the Sea. It is also the parsha of the murmurings:

"And the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael murmured against Moshe and Aharon in the Wilderness. And they said to them: 'Who would give that we had died by the hand of God in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to our fill, that you have taken us to this wilderness to kill this entire congregation in starvation'" (Shemot 16:2-3).

"And the people fought with Moshe and they said, 'Give us water to drink'..." (Shemot 17:3).

"And they called the name of the place Trial and Quarrel, because Bnei Yisrael had fought with and tested God saying, 'Is God in our midst, or not?'" (Shemot 17:7).

How is it that the climax of the Exodus could be followed so precipitously with the grumbings and murmurings that were to accompany them for 40 years throughout the Wilderness?

Much has been said and can be said about this in regards to the outgrowing of a slave mentality and the quality of a faith that comes too easily. There is, however, another factor here as well, one that goes to the very core of the Exodus and of the purpose of freedom. What were they heading towards? What was the purpose of yitziat Mitzrayim and how had this purpose been framed to the people?

Both God and Moshe had emphasized that the people would be freed from the bondage of Egypt and be able to enter into a land "flowing with milk and honey" as a free people (cf. Shemot 3:8, 3:17). This material promise of freedom was of course thrown back in Moshe's face when it did not immediately materialize: "Even to a land flowing of milk and honey you have not brought us, nor given us an inheritance of a field and vineyard!" (Bamidbar 15:13). The promise for a physically better life was met with immediate disappointment, and when water and food were lacking, murmuring and complaining ensued. Why not go back to the fleshpots of Egypt rather than endure the hardships of the desert?

The true purpose of yitziat Mitzrayim was, of course, quite different. "When you take the People out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain" (Shemot 3:12). While to the people this must have sounded like a ruse to win Pharaoh's agreement to let them out, it was, in fact, the ultimate purpose of the Exodus: to stand at Har Sinai and accept and be commanded by the mitzvot, not just to become physically free, but to transform from slaves of Pharaoh to servants of God. As God says, "they are My servants, whom I have taken out of the Land of Egypt" (Vayikra 25:42). Thus, as we have seen "and I will be for them as a God" is the climax of "and I will redeem them... and take them for me as a People"

(Shemot 6:7). This is distilled in the concise statement of the Hagaddah, "Originally we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and now God has drawn us close to God's service."

The question of the purpose of freedom, and the definition of liberty, was clearly articulated by Isaiah Berlin in his article "Two Concepts of Liberty," where he describes two types of liberty: negative liberty and positive liberty. Negative liberty is the freedom from constraint, whereas positive liberty is having the power and resources to act to fulfill one's own potential, and often requires a level of education, self-discipline, and certain underlying values. Negative liberty is leaving Egypt, positive liberty is standing at Har Sinai. Ain likha ben chorin ela mi she'osek baTorah, "No one is as free as the one who devotes himself to the study of Torah."

Bnei Yisrael, as an enslaved people, had to first be motivated by the physical freedom and the promise of a better life, but – once hardship was encountered and murmurings ensued, they had to be trained in the second type of freedom. They had to learn to see beyond material privation to something of greater consequence. At Marah, "God gave them rule and law and there God tested them" (Shemot 15:25). There – as the Rabbis said – God began to introduce them to law, discipline, and Torah, and gave them "some of the laws of the Torah that they should begin to practice – Shabbat, the red calf, and civil laws" (Rashi quoting Mekhilta). God continues: "If you surely listen to the voice of Hashem your God, and do what is right in God's eyes, and listen to God's commandments, and observe God's edicts, then all of the afflictions that I have placed upon Egypt I will not place upon you, for I am God your healer" (Shemot 15:26). While still needing to be motivated by the promise of physical protection, the people are being introduced and trained in the accepting of a life of discipline and meaning, a life of mitzvot and of purpose. And even the giving of the man, the most basic sustenance, was followed by, "that I may test them, if they will walk in My law, or no" (Shemot 16:4).

This idea is nicely stated by Michael Walzer in his book Exodus and Revolution (which is a must-read for these parashot):

For the wilderness wasn't only a world of austerity, it was a world of laws... The Israelites had been Pharaoh's slaves; in the wilderness they became God's servants... and once they agree to God's rule, He and Moses, His deputy, force them to be free. This, according to Rousseau, was Moses' greatest achievement; he transformed a herd of "wretched fugitives" who lacked both virtue and courage, into a "free people." He didn't do this merely by breaking their chains but also by organizing them into a "political society" and giving them laws. He brought them what is currently called "positive freedom," that is, not so much (not at all!) a way of life free from regulation but rather a way of life to whose regulation they could, and did, agree... The Israelite slaves could become free only insofar as they accepted the discipline of freedom, to obligation to live up to a common standard and to take responsibility for their own actions... hence the Sinai covenant" (pp. 52-53).

Two hundred years ago the Jewish People experienced another Exodus – they were freed from the ghetto and welcomed into the larger, secular world. For some, this freedom was a negative liberty, and with it came a rejection of all constraints – the physical and economic constraints (not to mention the oppression) of the ghetto, and the constraints of a life of Torah and mitzvot as well. For others, this freedom was only dangerous, because it allowed for such a complete rejection of constraints, and they attempted – and still attempt – to move back into a world that existed before this freedom, a world that is fully constrained. Others, including today's Modern Orthodox Jews, willingly embraced this new freedom, willingly left the Egypt of old, while still holding fast to the positive freedom of a life of Torah and mitzvot, the true freedom that comes from the commands and demands of the Torah.

What has been missing, however, even for this last group, and for today's Modern Orthodox Jews, is a new vision of the Promised Land. For with this new Exodus, a new vision that gives purpose and meaning to this freedom, a vision that shapes for us how we can embrace this freedom to bring us to a place of higher and ultimate meaning, that explains for us our purpose in life in a way that fully incorporates our new reality – such a vision, at least outside of Israel, is sorely lacking. What, we must ask ourselves, is the purpose of this new freedom? Where are we marching towards? What is our Promised Land?

It is because of this lack that we – in the Modern Orthodox camp – often struggle for an animating religious ethos, and a real sense of purpose. We have spent too many years wandering aimlessly in the Wilderness. Our challenge, then, is not just to accept this new freedom, not just to recognize it as something that has value – to affirm that we can learn from the larger world – but to incorporate it into our religious vision, to give it purpose, to make it part of our vision and part of our life, so that we can lead ourselves into the Promised Land.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctarah.org/2014/01/dont-leave-the-people-behind/>

Beshalach: Are You a Smartphone? by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

The redemption finally came. The Jews were escorted out with great respect. They were given gifts and good wishes. A few days later, when the Mitzriyim had second thoughts about the Exodus, Hashem once again rescued them. The Jews passed through the Yam Suf as if on dry land, while the Mitzriyim were drowned in the water as it returned to a normal sea. This was the long-awaited moment. The Jews broke into song. They were jubilant; they were brimming with thanksgiving. Had you been there, you too would have joined them in that emotional high and song experience. Unless you owned a smartphone.

You see, if you own a smartphone, you may feel the obligation to keep making it smarter. My smart phone, for example, knows all of Scripture, Talmud, Medrash, and a whole lot more. Additionally, it has picture records of my vacations, and a whole lot of information on my contacts. Yes, my smartphone is very smart.

When my wife visited Washington, DC for the first time as part of her 8th grade graduation trip, her principal told her class, "Don't see Washington through the lens of your camera. Certainly, you can take a few pictures. But focus on the experience. Experience the trip with friends and teachers. Experience the sights. Experience the experience." In other words, do not just make your electronic device record the event. Make sure to experience it yourself. Make sure you are present.

I wonder what would have happened if we would have been at the redemption with our smartphones, social media groups, postings, and texting. Would we have experienced the monumental experience? Or would we have felt obligated to make our smartphones smarter, and record the events and then share them on social media, asking all of our "followers" to "like" them?

I am not talking about filters. I am not talking about shutting down ringers before entering a lecture, meeting, or house of worship. I am wondering aloud, if we are living life personally or, are we living life through the lens of an electronic device, and through the lens of our "followers" whom we hope will "like" us?

For I fear, that had we been at Kriyas Yam Suf, the redemption moment, we would not have experienced it. We would have been busy texting.

What is especially scary is that when Moshe first talked to Paroh about the redemption, Paroh's response was to make the Jews busy with additional work, so that they would not think of lofty things like freedom. And now, as free people, we make ourselves busy, instead of being present.

I have heard that there is an app you can get to activate your phone ringer so that it rings urgently during a meeting, so that you appear busy, and can be excused. I wonder: Are we busy because we are busy, or are we sometimes busy because we are afraid to be present?

I invite you to join me in a personal challenge. It is not about filters and silent mode, as important as those are. It is about paying attention. It is about living smart and experiencing life personally, instead of through a smartphone. It is a challenge to be present, truly, for yourself and others. But it is also a gift of inestimable value. It is the gift of being able to say Oz Yoshir-- to join in the song of Moshe—and the ability to say to the person sitting next to you, "I'm here, are you?"

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.

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Worries about our Worrying: Thoughts on Parashat Beshallah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Q. What is the text of an Emergency Alert sent out by a Jewish Organization?

A. Start worrying! Details to follow.

This joke reflects an ongoing reality of Jewish life. There always seems to be something to worry about, some crisis that is about to erupt, some threat to our survival. Even when we don't yet know the details, we are called upon to get into the worrying mode.

The late Professor Simon Rawidowicz wrote a fascinating essay which he entitled: "Israel--the Ever-Dying People." He points out that in each generation, going back many centuries, Jews thought that Jewish history was coming to an end. They worried about destruction at the hand of vicious enemies; they worried about exiles and expulsions; they worried about spiritual decline; they worried about assimilation. It seems that since the time of Abraham, we've been worrying about our imminent demise. Although we have been "ever-dying", Professor Rawidowicz reminds us that after 3500 years we are still alive!

Perhaps our very awareness of the fragility of our existence has given us an added tenacity to survive, to find ways of solving problems. The 19th century Rabbi Israel Salanter once quipped: "When people come to a wall that they can't go through, they stop. When Jews come to a wall that they can't go through--they go through."

This week's Torah reading includes the dramatic episode of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. When they reached the shore of the sea, they faced an existential crisis. Behind them, the Egyptian troops were coming to destroy them. In front of them was the Red Sea. They were trapped, with no obvious solution to their dilemma.

The Midrash tells of various reactions among the Israelites as they pondered their imminent destruction. Some said: we should have stayed in Egypt! Others said: the situation is hopeless; we and our families will perish. Woe unto us.

The common denominator of these approaches is that they led to psychological and emotional paralysis. Crying over what they could have done or should have done did not address their current crisis; it stifled their ability to cope. Declaring the situation to be hopeless led to despair. They came to a wall--and they stopped.

The Midrash tells that Nahshon ben Aminadav, head of the tribe of Judah, walked into the Red Sea. When the water reached his neck, then the sea miraculously split--and the Israelites were saved. Nahshon is described as a great hero because he took things into his own hands; he acted decisively; he risked his own life.

Yet Nahshon's heroism was not the result of a sudden burst of desperation. Rather, we can imagine that Nahshon deliberated carefully before entering the sea. He might have thought: God performed so many miracles for us in Egypt; God obviously has unlimited power; if God wanted us to be liberated from Egyptian servitude and to be brought into the Promised Land, surely God can and will make good on His promises to us. Armed with this reasoning, Nahshon entered the Red Sea. He was confident God would redeem His people. Nahshon came to a wall--and he went through; and he brought the rest of the people through as well.

When we receive Emergency Alerts from Jewish organizations telling us to start worrying because we are facing enormous threats, we should worry. But we should worry in the right way. Worrying that stems from regret that we should have or could have done things differently--such worrying is negative and self-defeating. The past is over, and we need to confront the crisis as it faces us now. We don't have the option of returning to the past to undo decisions. (Hopefully, we can learn from these past decisions when we get through the current crisis, and contemplate how to make future decisions.) Likewise, it is not productive to sink into self-pity and passive despair. Indeed, despair feeds on itself and infects others with a spirit of helplessness.

We should worry like Nahshon worried. We should not minimize the dangers and the risks; but we should deliberate on what is at stake and how we can overcome the difficulty. We should have confidence that if God has brought us this far,

He will keep His promises to us and bring us ultimate redemption. We should be ready to act decisively, to think "out of the box", to maintain forward momentum.

On April 17, 1818, Mordecai Manuel Noah--one of the great American Jews of his time--delivered an address at the dedication ceremony of Shearith Israel's second synagogue building, on Mill Street in lower Manhattan. He closed his talk with a prayer: "May we prove ever worthy of His blessing; may He look down from His heavenly abode, and send us peace and comfort; may He instill in our minds a love of country, of friends, and of all mankind. Be just, therefore, and fear not. That God who brought us out of the land of Egypt, who walked before us like 'a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night,' will never desert His people Israel."

* Angel for Shabbat; Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, <https://www.jewishideas.org/worries-about-our-worrying-thoughts-parashat-beshallah> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

The Jews of Rhodes and Cos: In Memoriam

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

One of the great writers of the 20th century, himself a Holocaust survivor, was Primo Levi. In his book, *Other Peoples' Trades*, he reminisces about his childhood home in Turin, Italy. In his nostalgic description, he remembers how his father would enter the house and put his umbrella or cane in a receptacle near the front door. In providing other details of the entrance way to the house, Primo Levi mentions that for many years "there hung from a nail a large key whose purpose everyone had forgotten but which nobody dared throw away (p. 13)."

Haven't we all had keys like that? Haven't we all faced the mystery of an unknown key! What door will it open? What treasures will it unlock? We do not know where the key fits...but we are reluctant to toss it out. We suspect that if we did discard the key, we would later discover its use; we would then need it but no longer have it!

The key might be viewed as a parable to life. It is a gateway to our past, our childhood homes, our families, our old schools, old friends. Over the years, we have forgotten a lot...but we also remember a lot. We dare not throw away the key that opens up our memories, even if we are not always certain where those memories will lead us.

The mysterious key not only may open up or lock away personal memories; it also functions on a national level. As Jews, the key can unlock thousands of years of history. Today, with trembling, we take the key that opens memories of the Jews deported by the Nazis in late July 1944, the brutal torture and murder of the Jews of Rhodes and Cos. Some doors lock away tragedies so terrible that we do not want to find the key to open them. But if we do not open them, we betray the victims and we betray ourselves.

I remember my first visit to Rhodes in the summer of 1974, as I was completing my doctoral dissertation on the history of the Jews of Rhodes. I had intended to stay for several weeks; but I left much sooner. I felt very uncomfortable as I walked through the once Jewish neighborhood, now almost totally devoid of Jews. I instinctively resented the many well-tanned European tourists strutting through the streets without a care in the world. I felt that I was witnessing a circus built atop a graveyard.

The Jews are—unfortunately—well experienced in coping with tragedy. How have we managed to flourish for all these many centuries? How have we maintained an indomitable optimism in spite of all that we have endured?

Some years ago, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz (known as the Bostoner Rebbe) wrote an article in which he described two concepts in the Jewish reaction to the destruction of our Temples in Jerusalem in antiquity. During those horrific times when the first Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the second Temple was razed by the Romans in 70 CE, the Jewish people may have thought that Jewish history had come to an end. Not only was their central religious shrine destroyed; many hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered, or sold into slavery, or exiled from their land.

The rabbinic sages of those times developed ways to remember the tragedies—but not to be overwhelmed and defeated by them. One concept was zekher lehuban, remembering the destruction. Customs arose to commemorate the sadness and sense of loss that pervaded our people's consciousness. One custom was not to paint one's home in full but to leave a part of the ceiling unpainted...zekher lehuban. Fast days were established to commemorate the destructions; dirges were composed to be chanted on those sad days. On Tisha B'Av we sit on the floor as mourners...zekher lehuban. Even at a wedding—a happy occasion—the bridegroom steps on a glass to remind us that all is not well in the world; the shattering experiences of antiquity and the destructions of our Temples continue to be remembered.

But our sages developed another concept as well: zekher lemikdash, remembering the Temple. Practices were created whereby we literally re-create the rites and customs that took place in the Temple. At the Passover Seder, we eat the "Hillel's sandwich"—zekher lemikdash, to re-enact what our ancestors did in the Temple in Jerusalem in ancient times. During Succoth, we take the lulav and etrog for seven days and we make hakafot in the synagogue—zekher lemikdash, to re-enact the practices of the ancient Temples. We treat our dinner tables as altars, akin to the altars in the Temples: we wash our hands ritually before eating; we put salt on our bread before tasting it—zekher lemikdash. Our synagogues feature the Ner Tamid, eternal light; they often have a menorah—because these things were present in the ancient Temples.

Whereas zekher lehuban evokes sadness and tears, zekher lemikdash evokes optimism. We carry the Temple ritual forward...even in the absence of the Temples. We continue to live, to thrive, to move forward.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz wisely observed: "Our people has come to deal with its need to mourn in an unusual, almost paradoxical way. We not only cry in remembrance of the Temple, we dance too."

Among our Sephardic customs is the meldado, a study session held on the anniversary of the death of a loved one. I well remember the meldados observed in my childhood home and in the homes of relatives. Family and friends would gather in the hosts' homes. Prayer services were held. Mishnayot were read. The rabbi would share words of Torah. The event evoked a spirit of family and communal solidarity, solemnity, reminiscing. But meldados were not sad occasions! After the prayers and study, there was an abundance of food prepared by the hostess. People ate, and chatted, and laughed. People would remember stories about the deceased person whose meldado was being observed, drawing on the good and happy memories. The memorialized person would have wanted family and friends to celebrate, to remember him or her with happiness and laughter.

Today, we are in a sense observing the meldado of our fellow Jews in Rhodes and Cos who were humiliated, tortured and murdered...solely because they were Jews. When the key to the past opens to the Holocaust, we cannot help but shudder. We are shocked by the mass inhumanity of the perpetrators. We are distressed by the suffering of so many innocents.

But our key must open doors beyond grief and despair. Those Jews who died in the Holocaust would not want us to mourn forever. They would want us to respect their memories by carrying on with life, by ensuring that Jewish life flourishes, by maintaining classic Jewish optimism and hope.

We come together as a community, very much as the victims of the Holocaust would have appreciated. We sense strong bonds of solidarity as we pray in this synagogue—Congregation Ezra Bessaroth—that was established over a century ago by Jews who had come to Seattle from Rhodes. We sing the same prayers, chant the same melodies that the Holocaust victims prayed and sang. We announce to them, and to the world: we are alive, we are carrying forth our sacred traditions, we have not forgotten and will never forget. Our key is firmly in hand.

Years ago, my wife and I took our children to Rhodes. On the Friday night that we were there, our son Hayyim and I led services in the Kahal Shalom, in the same style as services here at Ezra Bessaroth. The synagogue in Rhodes was empty except for a minyan of tourists. Yet, I felt that our voices went very high, that the ghosts of all the earlier generations of Rhodesites somehow heard our prayers and rejoiced that the tradition has continued through the next generations.

I had that same feeling here in synagogue this morning. We are not only praying for ourselves; we are in some mysterious way praying with our ancestors, with all the earlier generations of our people. Our generation is linked with theirs; our lives

are tied to theirs. And our generation is linked to the younger generations and the generations yet to come. The eternal chain of the Jewish people is indestructible.

The keys of life open up many doors of sadness and consolation, many doors of commitment, joy and rebuilding. Each of us, knowingly or unknowingly, carries a key to the Jewish future of our families and our communities. As we remember the Jewish martyrs of Rhodes and Cos, we also must remember the sacred privilege that is ours: to carry forth with a vibrant, happy and strong Jewish life.

Am Yisrael Hai. Od Avinu Hai. The people of Israel lives; our Eternal Father lives.

* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals . Rabbi Angel delivered this sermon on July 26, 2014 at Congregation Ezra Bessaroth in Seattle, Washington. On that Shabbat, the community marked the 70th anniversary of the deportation of Jews from the islands of Rhodes and Cos in July 1944, nearly all of whom were murdered in Auschwitz. We post this article in observance of Holocaust Memorial Day, April 21, 2020. Reprinted now in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, 2021.

https://www.google.com/search?q=international+holocaust+remembrance+day+2021+israel&rlz=1C1ZCEB_enUS804US804&oq=international+holocaust&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0i3j0i131i433j0i3l2j0i3i395l3.17753j1j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

Parshas Beshalach – Sacrifices

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

One of the most famous elements of the *man* that our ancestors ate in the desert, was the manner of its collection. Every morning the *man* would fall from the sky with the morning dew. The Jews would go out to collect a daily portion for themselves and their families. Some would collect a little more, and some would collect a little less. Yet, when they would arrive home and measure their *man*, every individual received the exact same ration, irrelevant of how much or how little they had collected. This is often understood to have been intended as a clear and powerful illustration of how to live with proper faith in G-d. We must understand and recognize that whatever G-d has decreed for us is what we will have. No matter how much extra effort we put in, we will only receive that which G-d has allotted us. Once we have put in the appropriate effort, we cannot achieve more, and should better spend our time engaging in our relationship with G-d, developing and perfecting ourselves and helping others.

The Ralba"g notes that there is an additional lesson to be learned from our daily *man* gathering. It was not only those who put in extra effort who received their proper portion miraculously, not receiving extras. There were also those who did not put in enough effort and collected less than their daily portion. Yet, they too miraculously received their proper portion, and did not find themselves lacking. This was not a question of proper faith in G-d. As is well-known, faith in G-d does not absolve one of putting in the necessary effort. If we do not put in the proper effort, then we will not receive that which G-d has allotted us. Why then did those who collected less than needed, still find they had enough when they got home?

The Ralba"g explains that the manner of collecting the *man* was not intended solely as a lesson in faith in G-d. Rather, the lesson was a lesson in overall service of G-d and how we should approach our physical endeavors. While it is true that we should not overexert ourselves for our physical needs, G-d also does not want us to skimp on our physical needs. The Ralba"g says that Hashem wanted to show us that we should not follow the actions of many other nations whose pious ones seek to afflict themselves by removing themselves from the physical world. Rather, G-d has given us the physical world to utilize and enjoy for our physical and emotional needs so that we can thrive in life. Service of G-d is not intended to be a life of sacrifice and abstention. On the contrary, service of G-d is intended to enhance and uplift our lives.

For this reason, those who sought to abstain and take less than their proper portion would miraculously measure a proper portion when they returned to their tent. G-d was telling us then and for all time, that he does not want us to strive for spirituality by foregoing our physical needs. While we certainly should not overindulge, G-d does not want us to suffer.

Rash"i echoes this idea earlier in the parsha. After leaving the *Yam Suf*, the Jews travelled to Marah, where we were given a few mitzvos and a warning. If we follow G-d's will, we would be spared from all of the afflictions that G-d had placed upon the Egyptians, "because I am G-d, your Healer." (Shemos 15:26) Rash"i explains that the simple meaning of the final phrase is explaining that this warning is not intended as a threat of punishment. Rather, the message is that the entire reason G-d is giving us Torah and mitzvos is to guide us to protect ourselves from any and all of the afflictions of the Egyptians, because He is our Healer.

A Torah-true spiritual life, is not a life of affliction and abstention from physicality. A Torah-true spiritual life is one where a person recognizes the endless gifts G-d has given us in this physical world, and uses them in a balanced and healthy way. This enables one to reach even higher levels of spirituality, giving one the physical and emotional energy to thrive, and elevating even the physical elements of the world.

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Dvar Torah for Beshalach: The Song Our Survivors Sing

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Today [Wednesday, January 27, 2021] is International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. As the camp was liberated, the prisoners shouted "We are free. We are free."

I hesitate to comment on the experiences of the survivors for I cannot even begin to imagine what it must have been like. Even the survivors themselves would not talk about it for quite some time. Elie Wiesel took upon himself a ten year vow of silence after liberation. For to talk about it too much would be to cheapen it. We should keep this sensibility especially in a time when people throw out the word Nazi so carelessly or when figure skaters do a routine dressed as concentration camp inmates.

But we shall try even though any analogy will be imperfect. With our portion this week, we may have another narrative that can help us relate to the meaning of this day.

The plain text of the Splitting of the Sea describes a scene of genocidal intent. The Egyptians had the Jews cornered between the raging waves of the sea and their mighty chariots. The Jews cried out to God and Moses in a terrible panic, and God opened up a path through the water.

What a scene it must have been. Trepidation must have filled every step as the Jews traveled through this miraculous tunnel. With every step forward, they had to have faith in God that these sea walls would not collapse and that the Egyptians would not catch up to them. They probably heard the shouts of "Kill the Jews!" ringing behind them. But yet, they continued.

When they finally emerged on the other side, they still felt fear that they would be found by their former masters. But when they saw their bodies washed ashore, they burst forth into the Song of the Sea. "We are free," they shouted.

And from that song came a rebirth. The Jews became a nation that day and proved themselves worthy of the Torah, the special gift and purpose that binds us together even today. From the waters we transformed into Am Yisrael.

The survivors also sang that song of freedom. From the ashes they rose to rebuild their lives and serve as lights to all of their succeeding generations. From the ashes they rose to build Jewish life in America and reestablish the Jewish homeland in Israel. Their eyes may show signs of age but their lights will never be put out.

May we all merit to keep their flame burning.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rabbi, Kneseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. We joined KI when our son Evan lived in Birmingham while attending the University of Alabama Medical School. **Above is Rabbi Rube's Dvar Torah for Holocaust Remembrance Day, January 27, 2021.**

Rav Kook Torah Beshalach: This is My God

The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 23:15) makes a startling claim about the Israelites who witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea:

"Come and see how great were those who crossed the Sea. Moses pleaded and beseeched before God that he should merit seeing God's Divine Image, 'Please, show me Your glory!' (Ex. 33:19). Yet God told him, 'You may not see My face....' But every Israelite who descended into the Sea pointed with his finger and said, 'This is my God and I will glorify Him' (Ex. 15:2).

Could it be that those who crossed the Red Sea saw more than Moses, about whom the Torah testifies, "No other prophet like Moses has arisen in Israel" (Deut. 34:10)? Furthermore, Moses was also there when they crossed the sea — he certainly saw what everyone else experienced!

Total Suspension of Nature

Clearly, the Midrash cannot be referring to the level of prophecy, for it is a fundamental article of faith that Moses' prophecy was unparalleled. Rather, the Midrash must be referring to some aspect of prophetic vision that was only experienced by those who participated in this miraculous crossing.

What was so special about the splitting of the Red Sea? God performed other miracles for Israel, but those miracles did not entail the complete abrogation of the laws of nature. Nature as a whole continued on its usual path; God only temporarily changed one aspect for the benefit of His people.

But with the miraculous splitting of the Sea, God suspended the entire system of natural law. The Sages wrote that this miracle did not occur solely in the Red Sea. On that night, bodies of water all over the world were split. According to the Maharal, Rabbi Yehudah Loew of Prague, water symbolizes the physical world, so that this miracle affected the entire physical realm of creation (Gevurot Hashem, chap. 42). The entire rule of nature was breached.

Immediate Awareness of God's Rule

Our world is governed by the framework of cause and effect. When the underlying rule of nature was suspended during the splitting of the Red Sea, the entire system of causality was arrested. During that time, the universe lost its cloak of natural law, and revealed itself as a pure expression of divine will.

What is the essence of prophecy? This unique gift is the ability to look at God's works and recognize in them His greatness.

As long as nature's causal structure is functioning, a prophet may attain sublime and even esoteric knowledge, but he will never achieve immediate awareness of God's directing hand. Through his physical senses and powers of reasoning, the prophet will initially recognize the natural system of cause and effect. Only afterwards does the prophet become aware that the entire universe is created and directed by an ultimate Cause.

At Mount Sinai, God told Moses, "You will only see My back." What is God's 'back'? Maimonides explained that this is a metaphor for the system of natural law by which God governs the universe. God granted Moses an awareness of the inner connectivity within creation. This understanding of God's true nature exceeded that of any other prophet.

When God split the Sea, all laws of nature were temporarily suspended. God took "direct control" of the universe. Those witnessing this miracle were instantly aware of God's intervention and providence, each according to his spiritual level. Certainly none reached the prophetic level of Moses. But whatever enlightenment they attained, it was perceived

immediately. They did not need to first examine the natural system of causality, and from this, recognize the prime Cause of creation.

Therefore, those experiencing the miracle of the Red Sea called out spontaneously, "THIS is my God." Their comprehension was not obscured by the logical system of cause and effect; they witnessed God's revealed rule directly, without the cloak of causality.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 353-357.)

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/BSHALA63.htm>

The Divided Sea: Natural or Supernatural? (Beshalach 5779)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

The splitting of the Reed Sea is engraved in Jewish memory. We recite it daily during the morning service, at the transition from the Verses of Praise to the beginning of communal prayer. We speak of it again after the Shema, just before the Amidah. It was the supreme miracle of the exodus. But in what sense?

If we listen carefully to the narratives, we can distinguish two perspectives. This is the first:

The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left...The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (Exodus 14:22, 28-29)

The same note is struck in the Song at the Sea:

By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up.

The surging waters stood firm like a wall;

The deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. (Ex. 15:8)

The emphasis here is on the supernatural dimension of what happened. Water, which normally flows, stood upright. The sea parted to expose dry land. The laws of nature were suspended. Something happened for which there can be no scientific explanation.

However, if we listen carefully, we can also hear a different note:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. (Ex. 14:21)

Here there is not a sudden change in the behaviour of water, with no apparent cause. God brings a wind that, in the course of several hours, drives the waters back. Or consider this passage:

During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. The Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." (Ex. 14:24-25).

The emphasis here is less on miracle than on irony. The great military assets of the Egyptians—making them almost invulnerable in their day—were their horses and chariots. These were Egypt's specialty. They still were, in the time of Solomon, five centuries later:

Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem...They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. (I Kings 10:26-29)

Viewed from this perspective, the events that took place could be described as follows: The Israelites had arrived at the Reed Sea at a point at which it was shallow. Possibly there was a ridge in the sea bed, normally covered by water, but occasionally—when, for example, a fierce east wind blows—exposed. This is how the Cambridge University physicist Colin Humphreys puts it in his *The Miracles of Exodus*:

Wind tides are well known to oceanographers. For example, a strong wind blowing along Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes, has produced water elevation differences of as much as sixteen feet between Toledo, Ohio, on the west, and Buffalo, New York, on the east...There are reports that Napoleon was almost killed by a “sudden high tide” while he was crossing shallow water near the head of the Gulf of Suez.[1]

In the case of the wind that exposed the ridge in the bed of the sea, the consequences were dramatic. Suddenly the Israelites, traveling on foot, had an immense advantage over the Egyptian chariots that were pursuing them. Their wheels became stuck in the mud. The charioteers made ferocious efforts to free them, only to find that they quickly became mired again. The Egyptian army could neither advance nor retreat. So intent were they on the trapped wheels, and so reluctant were they to abandon their prized war machines, the chariots, that they failed to notice that the wind had dropped and the water was returning. By the time they realised what was happening, they were trapped. The ridge was now covered with sea water in either direction, and the island of dry land in the middle was shrinking by the minute. The mightiest army of the ancient world was defeated, and its warriors drowned, not by a superior army, not by human opposition at all, but by their own folly in being so focused on capturing the Israelites that they ignored the fact that they were driving into mud where their chariots could not go.

We have here two ways of seeing the same events: one natural, the other supernatural. The supernatural explanation—that the waters stood upright—is immensely powerful, and so it entered Jewish memory. But the natural explanation is no less compelling. The Egyptian strength proved to be their weakness. The weakness of the Israelites became their strength. On this reading, what was significant was less the supernatural, than the moral dimension of what happened. God visits the sins on the sinners. He mocks those who mock Him. He showed the Egyptian army, which revelled in its might, that the weak were stronger than they—just as He later did with the pagan prophet Bilaam, who prided himself in his prophetic powers and was then shown that his donkey (who could see the angel Bilaam could not see) was a better prophet than he was.

To put it another way: a miracle is not necessarily something that suspends natural law. It is, rather, an event for which there may be a natural explanation, but which—happening when, where and how it did—evokes wonder, such that even the most hardened sceptic senses that God has intervened in history. The weak are saved; those in danger, delivered. More significant still is the moral message such an event conveys: that hubris is punished by nemesis; that the proud are humbled and the humble given pride; that there is justice in history, often hidden but sometimes gloriously revealed.

This idea can be taken further. Emil Fackenheim has spoken of “epoch-making events” that transform the course of history.[2] More obscurely, but along similar lines, the French philosopher Alain Badiou has proposed the concept of an “event” as a “rupture in ontology” through which individuals are brought face to face with a truth that changes them and their world.[3] It is as if all normal perception fades away and we know that we are in the presence of something momentous, to which we sense we must remain faithful for the rest of our lives. “The appropriation of Presence is mediated by an event.”[4] It is through transformative events that we feel ourselves addressed, summoned, by something beyond history, breaking through into history. In this sense, the division of the Reed Sea was something other and deeper than a suspension of the laws of nature. It was the transformative moment at which the people “believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant” (Ex. 14:31) and called themselves “the people You acquired” (Ex. 15:16).

Not all Jewish thinkers focused on the supernatural dimension of God’s involvement in human history. Maimonides insisted that “Israel did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the signs he performed.”[5] What made Moses the greatest of the prophets, for Maimonides, is not that he performed supernatural deeds but that, at Mount Sinai, he brought the people the word of God.

In general, the sages tended to downplay the dimension of the miraculous, even in the case of the greatest miracle of all, the division of the sea. That is the meaning of the following Midrash, commenting on the verse, “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its full flow [le-eitano]” (Ex. 14:27):

Rabbi Jonathan said: The Holy One, blessed be He, made a condition with the sea [at the beginning of creation], that it should split asunder for the Israelites. That is the meaning of “the sea went back to its full flow” – [read not le-eitano but] letenao, “the condition” that God had earlier stipulated.[6]

The implication is that the division of the sea was, as it were, programmed into creation from the outset.[7] It was less a suspension of nature than an event written into nature from the beginning, to be triggered at the appropriate moment in the unfolding of history.

We even find an extraordinary debate among the sages as to whether miracles are a sign of merit or the opposite. The Talmud[8] tells the story of a man whose wife died, leaving a nursing child. The father was too poor to be able to afford a wet-nurse, so a miracle occurred and he himself gave milk until the child was weaned. On this, the Talmud records the following difference of opinion:

Rav Joseph said: Come and see how great was this man that such a miracle was wrought for him. Abaye said to him: On the contrary, how inferior was this man, that the natural order was changed for him.

According to Abaye, greater are those to whom good things happen without the need for miracles. The genius of the biblical narrative of the crossing of the Reed Sea is that it does not resolve the issue one way or another. It gives us both perspectives. To some the miracle was the suspension of the laws of nature. To others, the fact that there was a naturalistic explanation did not make the event any less miraculous. That the Israelites should arrive at the sea precisely where the waters were unexpectedly shallow, that a strong east wind should blow when and how it did, and that the Egyptians’ greatest military asset should have proved their undoing—all these things were wonders, and we have never forgotten them.

Shabbat shalom.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus*, Continuum, 2003, 247-48. For a similar analysis see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p199-215.

[2] Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, New York, Schocken, 1982, p14-20.

[3] Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, 2006.

[4] Ibid. p255.

[5] Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Yesodei ha-Torah 8:1.

[6] *Genesis Rabbah* 5:5.

[7] In general, the sages said that all future miracles were created at twilight at the end of the six days of creation (*Mishnah*, *Avot* 5:6).

[8] *Shabbat* 53b.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. Emphasis added. See <https://rabbisacks.org/divided-sea-natural-or-supernatural-5779/>

Who “Invented” the Holiday on 15 Shevat?

By Yehuda Shurpin *

Unlike what some may believe, the 15th of Shevat (or Tu BiShvat, as it's commonly called) isn't some Jewish version of Arbor Day. In fact, the 15th of Shevat doesn't even fall out during the planting season in Israel. And as we'll see below, “the new year for planting” as (opposed to the “new year for fruits of the tree”) is actually on the first of Tishrei.

The first mention of the significance of the 15th of Shevat can be found in the Mishnah,¹ which states that there are four days that are considered the “new year,” each for a different purpose:

- The first of Nisan is the new year for kings² and festivals.³
- The first of Elul is the new year for the tithe of cattle.⁴
- The first of Tishrei is the new year for counting years, for calculating Sabbatical years and Jubilee years,⁵ for planting⁶ and for tithing vegetables.⁷
- The first of Shevat is the new year for trees⁸ according to the school of Shammai; the school of Hillel, however, places this on the 15th of Shevat.

The halachah follows the school of Hillel, so the 15th of Shevat serves to separate one year from the next with regard to a number of agriculture-related laws, such as maaserot (tithes of fruits) and orlah (fruit produced by a tree during the first three years after planting, which are forbidden for consumption).

Yet, neither the Mishnah nor the Talmud tell us about any special celebrations or commemorations associated with the day.

Earliest Celebration

One of the earliest sources for the 15th of Shevat being a celebratory day is a pair of ancient liturgical poems that were found in the Cairo genizah, a trove of old Torah texts, documents and manuscripts discovered in the 19th century. The poems, composed by Rabbi Yehuda Ben Hillel Halevi around the 10th century, were meant to be added to the prayer service of the day.⁹

In a response to a community that wished to establish a fast day on the 15th Shevat, Rabbeinu Gershom (c. 960–1040) explained that just as one does not fast on the other days that are called “the beginning of the year” in the Mishnah, so too, one does not fast on the 15th of Shevat.¹⁰ Additionally, we find in early sources that one doesn't recite penitential prayers on the 15th of Shevat, just as one doesn't recite them on other holidays.¹¹

Eating Fruits

In addition to not fasting and not reciting any penitential prayers, there is also a custom to eat fruits on this day. The first to mention this custom (although it seems to have already existed in his day) was Rabbi Yissachar ben Mordecai ibn Susan (fl. 1539–1572) in his work Tikun Yissachar. This custom was popularized by the Kabbalists and subsequently cited in many halachic works.¹²

The somewhat controversial Kabbalistic work of unknown authorship Pri Eitz Hadar (first published in Venice in 1728) was also very influential in spreading the custom to eat fruits on this day. The work includes various texts that one would recite when eating the different fruits. However, the common custom is not to recite these texts when eating fruits on the 15th of Shevat.¹³

Luxury vs. Necessity

Expounding on the deeper meanings behind this custom, the Lubavitcher Rebbe explains that, unlike wheat, which is considered a staple, fruits are often eaten purely for pleasure.

The Torah is at times compared to bread and water—necessities—and at other times to wine, olive oil and date honey—foods for pleasure.

This refers to two dimensions of the Torah: the revealed part, which is necessary at all times and for all Jews; and the deeper, mystical part of Torah, which, especially in earlier generations, wasn't studied by all.

As the exile and the spiritual state of the world grow ever darker, just sticking to the bare bones necessities is no longer enough. It is imperative that one study the deeper, mystical aspects of the Torah, the "fruit" that infuses pleasure, strength and spiritual energy into our day and service of our Creator.

Thus, it is no wonder that the custom of eating fruits on the 15th of Shevat gained prominence at the same time as the mystical teachings of Kabbalah began to spread. This inner dimension of Torah infuses us with newfound vitality to finally finish off our task to light up the darkness of the world and usher in the ultimate Redemption.¹⁴ May it be speedily in our days!

FOOTNOTES:

1. Rosh Hashanah 1:1.
2. I.e., it is from this date that the years of a king's rule are counted.
3. I.e., it determines which is considered the first festival of the year and which is the last.
4. Rabbi Eleazar and Rabbi Shimon, however, place this on the first of Tishrei.
5. I.e., from the first of Tishrei there is a biblical prohibition to work the land during these years.
6. I.e., for determining the years of orlah, the three-year period from when a tree has been planted, during which time its fruit is forbidden.
7. I.e., vegetables picked prior to that date cannot be tithed together with vegetables picked after that date.
8. The fruit of a tree that was formed prior to that date belong to the previous tithe year and cannot be tithed together with fruit that was formed after that date
9. Eretz Yisrael, vol. 4, p. 138.
10. See Responsa of Rabbi Meir of Rottenbug (Prague ed.) 5.
11. See, for example, Maharil, Chilukei Haftorot; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 131:6.
12. See Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim 131:16; Hashlamah to Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim 136:8; Mishnah Berurah 131:31.
13. See Shulchan Menachem, vol. 3, pp. 295-6.
14. See Sichot 15 Shevat 5742; Likkutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 529-532; see also A Tree of the Field.

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https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5009491/jewish/Who-Invented-the-Holiday-on-15-Shevat.htm

What Happens When the Miracles Stop? An Essay On Parshat Beshalach

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) *

In Parshat Beshalach and Parshat Yitro, two events occur that inform the Jewish experience throughout the ages: the splitting of the Red Sea and the giving of the Torah.

The splitting of the Red Sea was the ultimate overt miracle, but it is perceived not only as a miracle but also, more significantly, as a revelation of the future.

G d's revelation at the sea is portrayed as the pinnacle of the Exodus and as the culmination of the process that began with the ten plagues and with the miracle of "G d will make a distinction between Israel's cattle and Egypt's cattle"¹ and continued until the parting of the sea. The People of Israel walk into the sea, a great salvation ensues, and the Egyptians drown. Every element of the narrative emphasizes that the event is "Your hand, O G d," "Your right hand, O G d."²

The splitting of the Red Sea is a momentous event with a profound spiritual dimension, and when viewed in light of the Song of the Sea and all the wonders, miracles, and marvels that it describes, we see that all these events created an extraordinary sense of momentous times. As the Talmud says, "Even the babes in their mothers' wombs chanted a song by the Red Sea."³

When the sea is split, the process is essentially different from the miracles that have occurred thus far – whether the plague of blood, the plague of frogs, or the plague of the firstborn. When the plagues come, they are clearly miraculous occurrences, but they are local miracles, events that transpire in the external world. By contrast, when the sea becomes a place in which people are able to walk, the feeling is completely different. Suddenly, nature changes, the whole system is transformed, and everything that we know about reality is no longer valid. The sea is no longer a sea; the water is no longer water: The rules of physics do not apply.

When our sages say that "maidservants beheld at the sea what even Isaiah and Ezekiel never saw,"⁴ Suddenly, nature changes, the whole system is transformed, and everything that we know about reality is no longer valid. The sea is no longer a sea; the water is no longer water: The rules of physics do not apply. This is because the maidservants see firsthand how all of physical nature is not actually fixed but can suddenly change from one extreme to the other. The whole conception that the world is a place with strict laws and a set order collapses. The splitting of the sea demonstrated to the maidservants and to the rest of the People of Israel that everything we see in the world is a mere theatrical performance, where the house on stage is not truly a house and the tree is not truly a tree – everything is made of cardboard. The entire world dissolved and melted before the eyes of Israel into new forms and patterns: Before, the sea was water; now it has become dry land. The people understood that the world is no longer governed by rigid laws; everything has become possible.

The aftermath

Great and wondrous things abound in Parshat Beshalach. However, let us try to view these events from below; not from the perspective of Moses and Aaron, not from G d's perspective, but from the perspective of an ordinary Jew. One can argue that such a perspective misses the main point; nevertheless, we, the ordinary Jews, are the ones who read the Torah, so this is a natural perspective for us to take.

A Jew goes forth from Egypt. He is not a great man, but merely one of the thousands of nameless Jews who picked himself up and went along with everyone else. What is he experiencing following the upheaval of the splitting of the sea? How does he proceed from there?

After the sea returns to its normal condition, suddenly everything is over, and the people begin their journey through the wilderness. A short time ago, this nameless Jew was sure that he was about to die. Immediately afterward, he experienced an incredible supernatural event. And after all that, he must crash back down into the mundane reality of the world. What is going on in his mind? How can he deal with these conflicting states of consciousness?

Immediately after Israel's emergence from the sea and the ecstasy of the Song of the Sea, the Torah says that "Moses made Israel travel from the Red Sea."⁵ After this experience, Moses had to force his people to travel onward, because they themselves were dazed and disoriented. They simply stood there in a state of confusion. It was necessary to organize them and start going. This individual who just emerged from the Red Sea does not know whether he is in a dream or in the real world; the whole world seems different to him.

When one crashes down from the heightened reality of the miracle, there is deep disappointment from the very discovery that the world still exists.

It appears that this transition is the major test of Parshat Beshalach, recurring several times: at Marah regarding the manna and at Refidim with the war against Amalek. In all these accounts, we see the great difficulty of moving from a

world where everything is perfect, where the rules of physics can be altered on a benevolent divine whim, to a world that unforgivingly follows the way of the world.

The miraculous splitting of the Red Sea can provide a person with spiritual sustenance for a long time, but there comes a stage where this simply does not work anymore. And when one crashes down from the heightened reality of the miracle, there is deep disappointment from the very discovery that the world still exists. This is not always a sudden fall from a high peak to a deep pit, and perhaps no devastating crash occurs at all, but the question remains: How can a person shift from the miraculous world of the Red Sea to the world of Marah, where the water is so bitter that it is undrinkable.

The story of the manna is likewise connected to the difficulty of dealing with dramatic changes in reality. The manna is a confusing combination of two aspects. On the one hand, its whole essence is miraculous: Bread that falls from the sky in large quantities is something that is entirely incompatible with the order of nature. On the other hand, it comes regularly, day after day, week after week, month after month. Eventually, the People of Israel likely ceased to consider the manna a miracle at all – it is difficult to imagine that they continued to be amazed by it throughout their travels in the desert. Under such circumstances, even if a person who experiences a miracle remains aware of its miraculous nature, he no longer feels its miraculousness. The miracle ceases to be a wonder and becomes routine. Just as a child knows that he can go each morning to the grocery store and buy a loaf of bread, a child born into a reality of manna knows that each morning one goes and collects manna – there is no wonder in it. Just as one can get used to anything, one can also get used to miracle bread from heaven, and take it for granted just like bread from the earth.

The duality of the manna is a perfect metaphor for the life of the People of Israel in the wilderness. Right after Marah, the People of Israel arrive in Elim, “where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palms; and they encamped there by the water.”⁶ It is unclear whether the seventy date palms are seventy palm trees or seventy kinds of dates, but either way, these are numbers that possess great significance. The Midrash explains, “Twelve springs corresponding to the twelve tribes of Jacob, and seventy palm trees corresponding to the seventy elders.”⁷ Right after the disappointment of Marah, the People of Israel come to a new place, and the twelve springs of water and seventy date palms give them a sense of the familiar: They again witness G d’s hand in nature, that the world is once again customized to their needs. They then leave this place and go back to traveling in the wilderness, returning to the throes of hunger and thirst, and the pattern repeats itself.

Every person must face this combination of miracle and routine in his life. Even a simple person who has no time for or interest in philosophy must deal with the same questions: What is nature? What is the supernatural? How, in the midst of this uncertainty regarding the nature of the world, do I direct the course of my life as a human being?

A human being remains a human being

We know about the tests that Abraham faced. We know about the tests faced by the other patriarchs and prophets as well. But what can we learn from this test?

The answer is that the nature of our experiences in this world does not matter; adversity will always exist. Jews frequently complain, claiming, “If we were to experience miracles like our ancestors experienced, we would return completely to G d.” But it turns out that this complaint is unfounded. Even that very Jew who lived through Parshat Beshalach with its tremendous revelations is still capable of complaining, of yelling, and of dancing around the Golden Calf. The complaints continue after the sin of the Golden Calf as well. All those miracles did not stop Korah, nor did they stop Zimri, even though they grew up eating bread from heaven.

Our sages say, “Whoever fulfills the Torah in the midst of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in the midst of riches; whoever neglects the Torah in the midst of riches will ultimately neglect it in the midst of poverty.”⁸ One who neglects the Torah will do so whether it is a time of trouble and sorrow or a time of overt miracles, and one who fulfills the Torah will continue to fulfill it even at a time of great difficulty and upheaval. By his very nature, man tends to fall. Because of this, we must constantly be engaged in spiritual work, with or without miracles; the test of faith never ends.

In a sense, when our sages say that “the Torah was given only to those who ate the manna,”⁹ they are referring to this point. Trust and stability can be expected only from those who are always ready to proceed, with or without miracles. The Torah is given to those who can carry on even when oppressed and downtrodden, not to those who need constant miracles throughout their forty years of travel in the wilderness to sustain them spiritually. The test determining who merited entering the Land of Israel ultimately hinged on this same distinction as well.

People like the patriarchs and like many of our other great and holy ancestors were able to bear this burden, to live through all kinds of troubles and distressful situations and still remain faithful to G d. But for someone who is not built for this, no number of wondrous miracles will change his basic nature. It is possible to survive for a while, but eventually one's basic nature comes to the fore.

Ezekiel relates¹⁰ that in the future G d will operate on us, removing our heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh. Until then, however, we will continue to be tested: "You tested him at Massah and contended with him at the waters of Merivah."¹¹

A stiff-necked people

Though this test of faith can be daunting, it can equally be seen in a positive light, as it emphasizes man's inherent stubbornness. Free will, the divine spark embedded in man, figures prominently here, in the sense that ultimately man cannot be bribed. G d, as it were, attempts to sway the people's loyalty to Him by providing for their every physical need. He feeds them manna – and later on, quail – morning and evening, every day. But the people remain stubborn and unchanged.

In this sense, when Moses calls Israel "a stiff-necked people,"¹² Man's glory is his free will, for his ability to decide is a kind of act of G d. Man can use his free will to his own detriment, or as an expression of glory and dignity. It is actually a form of praise, in a way. He takes pride in this attribute: We cannot be so easily moved, like those for whom hearing one sermon by a Christian preacher leads them to proclaim, "I am born again!" When attempting to move a Jew, every inch is an exhausting process.

The conclusion to be drawn is that man cannot be induced by external means to make a change in his essential nature. Neither miracles nor bread from heaven can, in and of themselves, change human nature. Human nature can change, but we must make these changes from within.

The nameless Jew who experienced both the high point of the splitting of the Red Sea and the low point of Marah remains a bit stubborn and rebellious, but his mind is not completely closed to change. The most effective path to this change is not clearly defined perhaps miracles are necessary, and perhaps they are not. But when a person uses his free will, the hallmark of his humanity, to draw closer to G d, then change is always possible.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Ex. 9:4.
2. 15:6.
3. Berachot 50a.
4. Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Beshalach 3
5. Ex. 15:22.
6. Ex. 15:27.
7. Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Beshalach, Masechta DeVayassa 1.
8. Avot 4:9.
9. Mechilta DeRabbi Yishmael, Beshalach, Masechta DeVayassa 2.
10. Ezek. 11:19.
11. Deut. 33:8.

12. Ex. 32:9.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020), one of the leading rabbis of this century and author of many books, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud. © Chabad 2021.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5007226/jewish/What-Happens-When-the-Miracles-Stop.htm

Beshalach: Seeing is Not Believing!

An Insight from The Rebbe *

Israel saw G-d's mighty arm...they believed in G-d: (Exodus 14:31)

Generally, after seeing something, we no longer need to accept it on faith. If so, after seeing G-d's great hand, why did the Jewish people still need to believe in G-d and Moses?

The answer is that once they had seen and validated what they had previously only believed in, they were able to "upgrade" their belief and believe in that which remained beyond what they had seen; they believed in what they had not seen.

The potential to do this is infinite. We struggle to perceive what we currently believe; when we succeed in doing so, we realize that there is still more about G-d to believe in. In this way we perpetually broaden the horizons of our faith and our capacity to relate to G-d on ever-higher levels.

— From the Kehot Chumash

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

Beshalach: A Gift from Heaven

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky*

"G-d told Moses [to tell the people about the manna...] "The people will go out and gather each day's portion on that day." Exodus 16:4

Even if we believe that everything is in G-d's hand, we still tend to think that our own efforts also play a role in acquiring our physical sustenance. In contrast, manna was not acquired through human effort, and so left no room for such misconceptions.

Even so, G-d did not allow the people to collect more than one day's worth of manna at a time, for whenever the pantry would have been full, the people would not have felt dependent upon G-d.

On the other hand, G-d did require the people to go out and gather the manna, rather than deliver it to their doorsteps. In this way, He prepared them for their eventual entry into the real world. If acquiring the manna had not required any human effort, the people would have dismissed it as an isolated miracle, irrelevant to real life. By being required to collect the manna, they learned that human effort and G-d's blessings work together.

The manna taught us that our sustenance comes from heaven. Even when it appears to be the fruit of our own labor, it is in fact a gift from G-d.

— from Daily Wisfom *

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* <https://www.kehot.org/Newsletter?issue=441> Because Rabbi Friedman's post was late this week, I used an archived Daily Wisdom from 5777.

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via the Internet

May the learning in this issue be dedicated in loving memory
of my dear husband, Dr. Robert Segal, a"h,
on the occasion of his first Yahrzeit, 18 Shevat
Tzivi Naiman Segal

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Shabbat Parashat Beshalach

5781 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Looking Up

The Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The impossible had happened. The mightiest army in the ancient world – the Egyptians with their cutting-edge, horse-drawn chariots – had been defeated and drowned. The children of Israel were now free. But their relief was short-lived. Almost immediately they faced attack by the Amalekites, and they had to fight a battle, this time with no apparent miracles from God. They did so and won. This was a decisive turning point in history, not only for the Israelites but for Moses and his leadership of the people.

The contrast between before and after the Red Sea could not be more complete. Before, facing the approaching Egyptians, Moses said to the people: "Stand still and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today ... The Lord will fight for you; you need only be silent." (Ex. 14:13) In other words: do nothing. God will do it for you. And He did.

In the case of the Amalekites, however, Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and prepare for battle against Amalek." (Ex. 17:9) Joshua did so and the people waged war. This was the great transition: The Israelites moved from a situation in which the leader (with the help of God) did everything for the people, to one in which the leader empowered the people to act for themselves.

During the battle, the Torah focuses our attention on one detail. Moses climbs to the top of a hill overlooking the battlefield, with a staff in his hand:

As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites prevailed, but when he let his hands down, the Amalekites prevailed. When Moses' hands became weary, they took a stone and placed it under him, so that he would be able to sit on it. Aaron and Chur then held his hands, one on each side, and his hands remained steady until sunset. (Ex. 17:11-12)

What is going on here? The passage could be read in two ways: The staff in Moses' raised hand – the very staff which he used to perform mighty miracles in Egypt and at the sea – might be a sign that the Israelites' victory was a miraculous one. Alternatively, it might simply be a reminder to the Israelites that God was with them, giving them strength.

Very unusually – since the Mishnah in general is a book of law rather than biblical commentary – a Mishnah resolves the

question: Did the hands of Moses make or break [the course of the] war? Rather, the text implies that whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their Father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell. [1]

The Mishnah is clear. Neither the staff nor Moses' upraised hands were performing a miracle. They were simply reminding the Israelites to look up to heaven and remember that God was with them. Their faith gave them the confidence and courage to win.

A fundamental principle of leadership is being taught here. A leader must empower the team. They cannot always do the work for the group; they must do it for themselves. But the leader must, at the same time, give them the absolute confidence that they can do it and succeed. The leader is responsible for their mood and morale. During battle, a captain must betray no sign of weakness, doubt or fear. That is not always easy, as we see in this week's episode. Moses' upraised hands "became weary." All leaders have their moments of exhaustion and at such times the leader needs support – even Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur, who then helped him to maintain his position. In the end, though, his upraised hands were the sign the Israelites needed that God was giving them the strength to prevail, and they did.

In today's terminology, a leader needs emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, best known for his work in this field, argues that one of the most important tasks of a leader is to shape and lift the mood of the team:

Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions. [2]

Groups have an emotional temperature. As individuals they can be happy or sad, agitated or calm, fearful or confident. But when they come together as a group, a process of attuning – "emotional contagion" – takes place, and they begin to share the same feeling. Scientists have shown experimentally how, within fifteen minutes of starting a conversation, two people begin to converge in the physiological markers of mood, such as pulse rate. "When three strangers sit facing each other in silence for a minute or two, the one who is most emotionally expressive transmits their mood to the other two – without speaking a single word." [3] The physiological basis of this process, known as mirroring, has been much

studied in recent years, and observed even among primates. It is the basis of empathy, through which we enter into and share other people's feelings.

This is the foundation for one of the most important roles of a leader. It is he or she who, more than others, determines the mood of the group. Goleman reports on several scientific studies showing how leaders play a key role in determining the group's shared emotions:

Leaders typically talked more than anyone else, and what they said was listened to more carefully ... But the impact on emotions goes beyond what a leader says. In these studies, even when leaders were not talking, they were watched more carefully than anyone else in the group. When people raised a question for the group as a whole, they would keep their eyes on the leader to see his or her response. Indeed, group members generally see the leader's emotional reaction as the most valid response, and so model their own on it – particularly in an ambiguous situation, where various members react differently. In a sense, the leader sets the emotional standard. [4]

When it comes to leadership, even non-verbal cues are important. Leaders, at least in public, must project confidence even when they are inwardly full of doubts and hesitations. If they betray their private fears in word or gesture, they risk demoralising the group.

There is no more powerful example of this than the episode in which King David's son Absalom mounts a coup d'état against his father, proclaiming himself king in his place. David's troops put down the rebellion, in the course of which Absalom's hair gets tangled in a tree and he is stabbed to death by Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

When he hears this news, David is heartbroken. His son may have rebelled against him, but he is still his son and his death is devastating. David covers his face crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" News of David's grief quickly spreads throughout the army, and they too – by emotional contagion – are overcome by mourning. Joab regards this as disastrous. The army have taken great risks to fight for David against his son. They cannot now lament their victory without creating confusion and fatefully undermining their morale:

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Then Joab went into the house to the King and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now." (2 Samuel 19:6-8)

King David does as Joab insists. He accepts that there is a time and place for grief, but not now, not here, and above all, not in public. Now is the time to thank the army for their courage in defence of the King.

A leader must sometimes silence their private emotions to protect the morale of those they lead. In the case of the battle against Amalek, the first battle the Israelites had to fight for themselves, Moses had a vital role to perform. He had to give the people confidence by getting them to look up.

In 1875 an amateur archaeologist, Marcelino de Sautuola, began excavating the ground in a cave in Altamira near the north coast of Spain. At first, he found little to interest him, but his curiosity was rekindled by a visit to the Paris exhibition of 1878 where a collection of Ice Age instruments and art objects was on display. Determined to see whether he could find equally ancient relics, he returned to the cave in 1879.

One day he took his nine-year-old daughter Maria with him. While he was searching through the rubble, she wandered deeper into the cave and to her amazement saw something on the wall above her. "Look, Papa, oxen," she said. They were, in fact, bison. She had made one of the great discoveries of prehistoric art of all time. The magnificent Altamira cave paintings, between 25,000 and 35,000 years old, were so unprecedented a finding that it took twenty-two years for their authenticity to be accepted. For four years Sautoula had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

This is one of the enduring themes of Tanach: the importance of looking up. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things," says Isaiah (Is. 40:26). "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From there will my help come" said King David in Psalm 121. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will not be like the flat plain of the Nile Delta where water is plentiful and in regular supply. It will be a land of hills and valleys, entirely dependent on

unpredictable rain (Deut. 11:10-11). It will be a landscape that forces its inhabitants to look up. That is what Moses did for the people in their first battle. He taught them to look up.

No political, social or moral achievement is without formidable obstacles. There are vested interests to be confronted, attitudes to be changed, resistances to be overcome. The problems are immediate, the ultimate goal often frustratingly far away. Every collective undertaking is like leading a nation across the wilderness towards a destination that is always more distant than it seems when you look at the map.

Look down at the difficulties and you can give way to despair. The only way to sustain energies, individual or collective, is to turn our gaze up toward the far horizon of hope. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle". The fly is trapped in the bottle. It searches for a way out. Repeatedly it bangs its head against the glass until at last, exhausted, it dies. Yet the bottle has been open all the time. The one thing the fly forgets to do is look up. So, sometimes, do we.

It is the task of a leader to empower, but it is also their task to inspire. That is what Moses did when, at the top of a hill, in full sight of the people, he raised his hands and his staff to heaven. When they saw this, the people knew they could prevail. "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," said the Prophet. (Zechariah 4:6) Jewish history is a sustained set of variations on this theme.

A small people that, in the face of difficulty, continues to look up will win great victories and achieve great things.

[1] Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8.

[2] Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership*, (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press), 2002, 3.

[3] *Ibid.*, 7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 8.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Moses brought the bones of Joseph with him, since [Joseph] had adjured the children of Israel to take an oath; [Joseph] had said, 'God will surely remember you; bring up my bones with you from this [place].'" [Exodus 13:19]

At the climax of the ten plagues, with the Israelites escaping their Egyptian slave masters, the Torah suddenly makes reference to a heroic personality from the Book of Genesis, Joseph.

Why interrupt the drama of the Exodus with the detail of concern over Joseph's remains? From a certain perspective, Joseph's name even evokes a jarring note at this moment of Israel's freedom. After all, Joseph may well be seen as representing the opposite of Moses: Joseph begins within the family of Jacob-Israel, and moves outside of it as he rises to

Likutei Divrei Torah

great heights in Egypt, whereas Moses begins as a prince of Egypt and moves into the family of Israel when he smites the Egyptian taskmaster.

Joseph is the one who brings the children of Jacob into Egypt whereas Moses takes them out; Joseph gives all of his wisdom and energy to Egypt whereas Moses gives all of his wisdom and energy to the Israelites. It can even be argued that the very enslavement of the Israelites by the Egyptians was a punishment for Joseph's having enslaved the Egyptians to Pharaoh as part of his economic policy (Gen. 47:19-23). So why bring up the remains of Joseph at this point in the story?

The fact is that Joseph is a complex and amazing personality who very much stands at the crossroads of—and serves as a vital connection between—the Books of Genesis and Exodus. The jealous enmity of the brothers towards Joseph was in no small way rooted in the grandiose ambition expressed in his dreams: sheaves of grain evoke Egyptian agriculture rather than Israeli shepherding, and the bowing sun, moon and stars smack of Joseph's cosmic domination.

Despite the truths that we have just expressed, Joseph certainly symbolizes not only the Jew who rises to a most prominent position in Egypt—a Henry Kissinger to the tenth degree. He also introduced Pharaoh to the God of Israel and the universe, when he stood before the monarch about to interpret his dreams. And is it not Israel's mission to be a kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation with the mandate of perfecting the world in the kingship of the divine?

Moreover, with his very last breaths, in the closing lines of the book of Genesis (i50:24-25), does not Joseph profess absolute faith in God's eventual return of the Israelites to their homeland, at which time he makes his brothers swear that his remains will be taken "home" to Israel? Despite the prominence he attained in Egypt, he understands that Israel is the only eternal home for the descendants of Abraham!

The Midrash describes a fascinating scene: When the Israelites went forth from Egypt, two casks [aronot] accompanied them for forty years in the desert: the cask of [the divine Torah that they had received as family tradition until that time] and the casket of Joseph.

The nations of the world would ask, "What is the nature of these two casks? Is it necessary for the cask of the dead to go together with the cask of [Torah]?" The answer is that the one who is buried in this [cask] fulfilled whatever is written in that [cask]. [Tanhuma, Beshalach 2]

Generally this midrash is understood to be saying that Joseph fulfilled the moral commandments already expressed in the Torah from the story of Creation up until and

including the Exodus. After all, Joseph was moral and upright, even to the extent of rebuffing the enticements of the beautiful “Mrs. Potiphar,” thereby earning the appellation of “the righteous one.”

However, I would suggest an alternate interpretation: The Torah of the Book of Exodus encased in one cask fulfilled the dreams, expectations and prophecies of Joseph buried in the other cask.

Joseph foresaw an eventual exodus from Egypt and return to Israel. Joseph also foresaw a cosmic obeisance of the sun, moon and stars to the universal God of justice and peace whom he represented. This, too, was fulfilled when the world was paralyzed by the force of the plagues, when the nations trembled at the destruction of Egypt and the victory of the Israelites when the Sea of Reeds split apart:

“Nations heard and shuddered; terror gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Edom’s chiefs then panicked, Moab’s heroes were seized with trembling, Canaan’s residents melted away... God will reign supreme forever and ever.” [Ex. 15:14–15,18]

At the supreme triumphant moment of the Exodus, Moses stops to fulfill a vow and take the bones of Joseph out of Egypt and into Israel with the Israelites. Moses wanted the faith of Joseph, the universality of Joseph, the morality of Joseph, the grandeur of Joseph, to accompany the Israelites throughout their sojourn in the desert (suggesting subsequent Jewish exiles), and to enter the Land of Israel and influence the Jewish commonwealth.

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb**

An Ounce of Prevention

I couldn’t believe it. One of my trusted old reference books failed me for the first time. You see, I am an old-fashioned guy and I still use books for reference rather than resorting to the electronic high-tech alternatives. Therefore, on the shelf next to my writing desk, I have three reliable works: Webster’s College Dictionary, Roget’s Thesaurus, and Bartlett’s Book of Familiar Quotations. It was the latter that disappointed me as I prepared to write this week’s Person in the Parsha.

This week’s Torah portion is Beshalach (Exodus 13:17-17:16). It contains the following verse: “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in His eyes... I will put none of the diseases upon thee, which I have put upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee.” (Exodus 15:26)

That is how Rabbi J. H. Hertz, late chief Rabbi of the British Empire, phrases it in the translation which accompanies his excellent commentary to the Pentateuch. However, Rashi’s commentary suggests a different translation.

This is what Rashi says: “Simply put, I am the Lord your physician, who teaches you Torah and mitzvot so that you will be spared illness, much as a physician would instruct his patient not to eat certain things because they may lead to his getting sick...” Thus, For Rashi, the more accurate translation of the end of our first is not “I am the Lord that healeth thee...” But rather, “I am the Lord thy physician.”

At this point, you must be asking yourself, “What’s the big deal? Is there any difference between “I heal you” and “I am your doctor”?

Rashi would respond, “Yes, there is a great difference between the two. ‘I heal you’ means that you are sick and I make you better, whereas ‘I am your doctor’ means that I have the ability to prevent you from getting sick in the first place.”

For Rashi, this is fundamental. The Almighty has the power to prescribe for us a lifestyle that will protect us from illness; from spiritual illness certainly, but arguably from physical suffering as well.

Rashi, of course, never knew the great physician who was Maimonides. But Rashi’s conception of a good physician as one who does not merely heal the sick, but who counsels those who are well about how to avoid disease, is identical to Maimonides’ definition of a good doctor.

Maimonides was the court physician for the Sultan Saladin in medieval Egypt. The Sultan was never ill and once called Maimonides on the carpet, as it were, and demanded of him proof that he was a good doctor. “I am never ill,” said Saladin, “so how am I to know whether you in fact deserve the reputation that you have for being a great physician?”

Reportedly, Maimonides answered: “The greatest of all physicians is the Lord, of Whom it is said ‘I am the Lord thy physician’. As proof of this, it is written ‘I will not place upon you the illnesses which I have placed upon ancient Egypt’. Who is truly the good doctor? Not the person who heals the sick from their diseases, but rather the one who helps the person from becoming sick and sees to it that he maintains his health.”

As Maimonides writes in one of his medical works, Essay on Human Conduct, “Most of the illnesses which befall man are his own fault, resulting from his ignorance of how to preserve his health – like a blind man who stumbles and hurts himself and even injures others in the process due to not having of a sense of vision.”

As I was contemplating the merits of the translation suggested by both Rashi and Maimonides, I couldn’t help but think of the old adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” My memory told me that this

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was another wise saying of crafty old Benjamin Franklin. But these days, I have grown increasingly distrustful of my memory and so decided to confirm the origin of those words.

Here is where the reference books with which I opened this column came into play. I reached for my trusty and well-worn Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations. I searched under “prevention,” “cure,” and even “ounce,” but to no avail. Then I looked up “Franklin, Benjamin,” and found all sorts of words of wisdom but nothing about “an ounce of prevention.”

Google was my next resort. And there I indeed confirmed that it was Benjamin Franklin who echoed an important Jewish teaching when he said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

But there is more to be learned from the verse in this week’s Torah portion which we have been pondering: That the Almighty describes Himself as a healer or physician is more than just a lesson in the importance of living the kind of life that avoids the very real physical suffering that is often the consequence of an immoral life.

The metaphor of “physician” also makes a strong statement about the nature of the relationship between the Almighty and us, his “patients.”

If the verse would read, “If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord... for I am the Lord thy Master,” that would suggest that He demands our obedience in order to assert His own authority. But by urging us to “hearken to His voice” because He is “our physician,” we gain an entirely different view of why we should be obedient. As Malbim, a 19th century rabbinic commentator, puts it, “A physician, like a master, demands obedience, but only for the purpose of securing the patient’s welfare.” Thus, the divine commandments are to be seen as being for our own benefit, for our own ultimate well-being.

The image of a divine healer is one of the special gems to be found in Parshat Beshalach, which is a rich treasury of such images. How helpful it is for the Jew to experience a life of Torah and mitzvot as a gift given to him by a divine being who is concerned with his benefit, and how meaningful it is to know that the observant life is designed to avoid every manner of illness and to promote spiritual health and material wellness.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **No! The Jews Are Different!**

The Medrash comments on the pasuk, “And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him...” [Shemos 13:19] as follows: “About such, scripture writes: ‘The wise of heart will seize good deeds, but the foolish one’s lips will become weary’ [Mishlei 10:8], for all of Israel were occupied with (gathering) silver and

gold, and Moshe was occupied with the bones of Yosef.”

The Medrash thus praises Moshe Rabbeinu’s piety. When the masses were busying themselves with taking the spoils from Egypt, Moshe busied himself with taking Yosef haTzadik’s remains. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (in his sefer, *Emes L’Yaakov*) wonders why Moshe’s actions represent great piety (chassidus). Was it not a mitzvah to fulfill the oath made to Yosef [Shemos 13:19] and take his bones with them when they left Egypt? What else would we expect Moshe to do at this moment?

Rav Yaakov points out that Klal Yisrael had a hard time taking the silver and gold from the Egyptians. As difficult as it may seem for us to understand why they should have had a hard time taking the money from Egypt, the truth of the matter is that the pasuk says, “Please speak into the ears of the people and have them ask, every person from his fellow (Egyptian)...” [Shemos 11:2]. The Almighty, as it were, had to beg the people to take the money! Why “Please take the money”? Since when do people need to be told, “Please take the money”? What does Rav Yaakov mean here?

Rav Yaakov says the reason they were hesitant to take the gold and silver was because they thought perhaps they were taking it illegally. Here they would be taking money from the Egyptians and they would not be returning it or paying it back! In reality, that was not the case. The Almighty would not instruct them to do something that was illicit. In fact, they deserved the money. They had worked all these years as slave laborers without proper compensation. Furthermore, the great wealth that the Egyptians possessed all came about because of Yosef. The money was legitimately theirs.

But even though this might have conceivably been the “easier mitzvah” to perform, Moshe Rabbeinu chose a mitzvah for which he would not receive any financial benefit. Taking the bones of Yosef with him was a mitzvah that involved no personal gain.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains that it is virtually impossible to imagine what Moshe Rabbeinu was able to accomplish with this Mitzvah. This act of taking the bones of Yosef literally saved Klal Yisrael. We are all familiar with the teaching of Chazal that when the Jews arrived at the Yam Suf (Reed Sea), the Angels complained to G-d “These (the Egyptians) are idol worshippers and these (the Jews) are idol worshippers” (implying – why kill the Egyptians and save the Jews?)

The Medrash states as follows: “In the merit of the bones of Yosef, the Sea split for Israel. About this it is written: ‘the sea saw and fled (va’yanos)’ [Tehillim 114:3] – this happened in the merit of ‘he left his garment in her hand and he fled (va’yanas) outside’ [Bereshis

39:12]. The splitting of the Yam Suf – the quintessential paradigm of all miracles – occurred in the merit of the coffin of the righteous Yosef, who generations earlier fled from the seductive efforts of Potiphar’s wife.

Yosef knew that by fleeing from the wife of Potiphar, he faced likely imprisonment for the rest of his life. Mrs. Potiphar was not going to stand idly by after she tried to seduce him and he left her standing there. Yosef knew what would happen: She would accuse him of trying to rape her and they would throw the ‘Egyptian slave’ into prison forever. He had no idea what was going to eventually happen – that Pharaoh would dream and he would interpret the dream and be elevated to second in command in the land. He did not read Parshas VaYeshev and Parshas Miketz ahead of time to realize all that! This was an incomprehensible act of mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice). In the merit of this great deed, according to the Medrash, the sea split!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky adds the following: When the Angels complained, “These and these are idolaters” (i.e., there is no difference between the Jews and the Egyptians), the Ribono shel Olam responded to them: “No! There is a difference between the Jews and the Egyptians.” Granted, they both might worship avodah zarah, but there is something fundamentally different. By Yosef HaTzadik, the fact that he was willing to literally give up his life to preserve moral standards, speaks to the capacity and power of the Jewish soul.

Had it not been for Yosef HaTzadik, the implication is that the Ribono shel Olam would have had to concede to the Angels and tell them they were right – there is no difference between these idolaters and those idolaters...and the Jews would have drowned as well.

In retrospect, we can see who caused the sea to split! “Come and see the wisdom, the piety and the righteousness of Moshe Rabbeinu!” Had he not taken Yosef’s bones, had Israel not had the merit of Yosef’s coffin accompanying them as they passed through the split waters of the Yam Suf, who knows what would have been?

This is another case where at the time of a person’s action, he does not realize what he is accomplishing. However, that action could make the difference for eternity. Moshe Rabbeinu did not realize what he was doing, and Yosef HaTzadik realized the trouble that he was going to get into – but he did it anyway. Those actions enabled the Master of the Universe to respond to the Angels “No! The Jews are different.”

What Was Pharaoh Thinking???

After having been on the receiving end of ten Divine plagues, and after sending out Bnai Yisrael, Pharaoh suddenly says: We made a mistake. We sent out the Jews! “What have

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we done? We sent out Israel from being our slaves!” [Shemos 14:5]

I ask you: Pharaoh looks at his country. It is literally destroyed. The cattle are gone. The crops are gone. The firstborn are dead. Talk about destruction! Look at Germany after the bombing of the Allied campaign. Cities – literally destroyed! Nothing left! Good, Pharaoh is a stubborn fool. All along, he did not get it. He was “slow” to catch on. But now, he looks around and he sees his country is devastated. How could he say such a stupid thing – What have we have done that we sent out Israel from being our slaves?

Does he not realize with whom he is dealing? Does he not realize that he is dealing with an Omnipotent G-d that he has not been able to stop? And now he plans to start all over again with Him? What was he thinking? Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in *Emes L’Yaakov* offers two interpretations, one based on ‘pshat’ (the simple reading of the pesukim), and one based on human psychology.

Based on the simple interpretation, Rav Yaakov says an interesting thing on Parshas Shemos. The first time Moshe asks Pharaoh to “Send out the people,” he asks that Pharaoh release them for only three days and then they would return. Was this a trick? Did the Almighty really mean that Israel would go out for three days and then return to Egypt? What is the alternative? Was it merely a ruse?

The Almighty was not trying “to pull a fast one” on Pharaoh. The Ribono shel Olam does not work like that.

Rav Yaakov says an amazingly novel idea. There is a basic difference between Parshas Shemos on the one hand and the Parshas of VaEra and Bo on the other hand. In Parshas Shemos, Israel was supposed to remain in Egypt for the full 400 years (foretold to Avraham in Bereshis 15:13). However, the Ribono shel Olam saw that if they stayed in Egypt much longer than the 200+ years that they were currently already there, they would have spiritual destruction and therefore they would not be able to last the 400 years. Therefore, He came up with a plan – Let them out for three days! They will go into the wilderness, they will have a national Avodas Hashem (Divine Service), this will provide a booster shot of ruchniyus (spirituality) and then they will be able to return to Egypt and remain for the rest of the four hundred years!

That was “Plan A”. Pharaoh rejected Plan A. The Almighty then came up with “Plan B”. Plan B was that they were not going to last 400 years in Egypt so the Almighty calibrated the qualitative intensity of the enslavement that they experienced during the time they were in Egypt to be equivalent to 400 years. After Parshas Shemos, there is never any more talk of “Let us go for three days.” It is always “Let

us out.” This is what happens in Parshas VaEra and Parshas Bo.

Then in Parshas B'Shalach, Pharaoh says “OK, G-d, You won! I got it! Let them go for three days like You said originally!” They went, and they were gone for three days, then four days, then five days and six days and they are not turning around! Pharaoh says “Hey! What happened over here? You said three days!” This is what prompted him to go after the Jews. He felt that it was not fair that they were not coming back (as Moshe had originally offered). This is the approach based on “pschat”.

The approach based on psychology is as follows: A human being who is blinded – be it by money, be it by greed, be it by tayvah (lust), be it by passion – can look at a situation and see that there is a 99.9% chance that he is going to fail. Nonetheless, if he really wants something because of his greed or his passion or whatever, he will look at that one tenth of one percent and say “Ah! I can still do it!”

Pharaoh looked around and saw every avodah zarah was destroyed – except one. Baal Tzefon was still intact. [Shemos 14:2]. Yes! G-d took on my 99 idols and defeated them. But look! Baal Tzefon is still around. The Jews are confused in the desert. Baal Tzefon has caused them to lose their bearings. I can still get them.

Any rational person could look at this situation and say, “Look, if G-d did all this to you already, Baal Tzefon or anybody else is not going to be able to help you!” But Pharaoh was greedy. He did not want to see the slaves go, and that greed blinded him. It happened to Pharaoh and it happened in Iraq in 1991. When Donald Rumsefeld said, “We are going to go ahead, and we are going to destroy your country – ‘Shock and Awe’ (remember that terminology?) – Saddam Hussein thought he would take on the combined forces of the United States of America and all the Allies and he would survive! Was he crazy? What motivates someone like Saddam Hussein? The answer is that it is the same psychology all over again. Whether it was his greed or his ego or whatever – he went up against the United States. That was insanity!

That is the way human beings think. If there is a one tenth of one percent chance, they will rationalize, they will bend, they will twist themselves into a pretzel and conclude – “I will be able to do it.” That is what we see from Pharaoh. The words “Before Baal Tzefon” indicate that Pharaoh observed that Baal Tzefon was still around. “He is my savior. G-d can't beat Baal Tzefon!”

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is the recipe for a miracle? Parashat Beshalach tells us about the parting of the waters of the Red Sea – surely one of the

greatest miracles that has ever taken place. Details are given of the entry of the Israelites into the water. The Torah tells us that they entered: ‘B'toch hayam bayabasha’ – ‘in the midst of the sea, on dry land.’ ‘Vehamayim lahem choma mi'minam umismolam’ – ‘and the water became a wall for them to their right and to their left.’

However, only seven verses later, The same details are mentioned but now the order is switched around. Here the Torah tells us that they entered, ‘bayabasha b'toch hayam’ – ‘on dry land, in the midst of the sea.’ Previously it was ‘in the midst of the sea, on dry land.’

There is also a further difference. When we're told: ‘Vehamayim lahem choma’ – ‘the water became a wall for them’, in the word ‘choma’, the letter ‘vav’ is missing. Therefore it reads ‘chema’ which means, anger.

What sense can we make of this? The Kli Yakar gives a beautiful peirush. He says that the Torah is actually describing two separate entries into the sea. The first was of course, by Nachshon. He and his followers said, “Hashem is promising us a miracle. We can't just wait. We need to be his partners. So Nachshon walked into the deep waters and when they reached up to his nostrils, at the moment when he was just about to drown – having been ‘b'toch hayam’ – ‘in the midst of the sea’ – he found himself on dry land, thanks to the miracle of Hashem. Those waters became a ‘choma’ – walls of protection for him and those with him.

They were followed by others. The doubters. Those who didn't want to risk their lives. They therefore walked ‘on dry land, in the midst of the sea’ – because the miracle had already taken place. And these waters were ‘chema’. It was as if the waters were looking at them with anger. Saying, “Where were you? Why were you doubting Hashem? You should have been like Nachshon and those with him.”

I believe that here we have the recipe for a miracle. There are two ingredients. They are Hishtadlut and Bitachon.

Hishtadlut is our own effort to utilise every single ounce of ability, talent and bravery that we have, in order to contribute towards a partnership with Bitachon – our trust in Hashem. He will do the rest. That's what enabled this miracle to happen.

Within our own lives, of course, we would love miracles to happen all the time. But Chazal tell us, “ein somchin al haness”. You can't just rely on miracles. Bitachon, trust in Hashem, is not enough. We need to show Hishtadlut. To try our best in order to achieve our greatest goals and aspirations because after all, Hashem helps those who help themselves.

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OTS Dvar Torah

The Nachshon ben Aminadav Effect Rabbi Ohad Teharlev

How can we explain the juxtaposition of Nachshon Ben Aminadav's leap into the Red Sea and our annual Tu B'Shvat (Jewish Arbor Day), and who has been following in Nachshon's footsteps in the last few generations?

“Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, ‘They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.’” Immediately after the Children of Israel leave Egypt, Pharaoh understands that the Jewish people have gotten themselves into a bind in the desert. He organizes his vast army and starts to pursue them. Having reached the shores of the Red Sea, they now lift their gazes and make out an enormous dust cloud rising into the sky. The Egyptian army was on their tails. Frightened and horrified, they now understand that they are caught in a dead end. The sea barred their way ahead, and behind them was the army of the biggest superpower at the time. There was no way out, and no way to rechart their course.

It is taught in a Beraita: Our forefathers split into four factions at the sea: One was for lunging into the sea; another, for returning to Egypt; another for fighting against them; another, for crying out against them.

In the Jerusalem Talmud (Tractate Taanit, Chapter 2, Halacha 2), our sages tell us that during those extremely tense moments, the Jewish people formed four groups. The first group suggested mass suicide. The second group believed that the people needed to surrender and revert to being a slave nation. The third group suggested going to battle. The fourth preferred to stand and pray.

These four groups represent two different approaches. The first two reflect a passive and defeatist approach characterized by desperation and loss of hope. The first group, which wanted to jump into the sea, was completely desperate, while the second group was slightly less pessimistic, thinking that the only way to stay alive was to capitulate and go back to being slaves. The last two groups represent a more active approach, suggesting that action must be taken. The third group proposes going to war, though their chances of success were minimal. How could slaves, who had never wielded weapons, vanquish such a large and experienced enemy? We can assume that this approach is also based on desperation, recalling Samson's proclamation of “Let my life perish with the Philistines”. The fourth group, which suggested praying, promoted taking spiritual action, recalling the verse “(Even if) a sharp sword is placed on a person's neck, he must not lose hope in Hashem's mercy”. Which of these groups was right, and how should it have proceeded?

Nachshon Ben Aminadav makes a surprise move. While the entire nation was horror-stricken and under great stress, he starts

walking towards the sea, despite all odds. Our sages tell us that once his feet touched the water, the sea started to part, revealing a new and unexpected option of averting disaster.

I am certain that Nachshon Ben Aminadav wasn't associated with any of the pessimistic groups. He might have thought that the people of Israel should stand and fight, though he, himself, had chosen to pray, but what made his solution great was that he took the initiative, choosing to think outside the box and act against all odds, and despite what reality might dictate. At first, what he did may seem no less hopeless than the mass suicide proposed by the first group. Yet there is a significant difference between them. Nachshon Ben Aminadav was a faithful individual with a positive attitude. He believed that a new option could evolve, one that would provide new hope. He saw both the sea and the horizon that lay beyond, unlike the others who couldn't see the horizons in their lives.

Every year, we read these chapters on distress and redemption as part of the weekly portion, and it always falls just before the holiday of Tu B'Shvat. It therefore comes at no surprise that the almond tree, which begins to bloom in the wintertime, symbolizes this holiday. Though we are at the coldest time of the year, when everything around us is still grey and gloomy, a budding flower suddenly appears, a harbinger of spring. It symbolizes the idea that though the world around us may seem gloomy, deep down, there is always hope and a better future. We just need to be able to believe and sense this hope and this future in our mind's eye.

One of those who followed in Nachshon Ben Aminadav's footsteps was Benjamin Zeev Herzl, the visionary behind the State of Israel. At a time when the Jews, a people without a safe piece of land of their own, were being accosted throughout Europe, the thought of adopting a Zionist vision and establishing a state for the Jewish people seemed outrageous and hopeless. However, Herzl sensed a hopeful future, and with a bit of daring and thinking outside of the box, he went from city to city and from country to country, trying to persuade leaders and peasants to share his vision. Many thought he was a madman, but he paid them no heed, and in so doing, he extended the Nachshon Ben Aminadav effect. The rest is history.

We too, in our private lives, can sometimes fall on hard times. It seems as though life doesn't offer us a way out, materially, financially, or emotionally. What would we do, if we were to be pushed back to the shore? Which group would we join? Who would we identify with? Nachshon Ben Aminadav seems to offer us a solution. When trouble comes, he beseeches us not to fear, but rather to muster our courage and think outside of the box. To be devout and creative, and to look for solutions that may seem rather unrealistic to us. We believe that

when we take that first step into the horizon, we'll discover, to our surprise, new opportunities and options that will take us down new roads that lead to hope, freedom, liberty, and a better future.

OU Dvar Torah

Life as a Symphony: Shirah and Becoming an Adult - Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

We are each but a quarter note in a grand symphony. - Guy Laliberte

The conductor takes his place upon the podium. He raises his baton. A hush falls over the hall and there is a moment of exquisite silence, during which it seems as if the world itself holds its breath in anticipation. Then, with the sweep of his hand, a sound rises, a glorious sound greater than the sum of its parts. A symphony begins.

An attuned ear can, of course, find the disparate tones as the music plays. The strings here. A flute there. The drum. The sharp played by the oboe here. The rest taken by the violas there. But each piece of the symphony is only given meaning by being part of the greater whole.

There is no symphony without the wholeness of its parts.

So too with shirah. Shirah rises above the scope of both sichah and zimrah. Each of these is important and has its honored place in life's experience. Sichah, conversation, calls upon the intellect, reflecting that which is most thoughtful about human experience. Zimrah adds another layer of content, as if another layer of sound is added to the music.

Unlike the intellectual experience of sichah, zimrah demands more nuance and engagement. Zimrah demands an emotional investment as well. To sing Shabbat zemirot is to engage so much more than our minds; it calls forth our hearts and hopes as well. In zimrah both halachah and agadah brought into harmony; the body and soul of Shabbat is made one.

Our lives and experience are enriched by our participation in the intellectual and the emotional. But neither of these alone, or in tandem, is enough to make life truly meaningful. For that, we need shirah.

As in the magnificence of the symphony, shirah brings to bear the fullness of all the orchestra's component parts. Shirah embraces the fullness of experience, in its scope of subject and in its complete use of the "composer's" talents, abilities and senses.

Dovid Hamelech was reprimanded for diminishing Torah by referring to it as zimrah. Torah is not zimrah. It is the perfect shirah because it mirrors the whole of human experience; it encompasses the wholeness of a symphony.

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It is the wholeness of experience that saw Israel recite shirah on the yam. There, on the distant shore of the sea, the newly freed nation spoke not merely of present triumphs. Their "song" was about much more than present courage and accomplishments; their spontaneous shirah embraced their experience of their brutal past even as it proclaimed a vision of their grand future.

Their shirah called forth visions of the coming conquest of the promised land, and even of building a holy Temple in the far distant prophetic future, reaching its crescendo as it envisioned the perfect Messianic society when Hashem shall reign forever.

Shira is timeless. It reflects all that was, is and will be.

It encompasses the good and the bad. The Midrash quotes Moshe announcing that just as he sinned with the word az when he condemned God, saying, Umeaz ba'ati ledaber el Parao hera la'am hazeh, [since I have come to speak to Parao, the nation's situation has worsened] so now he will praise God with az; az yashir. Both sin and praise, encompassed in one.

When we truly sing, we understand that our voices cannot sing praise without encompassing pain and suffering. Our shirah is a realization that geulah – redemption – is not an independent condition. It is not a by-product or a fortunate outcome. It is, in fact, a direct consequence of galut. There can be no geulah without galut.

There is a direct connection to when Moshe exclaimed, Be'az chatati, yesterday I angrily declared my anguish over the galut and enslavement and therefore today I openly declare my gratitude and song for the redemption – az yashir.

The difficulties of yesterday and today make possible the glory of tomorrow, which is yet to come. Perhaps then this is the meaning of the Talmud's statement that, "Whoever says shirah in this world merits to say shirah in the world to come."

The symphony requires all the notes from all the instruments – brass, strings, percussion, flats, sharps and naturals. To hear only one part is to miss the fullness of the symphony and to surrender the grand for the small.

* * *

It is not easy to grow up and take on adult responsibilities. It's nice to be a child, free of care. And it is supposed to be. Childhood is a time of joy and innocence... at least, that is how many adults feel looking back through the lens of their adult responsibilities. But the truth is, childhood wasn't all that easy. There was lots of hurt and confusion along with the joy. There were falls, booster shots, bitter-tasting medicine, scrapes and scratches; there were

mean-spirited children in the school yard and stern lectures from parents, not to mention the reprimands from older sisters who are quite sure they know what is best and younger siblings who become incredibly bossy just when you want kindness and comfort.

Yes, with a little bit of perspective, it is easy to see that all that “fun” of childhood was mixed in with a goodly amount of anguish.

The child lives a number of years... um, let's say thirteen... in his own private galut. But then he is redeemed at thirteen, independent – with the wonder and uncertainty that is part of independence!

What an interesting plan God seems to have employed! The baby crawls before he walks. The boy struggles before he becomes a man. Why? Because without the struggles, being a man is an impossible and meaningless task. As it is with geulah and galut so too is it with our own experience and lives.

True shirah is the culmination of a complete, universal perspective. It relies not only on today's joy, but also yesterday's pain and tomorrow's glory. It is because I was a child “only yesterday” that today I can laugh, rejoice and dance, knowing too that tomorrow I am grown, mature and responsible.

* * *

Chazal declare that “from the inception of the world's creation until Israel stood at the sea, we do not find anyone who has uttered shirah to God, but Israel. He created Adam and he did not utter shirah”

Is that really so? Doesn't the Midrash extol Adam for reciting Lechu neranena? Likewise, when Adam repented for his sin, the Midrash tells us that he sang Mizmor shir leyom HaShabbat. Why then do Chazal state that until the parting of the sea no shirah was ever truly uttered?

It is because Chazal speak of genuine shirah. When Adam asked forgiveness for his sin, his focus was on the “now,” on his immediate need of forgiveness, not on the scope of his life and experience that had brought him to his sin – or on the future that still lay ahead.

Shirah necessitates a recognition of the present state of salvation and geulah, but with an equal cognizance that yesterday's pain, anxiety and galut were also part of God's grand scheme. Such a shirah was first uttered by Israel at the sea.

The Sfat Emet questions the well-known postulate that Parashat Haazinu is referred to as shirah. After all there are many chastising and punishment-filled statements throughout the parasha!

But that is precisely the point. To express shirah requires the full perspective not only for

today's joy but also yesterday's pains. Awareness of hardship and the joy, galut and geulah, creates fullness and harmony in one's life; it teaches that such things “emanated from God . . . let us rejoice and be glad on it.”

Genuine faith encompasses the belief that He Who takes us into galut will also lead us geulah. Kohelet(7:14)describes God as having, “made even the one as well as the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.” God's plan was not to make human life an unbroken spell of calamity – or of joy. Both are necessary parts of life in His scheme. When we know this and feel it, we can sing about it, too.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

Amongst the 20%

G-d led the people around [by] way of the desert [to] the Red Sea, and the Children of Israel were (CHAMUSHIM) armed when they went up out of Egypt. (Shemos 13:18) (CHAMUSHIM) armed: One fifth (1/5) went out and four fifths (4/5) died during the three days of darkness. (Rashi)

There is a shocking piece of history buried in the word “CHAMUSHIM”. It is translated as “armed” but it hints to an enormous tragedy, that four fifths of the Jewish People perished during the plague of darkness. Only one fifth ultimately participated in the long awaited and much heralded “Exodus”!

Many years ago I heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. an equally incredible statement. I am not the historian to confirm or deny, to endorse or challenge the veracity of this claim, but Rabbi Miller was a giant student of history and authored many books. He says that “not only were 4/5 of the Jews were lost in the plague of darkness in Egypt, but 4/5 of the Jews are lost in whatever the “plague of darkness” is in that generation.”

Armed with this frightening piece of information for many years, it dawned on me only recently something that I feel compelled to share and repeat at our Pesach Seder now year after year.

Let us say that we can be counted as being amongst the “fortunate” 20% who will have the merited to continue beyond the darkness of this generation- then we are here because there was a 20% that chose profoundly and lived bravely to be amongst the 20% of the previous generation. Now that 20% came from another 20% of survivors and so it continues, exile after exile and pogrom after pogrom all the way back to Egypt.

At some point it occurred to me to take out my calculator. I multiplied .2 times .2 (1/5 x 1/5) and I kept going until I ran out of room on my calculator. At the final spot I had multiplied the 20% times 20% 8 times and the number 1 stood alone in the 10 million-th place.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Let us say that a generation is 100 years, then that takes us back a mere 800 years, less than ¼ of the way back to the Exodus from Egypt. The chances of someone sitting happily at his Pesach Seder 800 years ago with an attrition rate of 80% per generation making it to the Seder here in the 21st century is 1 out of 10 million. That is a crazy small percentage.

Now that's only a quarter of the way back to the Exodus and assuming a generation is 100 years. Maybe it's much less. What would be the chances of someone exiting Egypt projecting his progeny to the present?!

Consider now the value of the seat we occupy at the Pesach Seder. We are winners of the lottery of life and of history. What a truly extraordinary privilege we have just to be there, to have survived the gauntlet of history and being the descendants of wise and courageous choosers. The intensity of our celebration at the Pesach Seder should also be multiplied year after year and generation after generation.

I shared this calculation at a Bar Mitzvah a few years ago and I told the Bar Mitzvah boy that the good news is that his seat was paid for by the noble efforts of his parents and grandparents, generation after generation. The challenging news is that now he has to pay for the seat of the next generation and ensure that they, like he, can also be included amongst the 20%.



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Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg
Kindness: The Catalyst for Salvation

In the shiras hayam, Klal Yisrael praise Hashem for his kindness and mercy. "Nachisa b'chas'dicha am zu ga'alta - With your kindness, You guided this people that You redeemed" (Shemos 15:13.) What kindness are they referring to?

The Midrash (Tanna D'bei Eliahu 23) states that when Klal Yisrael were in Mitzrayim, they gathered together and made a covenant to act toward each other with compassion and sensitivity. What prompted them to make this special arrangement? The Chofetz Chaim (Shemos ibid.) explains that when the Jewish people saw that Pharaoh's decrees were becoming progressively harsher, and the oppression was unbearable, they realized they needed a salvation. But what could they do to merit a redemption if they did not deserve to be saved? They decided that if they acted toward each other with kindness and compassion, hopefully that would awaken a heavenly kindness, middah k'negged middah, and Hashem would treat them with mercy and hasten their redemption.

This, suggests the Chofetz Chaim, is the kindness that is hinted to in the shirah. Hashem mercifully calculated the end of the slavery in Mitzrayim in a way that hastened the redemption. As it says in the Haggadah shel Pesach, "Hakadosh Boruch Hu chisheiv es ha'keitz." It was only through divine mercy that Klal Yisrael were given an early release from their persecution in Mitzrayim. But according to the Midrash, the catalyst for that early liberation was the compassion and sensitivity that Klal Yisrael showed toward each other.

The Chofetz Chaim adds that perhaps this is the kindness that Hashem highlights, in the words of Yirmiyahu HaNavi (2:2), "Zacharti lach chessed ne'urayich - I remember the kindness of your youth." Hashem is saying that He will never forget the chessed that Klal Yisrael did with each other in Mitzrayim. And in fact, it was that kindness which tipped the scales and brought about yetzias Mitzrayim.

This idea that human kindness can generate divine mercy is applicable not only to the collective unit of Klal Yisrael, but to individuals as well. Chazal comment in different places that one who acts with compassion is judged more favorably. "One who is merciful with others is shown divine mercy" (Shabbos 151b.) "One who relinquishes his measure of retribution (ma'avir al midosav), the heavenly tribunal overlooks all of his sins" (Yoma 87b.) "Whose transgression does Hashem pardon? One who overlooks sin committed against him" (Rosh Hashana 17a.)

The Ramchal (Mesilas Yesharim 19) explains that by strict legal standards, no one would receive a favorable heavenly judgement. But by acting with kindness and sensitivity toward others, a person can merit a merciful judgement because even if Hashem follows the strict rule of law, one who acts with kindness should be judged with the same measure of kindness. Therefore, the more compassionate a person is with others, the more compassion he will be shown in the heavenly court.

In the tefillah of selichos on fast days and especially on Yom Kippur, we invoke Hashem's thirteen attributes of mercy multiple times. Chazal understood (Rosh Hashana 17b) that Hashem promised Moshe Rabbeinu that these thirteen attributes of mercy will never return empty-handed - einan chozros reikam. Rashi writes that what Hashem meant is that whenever Klal Yisrael mention these attributes of mercy, their tefillah will always be accepted. But this seems difficult because unfortunately there are times that our tefillos are not answered favorably despite the fact that we mention the thirteen attributes of mercy.

Rav Avraham Saba explains in Tzror Hamor (Shemos 34:5) that Hashem did not mean that simply mentioning the attributes of mercy will cause the tefillos of Klal Yisrael to be answered. Rather, if Klal Yisrael exemplify these attributes in their behavior, "to show mercy, to be gracious to the weak, to be slow to anger, to act with kindness one to another, to overlook injustices committed against them", then their tefillos will never be ignored. When Hashem told Moshe, "Ya'asu lefanai k'seder hazeh - Let them perform this order before me," He did not simply mean that they should recite this order of attributes. What He meant is that their behavior should reflect these attributes, and that will ensure that their tefillos will always be answered favorably.

In times of crisis and challenge, we need divine mercy to pull through. The way to earn Hashem's kindness is by acting with compassion and sensitivity toward others. When we incorporate the thirteen attributes of mercy into our behavior, we are assured that middah k'negged middah, Hashem will act toward us with mercy as well.

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subject: **Rav Frand - Wasting Precious Opportunities**
Parshas Beshalach

Wasting Precious Opportunities

What Was Pharaoh Crying About?

The parsha begins with the words "Vayehi b'shalach Paroah es ha'Am" (And it was when Pharaoh sent out the nation) [Shemos 13:17]. Chazal say that the word "Vayehi" usually connotes pain or distress—from the word "vay" (woe). They add that when Pharaoh saw the Jews leaving Egypt, he cried out in pain. (Oy! What did I do!)

The Medrash gives a parable: A person had a string of pearls but he did not know what they were worth. To him, they were just like a string of worthless

beans. He met someone and asked him, “Would you like this string of round little balls that I have? I have no use for it!” The fellow took it from him and then went into the city and separated the various pearls by size – large, medium, and small. He proceeded to do a booming business selling the individual pearls to customers who knew their true value. One day the person who gave him the string of pearls came into the store and saw what a fortune this other person was making from his “gift.” Once he saw that (and realized what he had given up), he tore his clothes in mourning. He bemoaned the fact that he had this fortune in his hands and he gave it away. “Woe is me!” The Medrash says that this was the story with Pharaoh. The Children of Israel were the string of pearls that he had in his possession. When he saw them leaving Egypt, he cried out in pain. Vay(ehi) – Woe is me! Look what I had, and I gave it away!

Rav Zevulun Groz was a great man who lived in Jerusalem. He was the Av Beis Din (Head of the Rabbinical Court) of the city of Rechovot. When he was a young student going away to Yeshiva, his father told him this Medrash. His father asked a question on the Medrash: What is the analogy here? The fellow who gave away the pearls did it voluntarily. No one forced him to give them away. He made a silly decision because he did not know the value of what he had. On the other hand, Pharaoh did not release the Children of Israel willingly. He was forced to let them go because his country was falling apart and everyone was dying as punishment for him not letting them go. When someone has a gun to your head or is twisting your arm, you sometimes have no choice but to comply even against your own wishes.

His father explained to the young Zevulun Groz that the reason Pharaoh was crying when he saw the Jews leaving was not because he sent them away. He had no choice but to send them away. The reason he was crying was that when he saw them leaving and he saw the formation with which they left – the order in which they left and how civilized they were – he said to himself: I am an idiot! I had such a nation under my power and I had them make bricks. They possess the genius to be artisans. They could have been architects. They could have done so much more with their talents. I had such a talented people, and I made them into ditch diggers. That was why he was now so regretful. Retroactively, he realized he had these pearls, these diamonds, and rather than using them for elevated purposes and for building up the economy of his country, he made them brick makers and brick layers. Rabbi Groz senior told his son: You are going away to Yeshiva. It is a golden opportunity. It is not always during a person’s lifetime that he has the opportunity to use even a limited period of years to accomplish that which is possible to accomplish in Yeshiva. Do not look back at the end of this period and say, “Look what I had, and I did not take advantage of it!” His son took this message to heart and indeed became a great person.

If there is one constant message that I try to share with my students in Yeshiva, it is this very message. The limited years a person has available to study in Yeshiva are precious. They are years that will not be duplicated. The rest of our lives are full of the distractions of earning a living and all kinds of family distractions. The ability to be able to sit and to learn in a focused and undisturbed manner during this brief period of our lives is like a string of pearls. They are the easiest years of a person’s life. Do not make the mistake of looking back and saying “Ah! Look what I had and I did not take advantage of it!”

Horse and Rider Were Thrown Into the Sea – Why Punish the Horses?

After the Shirah, the pasuk says, “Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aharon, took the drum in her hand, and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances. Miriam spoke up to them (va’Ta’an lahem Miriam), ‘Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea.’” [Shemos 15:20-21] The way most of us understand this parsha is that the men did their thing and then the women wanted to do their thing as well – so Miriam led them in an abridged version of the men’s Az Yashir song.

The Tolner Rebbe asks four good questions on these last two pesukim:

(1) Why does the Torah need to tell us here that Miriam is a prophetess?

(2) What does “Va’Ta’an lahem Miriam” mean? Literally Va’Ta’an means she answered them (rather than she led them [in song]). When leading in singing the appropriate verb is, as it says in this week’s Haftarah, VaTashar Devorah (and Devorah sang) not Va’Ta’an!

(3) The word ‘Lahem’ means ‘them’ in masculine. In the context of this narrative, where she is speaking to the women, we would expect to find the feminine pronoun Lahan.

(4) Out of all the pesukim in the Shirah, why does Miriam choose to repeat the expression “Sus v’Rochvo Rama b’Yam” (having hurled horse with its rider into the sea) to synopsise the entire Shira in this very abbreviated version?

Those are the Tolner Rebbe’s four questions.

The Tolner Rebbe answers his questions by redirecting our entire understanding of this incident. It is not that Miriam took the drum and then all the women followed her and they did the dances that women do at chassunahs. This is not what happened over here.

The explanation is that this was a protest (Hafganah!). How does the Tolner Rebbe see this? The word “the prophetess” gives us a clue. Miriam saw what was happening over here with Divine Vision. The normal human eye would not be able to discern this. But she saw what was happening. It was a demonstration.

What was the demonstration about? “What about us! Are we chopped liver?” Here, our rabbis tell us that in the merit of the righteous women, our ancestors left Egypt [Sotah 11b-12a]. It was the men who had given up hope, and it was the women who kept them going and encouraged them to procreate. Now, during the final celebration of our exodus, is it just the men who are going to sing praises to G-d? What about us? What are we? Miriam saw what was happening. She was not happy with the fact that all the women were following after her with drums and dancing because this was not an innocuous celebration. This was a protest! She heard the women complaining, “It is not fair that the men will have all the glory and be the ones who are the celebrants! What about us?”

The pasuk therefore uses the verb “Va’Ta’an Lahem Miriam” – Miriam responded to them! There was a question here which needed to be answered. The question was “What about us?” And Miriam answered “Lahem” – “Oh! You want to be like the men? Okay, I will answer you like men.” She is answering a question that we hear until this very day. “Why can’t women do this? Why can’t women do that? It is not fair!”

Therefore, her answer was very specifically “Horse and rider were thrown into the sea.” The cavalry, the guys who were riding the horses had to drown in the sea as punishment for their cruelty to us. That we can understand. But what was the crime of the horses? Why did they also need to perish?

The explanation is that the Almighty gives as much credit or as much blame to the person who facilitates, as He does to the person who actually does whatever was facilitated. G-d considers facilitators just as important as those who act.

This was the essence of the Tolner Rebbe’s lesson: If “all a Kolel wife does is bake and cook and clean and diaper and take care of the children, but as a result, she facilitates her husband to be able to sit and learn, she receives the same reward from Heaven as her husband receives. If someone learns Daf Yomi, and during that time his wife takes care of the children so that he can learn, she receives the same reward.

We see this principle from “the horse and its rider were thrown into the sea.” The Ribono shel Olam punishes the horse because it facilitated the rider. If this is the way it works by punishment, by reward it certainly works like that!

Miriam responded to them: “I know where you ladies are coming from, but that is the way the Ribono shel Olam built Klal Yisrael. Judaism is a role-oriented religion. Kohanim do some things, Leviim do other things, Yisraelim do other things. Men do some things and women do other things. The system will not work unless everybody pulls their weight and does what they are supposed to do. These are the words of Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto

in the beginning of his Mesilas Yesharim (Path of the Just). “A person must know what his responsibility is in this world.” (Mah chovoso b’Olam). This is not a popular idea because everybody wants to be the same. Today in “their infinite wisdom” the United States Armed Forces said that women can fight in combat roles just as well as men. I just don’t get it! But “it’s fair!” Fair is fair! This is not the way Yiddiskeit works. Yiddishkeit works with the principle “I have my role and you have your role!” That is why Miriam told the women “the horse and the rider were thrown into the sea.”

The Tolner Rebbe uses this insight to suggest an awesome insight into a pasuk in Shir HaShirim [1:9] “With My mighty steeds who battled Pharaoh’s riders I revealed that you are My beloved.” Did you ever think about the meaning of this pasuk? It might sound like the Lover is telling his Beloved that she is like a horse! If you go home tonight and tell your wife “I love you like a horse,” see where that will get you! The simple interpretation is that the Lover is saying “You are not just an average horse, you are like the best of Pharaoh’s steeds, as it were. You are the best of women!” This is the simple interpretation.

The Tolner Rebbe explains differently: “I love you because that is the lesson of the horses of Pharaoh’s stables who were thrown into the sea with their riders.” You are my facilitator and I owe everything I have accomplished to you!

The Rebbe related an incident of a woman in her nineties who came to him and told him a story involving a conversation she had with Rav Moshe Feinstein several years earlier. This woman was a cleaning lady in a big Yeshiva for forty years. Someone introduced her to Rav Moshe and told him “This woman cleaned the Yeshiva for forty years.” Rav Moshe told her: You have the same reward as all the students who learned in that Yeshiva for those forty years. The woman started crying as she related this story to the Tolner Rebbe about what Rav Moshe Feinstein had told her some thirty years earlier!

This is the power of a facilitator. The Almighty grants the same reward (or punishment) to a facilitator as the person being facilitated. Therefore, Miriam told the women (Va’Taan Lahem Miriam) they do not have anything to complain about! You are going to get the same Olam HaBah as the men! Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

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Rabbi Sacks zt”l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

Looking Up (Beshalach 5781)

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The Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The impossible had happened. The mightiest army in the ancient world – the Egyptians with their cutting-edge, horse-drawn chariots – had been defeated and drowned. The children of Israel were now free. But their relief was short-lived. Almost immediately they faced attack by the Amalekites, and they had to fight a battle, this time with no apparent miracles from God. They did so and won. This was a decisive turning point in history, not only for the Israelites but for Moses and his leadership of the people.

The contrast between before and after the Red Sea could not be more complete. Before, facing the approaching Egyptians, Moses said to the people: “Stand still and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today ... The Lord will fight for you; you need only be silent.” (Ex. 14:13) In other words: do nothing. God will do it for you. And He did.

In the case of the Amalekites, however, Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us, and prepare for battle against Amalek.” (Ex. 17:9) Joshua did so and the people waged war. This was the great transition: The Israelites moved from a situation in which the leader (with the help of God) did everything for the people, to one in which the leader empowered the people to act for themselves.

During the battle, the Torah focuses our attention on one detail. Moses climbs to the top of a hill overlooking the battlefield, with a staff in his hand: As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites prevailed, but when he let his hands down, the Amalekites prevailed. When Moses’ hands became weary, they took a stone and placed it under him, so that he would be able to sit on it. Aaron and Chur then held his hands, one on each side, and his hands remained steady until sunset. (Ex. 17:11-12)

What is going on here? The passage could be read in two ways: The staff in Moses’ raised hand – the very staff which he used to perform mighty miracles in Egypt and at the sea – might be a sign that the Israelites’ victory was a miraculous one. Alternatively, it might simply be a reminder to the Israelites that God was with them, giving them strength.

Very unusually – since the Mishnah in general is a book of law rather than biblical commentary – a Mishnah resolves the question:

Did the hands of Moses make or break [the course of the] war? Rather, the text implies that whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their Father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell.[1]

The Mishnah is clear. Neither the staff nor Moses’ upraised hands were performing a miracle. They were simply reminding the Israelites to look up to heaven and remember that God was with them. Their faith gave them the confidence and courage to win.

A fundamental principle of leadership is being taught here. A leader must empower the team. They cannot always do the work for the group; they must do it for themselves. But the leader must, at the same time, give them the absolute confidence that they can do it and succeed. The leader is responsible for their mood and morale. During battle, a captain must betray no sign of weakness, doubt or fear. That is not always easy, as we see in this week’s episode. Moses’ upraised hands “became weary.” All leaders have their moments of exhaustion and at such times the leader needs support – even Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur, who then helped him to maintain his position. In the end, though, his upraised hands were the sign the Israelites needed that God was giving them the strength to prevail, and they did.

In today’s terminology, a leader needs emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, best known for his work in this field, argues that one of the most important tasks of a leader is to shape and lift the mood of the team: Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions.[2]

Groups have an emotional temperature. As individuals they can be happy or sad, agitated or calm, fearful or confident. But when they come together as a group, a process of attuning – “emotional contagion” – takes place, and they begin to share the same feeling. Scientists have shown experimentally how, within fifteen minutes of starting a conversation, two people begin to converge in the physiological markers of mood, such as pulse rate. “When three strangers sit facing each other in silence for a minute or two, the one who is most emotionally expressive transmits their mood to the other two – without speaking a single word.”[3] The physiological basis of this process, known as mirroring, has been much studied in recent years, and observed even among primates. It is the basis of empathy, through which we enter into and share other people’s feelings.

This is the foundation for one of the most important roles of a leader. It is he or she who, more than others, determines the mood of the group. Goleman reports on several scientific studies showing how leaders play a key role in determining the group's shared emotions:

Leaders typically talked more than anyone else, and what they said was listened to more carefully ... But the impact on emotions goes beyond what a leader says. In these studies, even when leaders were not talking, they were watched more carefully than anyone else in the group. When people raised a question for the group as a whole, they would keep their eyes on the leader to see his or her response. Indeed, group members generally see the leader's emotional reaction as the most valid response, and so model their own on it – particularly in an ambiguous situation, where various members react differently. In a sense, the leader sets the emotional standard.[4]

When it comes to leadership, even non-verbal cues are important. Leaders, at least in public, must project confidence even when they are inwardly full of doubts and hesitations. If they betray their private fears in word or gesture, they risk demoralising the group.

There is no more powerful example of this than the episode in which King David's son Absalom mounts a coup d'état against his father, proclaiming himself king in his place. David's troops put down the rebellion, in the course of which Absalom's hair gets tangled in a tree and he is stabbed to death by Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

When he hears this news, David is heartbroken. His son may have rebelled against him, but he is still his son and his death is devastating. David covers his face crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" News of David's grief quickly spreads throughout the army, and they too – by emotional contagion – are overcome by mourning. Joab regards this as disastrous. The army have taken great risks to fight for David against his son. They cannot now lament their victory without creating confusion and fatefully undermining their morale:

Then Joab went into the house to the King and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now." (2 Samuel 19:6-8)

King David does as Joab insists. He accepts that there is a time and place for grief, but not now, not here, and above all, not in public. Now is the time to thank the army for their courage in defence of the King.

A leader must sometimes silence their private emotions to protect the morale of those they lead. In the case of the battle against Amalek, the first battle the Israelites had to fight for themselves, Moses had a vital role to perform. He had to give the people confidence by getting them to look up.

In 1875 an amateur archaeologist, Marcelino de Sautuola, began excavating the ground in a cave in Altamira near the north coast of Spain. At first, he found little to interest him, but his curiosity was rekindled by a visit to the Paris exhibition of 1878 where a collection of Ice Age instruments and art objects was on display. Determined to see whether he could find equally ancient relics, he returned to the cave in 1879.

One day he took his nine-year-old daughter Maria with him. While he was searching through the rubble, she wandered deeper into the cave and to her amazement saw something on the wall above her. "Look, Papa, oxen," she said. They were, in fact, bison. She had made one of the great discoveries of prehistoric art of all time. The magnificent Altamira cave paintings, between 25,000 and 35,000 years old, were so unprecedented a finding that it took twenty-two years for their authenticity to be accepted. For four years Sautoula had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

This is one of the enduring themes of Tanach: the importance of looking up. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things," says Isaiah (Is. 40:26). "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From there will my help come" said King David in Psalm 121. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will not be like the flat plain of the Nile Delta where water is plentiful and in regular supply. It will be a land of hills and valleys, entirely dependent on unpredictable rain (Deut. 11:10-11). It will be a landscape that forces its inhabitants to look up. That is what Moses did for the people in their first battle. He taught them to look up.

No political, social or moral achievement is without formidable obstacles. There are vested interests to be confronted, attitudes to be changed, resistances to be overcome. The problems are immediate, the ultimate goal often frustratingly far away. Every collective undertaking is like leading a nation across the wilderness towards a destination that is always more distant than it seems when you look at the map.

Look down at the difficulties and you can give way to despair. The only way to sustain energies, individual or collective, is to turn our gaze up toward the far horizon of hope. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle". The fly is trapped in the bottle. It searches for a way out. Repeatedly it bangs its head against the glass until at last, exhausted, it dies. Yet the bottle has been open all the time. The one thing the fly forgets to do is look up. So, sometimes, do we.

It is the task of a leader to empower, but it is also their task to inspire. That is what Moses did when, at the top of a hill, in full sight of the people, he raised his hands and his staff to heaven. When they saw this, the people knew they could prevail. "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," said the Prophet. (Zechariah 4:6) Jewish history is a sustained set of variations on this theme.

A small people that, in the face of difficulty, continues to look up will win great victories and achieve great things.

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date:Jan 24, 2021, 8:08 AM

subject:Short & Sweet - Text Message Q&A #329

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva of Aterest Yerushalayim

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:Wedding Hall which also Dialysis

Q: After a dialysis treatment is one required to say Asher Yatzar (the blessing recited after using the restroom)?

A: No. May you have a speedy recovery.

Charedim and Religious Zionists in Corona Hotel

Q: There is a Corona hotel which houses students from Charedi Yeshivot and Religious Zionist Yeshivot. A Charedi Yeshiva student wrote that he discovered a truth which was hidden from him, that the Religious-Zionist Yeshiva students are serious and dedicated Torah learners just like them. Is there any joy greater than this?

A: It is certainly always good to meet, but we need humility and to be truthful. We still have much that we need to improve and to learn from the Charedim. Yeshiva students such as this are rare. We believe that all Klal Yisrael will be uplifted.

Sunshine

Q: Does exposure to the sun's rays promote good health?

A: Definitely, because the sun is a Divine creation. Overexposure is detrimental just as an overdose of anything else that is good. A few minutes a day is enough to provide vitamin D, to strengthen brainpower, to uplift one's spirit and to improve sleep. Caution is required to avoid sunstroke, damage vision and skin cancer. The Divine creation is praiseworthy.

Military Stories

Q: I saw a response in the Mishnah Berurah stating that we should not read stories about wars. Does this include wars of the Israel Defense Forces?

A: No. The Mishnah Berurah refers to wars that are a waste of time, whereas the Israel Defense Forces fulfill a positive commandment.

Netilat Yadayim with Automatic Tap

Q: In the event that one doesn't have access to a vessel used for the specific purpose of Netilat Yadayim, is washing at an automatic tap permissible?

A: No. The tap is operated by an internal mechanism and this doesn't comply with the requirement.

Education for Modesty

Q: What is the most successful way to educate people to be modest?

A: 1. Teach them to be humble and not to strive to draw attention to themselves. 2. Teach by example: your own modest manner influences those around you.

Rubber Bracelets

Q: Are the colorful rubber bracelets considered feminine jewelry (and thus prohibited for males)?

A: This is not a female accessory. It is meant for males and females alike.

Donning a Kerchief as Opposed to a Wig

Q: I prefer that my wife cover her hair with a kerchief but she insists on covering her hair with a wig. Which one of us is right?

A: Your wife has the right to dress in whichever manner suits her. And you may choose whatever style of Kippa that suits you (Ha-Rav Meir Ha-Levi Soloveitchik, who served as the head of the Brisk Yeshiva in Yerushalayim, told the following interesting story related by his father, Ha-Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik: When Rav Itchele Peterburger came on Aliya, he lived in Yerushalayim. A while after his arrival, representatives of the local community approached him and requested that he switch his garb and dress in the same fashion as the residents among him. In addition, they requested that his wife wear a kerchief instead of a wig. To this he immediately replied that he's definitely prepared to oblige, but that he won't suggest that his wife change anything, albeit a serious matter. Rav Itchele added that had he known in advance, he wouldn't have come to join their community and that perhaps since he's already there maybe they could reconsider. Rav Itchele staunchly refused to raise the issue with his wife for the simple reason that he clearly understood that she alone has the right to dress however she pleases (In the book "De-Chazitei Le-Rebbe Meir" Volume 1, p. 196).

Mother's Role

Q: Where in the Torah and in the Oral Law is there a teaching that the education of the children is incumbent upon the mother?

A: 1. It's simply logical and there's no need to elaborate. 2. We are taught to heed and not forsake the Torah of our mothers. 3. The fathers are also bound to educate their children.

Kissing iPhone used for Davening

Q: After praying, people customarily kiss the Siddur. Should one kiss an iPhone used in place of a Siddur?

A: No.

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet

from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org>

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date: Jan 28, 2021, 11:19 AM

subject: Rabbi Wein - Interactive Miracles

Parshas Beshalach

Interactive Miracles

This week we read in the Torah the final chapter of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage and slavery. After centuries of servitude, the children of Jacob are finally freed from their Egyptian taskmasters and embark on their journey of building a civilization. Yet, the Torah goes to great lengths to point out to us that freedom as a concept cannot exist in a vacuum.

The people must have food to eat and water to drink. Though the Jewish people will live for 40 years in an unnatural environment in the desert of

Sinai, they do not escape the constant necessities of human life. The Lord will provide these necessities through miracles – bread from heaven and water from the flint rock. These miracles, perhaps like all other miracles, will require human participation – the gathering of the heavenly bread that falls to the earth, and the striking of the rock to force it to give forth waters.

It can be asked that if Lord is performing miracles for the Jewish people anyway, then why aren't the miracles complete, why are they always somehow dependent upon human action as well? The answer to that question lies in the question itself. The adage that God helps those who help themselves is a basic tenet and value in Judaism. Miracles provide opportunities, but these, like all opportunities, must be initiated by humans for them to be beneficial and effective.

It is difficult for the Jewish people over the 40-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai to appreciate their newfound freedom. People become accustomed to almost anything, and this includes slavery and servitude. An independent people create their own society, provide their own needs and continually jostle in a contentious world to retain that freedom.

A people accustomed to slavery will find this to be particularly challenging. Slavery induced in their minds and spirit a false sense of regularity that bordered upon security. The president of the United States once remarked that if one wants to be certain of having three meals a day, then one should volunteer to spend the rest of one's life in prison. He will receive this throughout his incarceration.

In the story of the Jewish people in the desert, when faced with difficult circumstances and upsetting challenges, there was always the murmur that they should return to Egypt and 'go back to prison', for at least then they would be certain of having their three meals a day.

According to many Torah commentaries, this was the fundamental reason why the generation that left Egypt could not be the generation that would enter and conquer the land of Israel and establish Jewish independence in their own state and under their own auspices. Psychologically they were not ready to be a free people with all the burdens that accompany freedom and independence. They could accept the Torah, be intellectually religious, admire Moshe and believe in the Almighty. But they were unable to free themselves from the psychological shackles of Egyptian bondage. And there are no miracles that can do that for human beings. Only human beings can do that for themselves.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: **Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky** <rmk@torah.org>

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date: Jan 27, 2021, 12:20 PM

subject: Drasha - Leap of Faith

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

To Dedicate an Article [click here](#)

Parshas Beshalach

Leap of Faith

A defining moment of Jewish faith takes place on the shores of the Yam Suf, the Reed Sea, as the fleeing, fledgling nation is cornered into a quick and fateful decision. Trapped between raging waters and a raging Egyptian army, the nation had but few choices to make. Some froze in fright. Others wanted to run back to Egypt straight into the hands of their former tormentors. Others just prayed. Still others wanted to wage war against the former taskmasters. But one group, led by Nachshon ben Aminadav forged ahead. Replacing fear with faith, he plunged into the sea. Only then did the sea split and the Jews cross. The Egyptians pursued. The waters returned, and the enemy was left bobbing in a sea of futility, totally vanquished under the turbulent waters. In defining that moment of faith, the Torah tells us, "Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moses, His servant" (Exodus

14:31). The strange connection between faith in Hashem and Moshe His servant needs clarification. What is the minor role of the servant in relationship to the great role of faith in the Almighty?

After hearing a fiery speech about the meaning of faith, a disciple of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter approached him and asked, “Rebbe, are you telling me that if I have perfect faith in Hashem, He will provide me with all my needs?” Rabbi Salanter affirmed. “Yes, my son,” he smiled. “If one has perfect faith in the Almighty, He will provide for him.” The man made a quick reposte. “Good, if that is the case I need no longer work. I will sit and study Torah and rely solely on my faith, and the 20,000 rubles that I’ll need to survive will come to me in full as if it were manna from Heaven!” The man went home and began to study Torah. But after one week when the money did not appear he returned to the Rabbi to complain. “I have the faith you claimed to need, and so far no money has arrived!”

Rabbi Yisrael was pensive. “I’ll tell you what,” he said. “I will offer you 8,000 rubles cash today if you would commit yourself to give me the 20,000 rubles that you are sure will come to you because of your faith.” The man jumped from his chair. “8,000 rubles! Sure! I’ll take it.” Rabbi Yisrael Salanter smiled, “who in his right mind would give up 20,000 rubles for a mere 8,000 rubles? Only someone with does not have perfect faith that he will receive 20,000 rubles! If one is positive that he is about to receive 20,000 rubles, and is absolutely confident that it is coming, he would not, in his right mind, give it up for a mere 8,000! Obviously you have more faith in my 8,000 rubles than in Hashem’s 20,000!”

The Torah tells us that the nation feared God, and it believed in Moshe, His servant. Notice that the first and foremost belief is in the Almighty. That immortal faith is the springboard for faith in all the mortal messengers, who are only vehicles of His command.

Normally, more or less, man believes in man much faster than he believes in G-d. On a hot tip, people throw thousands at the market. Ominous predictions of economic forecasters send us into panic. On a doctor’s dire prognosis, we react with despair. We forget that the source of faith is in the Almighty. Only then can we believe in his messengers.

Rabbi Yeruchom Levovitz, z”l, the Mashgiach of the Mirrer Yeshiva explains that the Jews at the sea reached the highest level of faith. Their following of Moshe was not in any sense due to his charisma or prior leadership. It was due to a total subjugation to a faith in an immortal Hashem. Only then did they follow the lead of a Moshe. That is the faith of those who take the leap. It is a faith they would not trade or deal for any offer in the world.

Dedicated by Michael & Rikki Charnowitz in memory of Ephraim Spinner
Liluy Nishmas Ephraim Yitzchok ben R’ Avraham — 17 Shevat Copyright
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from:Shlomo Katz <skatz@torah.org>
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subject:Hamaayan - What We Take for Granted

Hamaayan

By Shlomo Katz

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Parshas Beshalach
What We Take for Granted
BS”D

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January 30, 2021

Sponsored by

Faith Ginsburg

in memory of her father Herzl Rosenson

(Naftali Hertz ben Avraham a”h) (22 Shevat)

Irving and Arline Katz

on the yearzeits of

her mother Fradel bat Yaakov Shulim (Reiss) a”h
and his father

Chaim Eliezer ben Avigdor Moshe Hakohen (Katz) a”h

In this week’s Parashah, we are introduced to the food known as “Mahn,” and also to the “Well of Miriam,” from which Bnei Yisrael drank throughout their years in the desert (17:6). Later in the Torah, we read that Bnei Yisrael sang a song of thanksgiving for the well (Bemidbar 21:17-20). In contrast, the Torah does not mention any thanksgiving for the Mahn. Why? R’ Nachman Yechiel Michel Steinmetz shlita (rabbi in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: “I heard a wondrous answer to this question.” He explains: We read in our Parashah (16:35): “Bnei Yisrael ate the Mahn for forty years, . . . until their arrival at the border of the land of Canaan.” The Mahn fell every single weekday for almost 40 years. It even fell on the day Bnei Yisrael made the Golden Calf, as we read (Nechemiah 9:18-20), “Even though they made themselves a molten calf and said, ‘This is your G-d who brought you out of Egypt,’ . . . You did not withhold Your Mahn from their mouth.” As a result, Bnei Yisrael took the Mahn for granted, and it did not occur to them to give thanks for it. In contrast, the well disappeared when Miriam died, so (Bemidbar 20:2), “There was no water for the assembly.” Bnei Yisrael understood what it meant to be thirsty, so they gave thanks to Hashem when they had water.

In light of this, writes R’ Steinmetz, we can understand the Halachah that requires giving thanks for rain, but only in lands that are prone to drought (see Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 221). Because we do not experience drought, we should not give thanks for rain? Yes! One who has never experienced drought will not mean it when he gives thanks for rain, R’ Steinmetz explains; it will be a “blessing in vain.” Only one who has missed the rain can genuinely feel grateful for it. (Ateret Nevonim p.15)

“Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt, and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.” (14:31)

We read in the Pesach Haggadah that Hashem inflicted five times as many plagues on the Egyptians at the Yam Suf / Reed Sea as He did in Egypt. Regarding the plagues in Egypt, we read (8:15), “The sorcerers said to Pharaoh, ‘It is a finger of Elokim!’” whereas, at the Yam Suf, Hashem inflicted the Egyptians with a great “hand.” Just as a hand has five fingers, so the plagues at the Sea were five-fold those in Egypt. R’ Yosef Zvi Viener z”l (1936-2012; rabbi of Gan Yavneh and Nes Ziona, Israel) writes: From the fact that Bnei Yisrael attained a level of Emunah/faith from seeing Hashem’s “great hand” at the Sea that they had not attained in Egypt, we can be certain that Hashem’s revelation at the Yam Suf also was greater than His revelation in Egypt. This explains why the plagues at the Sea are not described in the Torah, R’ Viener writes. In Egypt, Hashem was “addressing” a lowly audience: Bnei Yisrael, who were then slaves, and the Egyptians. As such, the lesson had to be one that any person can grasp. At the Sea, in contrast, every member of Bnei Yisrael attained a level of prophecy higher than that attained by the prophet Yechezkel when he saw Hashem’s “throne,” say our Sages. Such a revelation cannot be spelled out in the Torah.

R’ Viener continues: In Egypt, too, the Plagues are described as Hashem’s “hand,” not just His “finger.” For example, we read (9:3), “Behold, the hand of Hashem is on your livestock.” Why, then, does the Haggadah say that the Plagues in Egypt were done with Hashem’s “finger”?

He answers: The verse just-quoted is Moshe Rabbeinu’s description of a forthcoming plague and is simply a way of saying that Hashem will strike the Egyptians. However, when the Torah describes the impressions that the plagues made on those who viewed them, we find the term “finger” used in Egypt and the term “hand” used at the Yam Suf. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Chayei Ha’bechirah p.84)

“This is my Kel and I will beautify Him.” (15:2)

From this verse, we learn that one should spend extra money to beautify his Mitzvah performance—for example, paying a premium for Tefilin or for an Etrog, or placing beautiful decorations in a Sukkah. However, notes R' Yoel Sirkes z"l (Poland; 1561-1640; known as the "Bach" after the initials of his Halachic work Bayit Chadash), the verse says, "Beautify Him!" Be sure that your intention is for Hashem's honor, not for your own. Also, imitate Him! Just as Hashem is compassionate toward those in need, so you should be. (Meishiv Nefesh 2:8)

"Moshe said to Yehoshua, 'Choose people for us and go do battle with Amalek'." (17:9)

Why did Moshe choose Yehoshua to fight Amalek rather than leading the battle himself? R' Shmuel Mordechai Wollner shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Nesivos Hatalmud in Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes:

There are two ways that forces of impurity challenge us. One is by espousing heresy, represented by Pharaoh who said (5:2), "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice? I do not know Hashem." The second is by taking advantage of feelings of hopelessness and lethargy, as Amalek did (see Devarim 25:18 — "He struck all the weak ones at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted.").

Moshe was the humblest of all men, continues R' Wollner. Humility is a very admirable trait when practiced properly, as Moshe obviously did, but those who do not understand that trait can easily confuse it with hopelessness or lethargy. Therefore, Moshe did not think he was the right person to lead the fight against Amalek. Yehoshua was a descendant of Yosef, who exuded self-confidence; he was the right person for this challenge. (Kovetz Sichot Hit'alat V p.31)

"Yehoshua did as Moshe said to him, to do battle with Amalek, and Moshe, Aharon, and Chur ascended to the top of the hill." (17:10)

The Gemara (Berachot 34b) relates: Rabban Gamliel's son was ill, so he sent two Torah scholars to Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa to ask him to pray.

R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l (1910-2012; Yerushalayim) explains: Rabban Gamliel learned from our verse that prayers are more effective when the one praying is flanked by two other people. Rabban Gamliel was concerned that R' Chanina might not, at that moment, be in the presence of two people worthy of "assisting" his prayer; therefore, Rabban Gamliel sent two Torah scholars to him.

R' Benzion Kook shlita (publisher of R' Elyashiv's Talmud lectures) adds in a footnote: The Tur (14th century Halachic code) cites a Midrash deriving from our verse that the Chazzan should be flanked in this way when he recites Selichot on a public fast day. We would have thought that Aharon and Chur accompanied Moshe to hold up his arms (see verse 12), but the Midrash is teaching that Moshe had another purpose in mind. (Shiurei Maran Ha'Grish Elyashiv)

"It happened that when Moshe raised his hand Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger." (17:11)

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 3:8) asks: Did Moshe's hands fight the war? It answers: When Moshe would raise his hands, Bnei Yisrael would look upwards and subjugated their hearts to Heaven, and then they would be victorious.

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) explains: It is a wonder that we pray that Hashem save us from suffering, for we know suffering cleanses our sins and is for our own good! Praying that we not suffer is like a child covered in mud asking his mother not to bathe him. How, then, do we justify such prayers? Our Sages teach that Hashem, too, "suffers" when we suffer; He wants to do only good for us, but He is "frustrated" when we sin and force Him to punish us. If we "look Heavenward," focusing on Hashem's desire to do good, rather than praying for our own needs, then we are justified in praying. (Ruach Chaim 3:2)

Rav Kook Torah

Beshalach: Two Levels of Love

Chanan Morrison

When the Israelites saw that they had been rescued from Pharaoh's army at the sea, they sang out with gratitude:

יְהוָה קִלֵּי וְאֶנְיָהוּ קִלֵּי-קִי אֲדֹנָי וְאֶרְמְיָהוּ

"This is my God, and I will enshrine Him;

My father's God, I will exalt Him." (Exodus 15:2)

Is the repetition in this line from Shirat Hayam - the "Song at the Sea" - merely poetic? Or is there a deeper significance to the two halves of the verse?

Although not apparent in translation, the verse uses two different names of God. The first half of the verse uses the name El, while the second half uses Elokim. What is the significance of each name? How do they specifically relate to the desire to "enshrine" and "exalt" God?

Natural and Contemplative Love

The song, Rav Kook explained, refers to two types of love for God. The first is a natural appreciation for God as our Creator and Provider. God, the Source of all life, sustains us every moment of our lives. All things are inherently drawn to their source, and this love for God comes naturally, like our innate feelings of love and respect for our parents.

This natural love of God corresponds to the Divine name El. The word El is in the singular, reflecting an appreciation for God as the only true power and the ultimate reality of the universe.

A second, higher form of love for God is acquired by reflecting on God's rule of the universe. As we uncover God's guiding hand in history, and we recognize the underlying Divine providence in the world, we experience a higher love of God. This love corresponds to the name Elokim - in the plural - referring to the myriad causes and forces that God utilizes to govern the universe.

Enshrine and Exalt

These two types of love differ in their constancy. Our natural love of God as our Creator should be constant and unwavering, like our love and respect for our parents. But the higher love, the product of contemplation and introspection, is nearly impossible to sustain continually due to life's distractions.

Regarding the innate love of God, the verse speaks of "enshrining" God.

With this natural emotion, we can create a permanent place - a shrine of reverence and love for God - in our hearts. "This is my God, and I will enshrine Him."

The higher, contemplative love, on the other hand, does not benefit from this level of constancy. We should always strive for an ever-deeper appreciation and reverence for God. This is a spiritual goal, attained through our intellectual faculties. Regarding this aspect of love, it is appropriate to speak about "exalting" God. This indicates a love that is the product of concentrated effort. "My father's God, I will exalt Him."

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 235)

from: **Peninim on the Torah** <peninim@hac1.org>

date: Jan 26, 2021, 11:10 AM

subject: Parashas Beshalach

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

וַיִּהְיוּ לִבָּב פֶּרַעַ וְעַבְדָּיו אֵל הָעַם

And the heart of Pharaoh and his servants became transformed regarding the people. (14:5)

What possessed Pharaoh to pursue the Jewish People, whom he had just (forced by Hashem) released from bondage? What was running through his mind when he made such an about-face? He had just suffered ten devastating plagues, with the death of the firstborn Egyptians striking very close to home. His people were demoralized, his country in ruin; yet, he was chasing the Jews. Did he require more proof of Hashem's power? He arrived with his soldiers at the banks of the Red Sea and saw that the sea had miraculously split, and the Jews were crossing through on dry land. Did he think that the

sea had been split for him? Did he not realize that to enter into the sea was suicidal? Pharaoh's actions bespeak a man who has lost his mind. Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, explains/rationalizes (if such a term is possible) Pharaoh's actions, based upon a halachah found in the Yerushalmi (Bava Metzia 4:3). Onaah, overreaching, refers to the laws surrounding monetary deception, the act of wrongdoing another by selling him an article for more than its real worth. Chazal distinguish three levels of onaah: when the discrepancy amounts to one-sixth; less than one-sixth; more than one-sixth of the value. When the discrepancy overreaches by one-sixth – the transaction is valid, and he need not repay the difference. If the discrepancy amounts to more than one-sixth, the transaction is void. The injured party, however, may uphold the transaction if he so chooses. The Yerushalmi questions the last halachah, which voids the sale in the event that the discrepancy overreaches one-sixth. Why can the seller not repay the injured party the money and validate the sale? Rabbi Zeira says, "The buyer can say to the seller, 'I am not comfortable having people say that you succeeded in cheating me. (I do not want people on the street conjecturing that I am a pushover, naïve in business – I could be sold anything for any price).'" In other words, it is not about the money. It is about one day the injured party screaming, "He ripped me off," and the next day making a settlement with him. The buyer's reputation is at stake.

Certainly, Pharaoh remembered the travail that he and his country had sustained the last few months, but he could not tolerate being cheated by the Jews. They went from home to home borrowing gold and silver utensils, and now they were leaving town with those utensils. The Egyptian People would not stand idly by as they were being ripped off by the Jews. He could not overlook this infraction, and he was willing to risk death to prevent it. His ego would not allow them to leave with his gold and silver.

Alternatively, I think we can add (along the same lines) "regarding the people," the Torah underscores that Pharaoh could not tolerate this behavior on the part of the "people," since their forebears had been their slaves, chattel to do with them whatever they pleased. Now, they were leaving the country as kings. This was just too much. Pharaoh would put an end to it – at all costs. He definitely paid!

וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל ד'

Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem. (14:10)

The Midrash Tanchuma (9) teaches that when Klal Yisrael saw that their situation was dire, they grasped the umnos, "profession," of their ancestors/Patriarchs and reached out to Hashem through the vehicle of prayer. The efficacy of prayer cannot be overstated. It should not be our last – but rather, our first – resort. A Jew speaks to Hashem, his Father in Heaven, through the medium of prayer. Chazal are teaching us, however, that the Jewish People turned to Hashem in prayer just because the situation was bleak. How is this to be compared to the prayers of our Patriarchs, who prayed to Hashem on a regular basis? It was their means of communication with Hashem. The prayers emanating from the Jewish People and those expressed by our Avos, Patriarchs, appear dissimilar on the surface.

Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita, cites Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, who posits that our prayers must reflect the attitude that, without Hashem, salvation is hopeless. Our only avenue to redemption, to recovery, to be extricated from the adversity that is gripping our lives, is through prayer to Hashem. Nothing else is effective. Our Avos manifested this attitude when they prayed to Hashem. They knew that it was always crunch time, because only Hashem could pull them through. Thus, every prayer that emanated from them addressed an eis tzarah, dire circumstance. Without Hashem, everything is foreboding.

Regrettably, we do not pray preemptively, waiting instead until we have exhausted all other avenues of relief, so that our backs are against the proverbial wall; then we turn to Hashem as our last resort. We must drum it into our heads that Hashem is not only the first resort – He is the only resort. Everybody/everything else is only His messenger. When we pray, it should be with this attitude – "Hashem, You are my only source of salvation. Without You, I am uncertain of any recovery." This is how we daven on

Yom Kippur. Indeed, if we would daven on a regular basis the way we daven when we know it is "crunch time," our davening would obviously have greater efficacy, because every moment is actually "crunch time."

הַתִּצְבוּ וְרֹא אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ד'

Stand fast and see the salvation of Hashem. (14:13)

Ibn Ezra writes: "You shall not wage war. You will see the salvation that Hashem will make for you." How is it possible for a nation of 600,000 men (over the age of twenty-years old) to just stand there and not fight their aggressors? The answer is that these people knew the Egyptians as their masters who lorded over them. It was impossible for the Jews who knew nothing about warfare to battle their Egyptian masters. Amalek attacked the Jews, and, without Moshe Rabbeinu's prayers, he would have dealt them a weakening blow. Likewise, these Jewish expatriated slaves could not fight the Canaanites in Eretz Yisrael. It was their children, the next generation, who had grown up as free men who conquered Eretz Yisrael. Ibn Ezra explains (Shemos 2:3), "Perhaps Hashem caused Moshe to grow up in Pharaoh's palace so that he would be used to royalty, and not fear entering into the halls of power. As a result, when Moshe observed an injustice, he acted immediately to right it, killing the Egyptian and later saving Yisro's daughters from the Midyanite shepherds who were harassing them."

Rav Mordechai Hominer explains that this concept applies equally in the world of chinuch, Jewish education (both in classroom and at home). A child must be imbued with self-esteem and self-confidence. A child who is belittled, ignored, disciplined to the extreme, will likely not develop a strong sense of self-esteem. When one's parents and/or one's rebbe/morah has little respect for his opinion, he has little hope to cultivate a sense of belief in himself. It is difficult to believe in yourself if no one else believes in you.

Horav Yisrael Zev Gustman, zl, was a brilliant talmid chacham, Torah scholar. At the young age of twenty-two, he was invited by the spiritual leader of European Jewry, the Rav of Vilna, Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl, to serve on his bais din as a dayan. Following the war, Rav Gustman came to Eretz Yisrael where he visited the Steipler Gaon, zl. The Steipler asked Rav Gustman whether he was a relative of the famous Rav Gustman who had served on Rav Chaim Ozer's bais din. When Rav Gustman replied that he was the one, the Steipler immediately stood up out of reverence for a gadol. A number of yeshivos turned to Rav Gustman in the hope that he would serve as their Rosh Yeshivah. He absolutely demurred from taking a position of leadership in a yeshivah.

These were the premier yeshivos in Eretz Yisrael. Nonetheless, he said, "No. I do not feel qualified to serve as a Rosh Yeshivah after all of the degradation to which I was subjected during the Holocaust." He felt that a Rosh Yeshivah must carry himself with a certain sense of dignity. After all that he had sustained during the war, he felt that he no longer had it in him. We have no idea the harm that we cause a child: when we put him down; when we demonstrate a lack of respect for him; when we show that his opinion holds no value in our eyes. We wonder why a young person might just turn-off to religion. Quite often, it is the result of the attitude adults manifested towards him as a youth: no respect; even disdain; and, at times, derision – since, after all, he had not been acting in the "prescribed" manner "expected" of him. The little barbs that are meant to motivate serve instead as lasting knives in the child's heart – knives which eventually destroy his relationship with Yiddishkeit. Our gedolim taught us the awesome respect we should show to each and every child, and the thoughtfulness that must be a constant and vital part of our relationship with them.

One incident has been in my mind since my early youth. I was in cheder with another young boy of similar background and extraction. His parents had also recently survived Hitler's inferno. Arguably, my friend was a discipline problem, and school was not his cup of tea. After another negative report from the rebbe, the boy's father lost it and yelled at his son, "Is this why I survived Hitler? To have a son like you?"

Certainly, the father did not mean what he said. He had lost his entire family and was an emotional wreck. His marriage after the war produced two children, a son and a daughter. His daughter married a distinguished ben

Torah, and together they raised a beautiful Torahdik family. Sadly, my friend went off the derech, left the fold, and has not been heard from. Why? Who knows? He certainly did not have positive feelings about himself.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, remembers that when the Chazon Ish, zl, spent a few weeks in Tzfas, a group of Jews davened with him in his apartment. The Chazon Ish would daven k'vasikin, at sunrise, which required a separate minyan. One morning, the Chazon Ish informed the men that, rather than daven in the apartment (which afforded them considerable room to maneuver), they would daven instead on the mirresses, balcony, which obviously did not have sufficient room. He explained that a young boy was sleeping in the room where they had normally been conducting services, and, if he would wake up, he would be embarrassed for them to see him in his pajamas. This indicates a sensitivity to a young boy's feelings evinced by the gadol hador.

Horav Yehudah Adass, Shlita, asked a young boy, "What are you thinking about as we move closer to Yom Kippur?" The boy gave a shocking response. "I am certain that I am the worst person in the world. I am a rasha, wicked, of the lowest level." "Why do you say such terrible things?" the Rav asked the boy. "This is what my father always tells me!" the boy replied. The Rosh Yeshivah (Porat Yosef) continued, "I was once walking down the street when I heard screams emanating from an apartment. I am embarrassed to repeat the words and maledictions that a woman was hurling at someone. Concerned that it could be a shalom bayis issue, matrimonial dispute, which could lead to serious ramifications, I walked up the stairs and listened by the door. I was shocked to hear the response of a young child, 'Imma, I am sorry. I will never do it again.'" "You are a rasha! What will ever become of you? You are worthless!" These were the words coming from a mother to her five-year-old son. What positive growth do you think we can expect to see from this child?" Rav Adass asked. There is no question that these words were the result of an overwhelmed, frustrated, challenged mother – but try explaining that to a five-year-old.

I cannot conclude with a story that leaves a negative taste in the reader's mind. I wrote the following story a few years back, but it is one that is worth repeating. It took place at a sheva brachos, nuptial reception, for a young couple, the husband being a brilliant scholar. The grandfather of the groom arose to say a few words. The grandfather was far from a scholar, and, as this was a gathering of elite scholars, the groom was nervous about what his loving grandfather might say.

The grandfather began, "As you all know, I hail from Europe. I would like to share an incident that took place in Europe. It is about a bright boy whose mischief took a front seat to his learning. He was so busy planning his next shtik that he had no time to learn. He had been warned countless times: 'One more time, and you are out!' The warnings and punishments left no impression on him. The final straw came when the boy took a goat and placed it inside the Aron HaKodesh. The next morning, when the chazzan opened the Ark to remove the Torah – a goat jumped out! The people were outraged. It did not take a master detective to trace the act to the mischievous boy.

"The principal of the cheder told the parents that he could no longer tolerate their son's insolence. He would have to go. It was not as if the parents were shocked. They had known that this day would come. It was inevitable. Their son, however, was floored, and he demanded to take the cheder's principal to a din Torah, adjudication, before the town's rav. Let him decide if he should be thrown out of yeshivah.

"The next day, the boy presented his case before the rav. 'Rebbe,' he said, 'there is only one cheder in town. If I am sent out of school, I have nowhere else to go. Where will I receive my Jewish education? I will have nothing. As a result, I will leave Yiddishkeit – a loss, not only to myself, but to all the generations that would emerge from me. Do you want to have this responsibility on your shoulders? Why should my descendants be sentenced to spiritual ignominy because of my mischief?' The principal could not help but agree with his recalcitrant student, who eventually turned his life around."

The grandfather concluded his story – paused for effect – and declared, "I will have you know that I was that mischievous boy. I put the goat in the Aron HaKodesh. Now look at my grandson, who is a brilliant talmid chacham. Can you imagine what would have occurred had I not succeeded in pleading my case?"

The story is powerful and, sadly occurs many a time – only not always with such a positive outcome.

ויסעו מאילם ויבאו כל עדת בני ישראל אל מדבר סין... בחמשה עשר יום לחדש השני לצאתם מארץ מצרים... וילנו כל עדת בני ישראל על משה ועל אהרן

As they journeyed from Eilim, and they came, the whole congregation of Bnei Yisrael, unto the wilderness of Sin... on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. Then the whole congregation of Bnei Yisrael murmured against Moshe and Aharon in the wilderness. (16:1,2)

Kol adas Bnei Yisrael, the whole congregation of Bnei Yisrael, explains Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, refers to the Jewish community in its entirety, in its highest meaning as a community united by its common mission. It is a community which is designated to be the "congregation" of Hashem. Thus, by using such vernacular to describe the Jewish People, the Torah implies from the get-go that the events to be recorded impact the interest of the general mission of the whole Klal Yisrael to the highest degree. It is for this reason that the Torah makes a point of underscoring the date: thirty days after this group left Egypt – where they had been enslaved for 210 years. The whole congregation of Bnei Yisrael "murmured"/complained. It was thirty days after they had been freed from the external chains that had bound them as slaves, persecuted, reviled, murdered – but now they were free! Slavery was no longer an issue. Now the issue was the anxiety of providing for their daily sustenance. This occurred through a national commitment to the institution of Shabbos.

With the gift of sustenance from Heaven, manna, Hashem announced the institution of Shabbos, which stands at the base of all Jewry and all Judaism. Through the daily miracle of the appearance of the manna (for forty uninterrupted years), Hashem introduced Shabbos to the Jews. Pesach transformed the slaves into a free people, committed to Hashem; Shabbos saw to it that they maintained this commitment.

The nation needed to be inculcated with the verity that Hashem provides our sustenance. Thus, He led them to a barren wilderness, desolate of life, a place where none of man's bare necessities was obtainable, to demonstrate to them that He – and only He – would take care of them. Nonetheless, a mere thirty days after witnessing the greatest miracles witnessed by human eyes, they murmured/complained. Where was their faith, their trust in the Almighty G-d Who took them out of Egypt?

Horav Mordechai Schwab, zl, explains that perusal of the previous pesukim will show that the nation had experienced many previous nisyonos, trials: from the liberation, to being chased by the Egyptians, to crossing the Red Sea, to a lack of water. It was one thing after another, because this is what Hashem wanted to teach them: life is filled with nisyonos. If it is not one thing, it is another. There will always be nisyonos. The purpose of these trials is to set the stage, to segue to the next phase: yeshuah, salvation. Trial – faith/trust – salvation. It never stops. Even after thirty days of trial – faith – salvation – they had more trials. No water. No food – patience/faith.

Rav Schwab derives from here that the only approach to triumphing over nisyonos is patience/shetukah, silence, acceptance, prayer. Change is on the horizon. We must wait patiently for the salvation to arrive, but we must trust that not only is it on the way, it is present, waiting to be introduced. He quotes Rav Hirsch's commentary to Hashem's response to the people's murmuring for food, Hineni mamtir lachem lechem min ha'Shomayim, "Behold, I am about to make bread rain from heaven for you" (Ibid. 16:4). Hineni – behold – not just as a result of this dissatisfaction – but Hineni – "I am already prepared." Hashem was implying that this was all part of His masterplan. The people's complaining did not catalyze the response; it had always been there – prepared and waiting for the appropriate time to be revealed and implemented.

This is how we must view nisyonos. They are a part of our lives. We must sit patiently, and pray with faith as we wait for the yeshuah, which is prepared and waiting for the right moment, but it will come.

Va'ani Tefillah

שים שלום – Sim Shalom. Establish peace.

What takes precedence – size or perfection? Does a large slice of challah precede a small, perfectly whole roll? Someone once complained to Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, the founder and expositor of the mussar, character refinement movement, that if his (Rav Yisrael's) disciple, Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl (Rav Itzele Petersburger), would spend more time studying Talmud and not immerse himself in mussar, he would be a greater talmid chacham, Torah scholar. Rav Yisrael employed the law concerning precedence in brachos, blessings, to counter his argument. In Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 168:1) it is ruled that if one has before him two pieces of bread, one of which is a large -- but imperfect -- slice, and the other a small, perfect roll, the blessing should be made on the perfect roll. Perfect trumps size. The message was simple: Rav Yitzchak Blazer might cover less Talmud, but he will become a more perfect scholar. In an alternative rendering of the incident, Rav Yisrael's retort was: that, by studying mussar, Rav Yitzchak would realize that he really has much more time available for learning Talmud. This would make up for the "lost time" study of mussar. In essence, we see that shalom, peace, is true shleimus, perfection.

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear mother and grandmother,

Leona Genshaft

לאה בת רפאל הכהן ע"ה - נפטרה ט"ז שבט תש"ע

by her family - Neil and Marie Genshaft, Isaac and Naomi

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date: Jan 24, 2021, 7:24 AM

subject: **Carrying Nitroglycerin on Shabbos**

Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>

Sun, Jan 24, 7:24 AM (5 days ago)

This week's parsha includes one of the main sources for the prohibition of carrying on Shabbos (Shemos 16:29). I therefore decided to send the following article, the original of which I wrote almost thirty years ago, hence the footnoting style and other writing aspects are different from the way I currently write.

By the way, tonight, in honor of Tu Bishvat, I am giving my weekly "Sunday Night at the Rabbi" shiur on the mitzvah of Orlah, a mitzvah whose halachos are not well known, even among talmidei chachamim. Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87579473464?pwd=MUJCSDdDQUgzckE1OGdVa0FyU3ZmZz09>

Carrying Nitroglycerin on Shabbos

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The rest of the article is attached.

Carrying Nitroglycerin on Shabbos

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

The Torah's concern for the protection of life and health is axiomatic. In virtually all instances, Torah restrictions are superseded when a life-threatening emergency exists. If the situation is extenuating, but not life-threatening, then the rule of thumb is that the Torah restriction remains in force. Sometimes, however, mitigating factors allow the overriding of a rabbinic injunction because of extenuating circumstances.

A contemporary halachic question that relates to this issue is as follows: Is there a way whereby a person suffering from angina or other heart disease may carry his medication on Shabbos through a public thoroughfare? In case of a sudden attack, there would indeed be a life-threatening need that permits procurement of such medication through any necessary means. However, there is no medical reason that compels the patient to leave his home where his medicine is kept. Is there halachic basis to allow him to leave his house with his medication, since the possible medical emergency can be completely avoided by staying home? Granted that this would result in a great hardship by making the patient housebound on Shabbos, yet this deprivation would not constitute a life-threatening emergency and would not be grounds for overriding a Torah-proscribed Shabbos prohibition.

The halachic question is two-fold: Can carrying the medicine be considered a rabbinic violation, as opposed to a Torah violation, thus making it more acceptable? Does halachic basis exist to permit overriding a rabbinic prohibition because of hardships?

The same principles can be applied to other medical situations. For example, the diabetic who receives insulin injection is usually medically advised to carry with him some food items containing sugar as a precaution against insulin shock; and certain asthmatics and other allergy sufferers are advised never to go anywhere without their medication available. Would these patients be allowed to carry their sugar or medicine on Shabbos in a way that involves violating only a rabbinic decree?

Most contemporary authorities who address this issue base their discussion on a responsum of Rav Shmuel Engel, dated 9 Tammuz 5679 (July 7, 1919).[1] At the time of this question, there was a government regulation in force requiring the carrying of identification papers whenever one walked outside, with serious consequences for those apprehended in violation. Rav Engel was asked if a person could place his identification papers under his hat on Shabbos while walking to shul. Rav Engel's analysis of the halachic issues involved will clarify many aspects of our question. Shabbos violations fall under two broad headings: those activities that are forbidden min hatorah (Torah-mandated), and those that are forbidden by rabbinic injunction, but do not qualify as melacha (forbidden work) according to the Torah's definition. Torah law is not violated unless the melacha is performed in a manner in which that activity is usually done. An act performed in a peculiar way, such as carrying something in a way that such an item is not normally carried, constitutes a rabbinic violation, but is permitted under Torah law. This deviation from the norm is called a shinui.[2]

Rav Engel points out that carrying identification papers in one's hat would constitute a shinui, thus allowing a possibility of leniency. He quotes two Talmudic sources that permit melacha with a shinui on Shabbos due to extenuating, but not life-threatening, circumstances.

Rabbi Marinus said, "One who is suffering is allowed to suck milk directly from a goat on Shabbos. Why? [Is not milking an animal on Shabbos a violation of a Torah prohibition?] Sucking is considered milking in an unusual way, and the rabbis permitted it because of the discomfort of the patient." [3]

Tosafos notes that the leniency is allowed only if the suffering is caused by illness and not simply by thirst. The Talmudic text and commentary of Tosafos are quoted as halachic decision by the Shulchan Aruch.[4]

The above-quoted Talmudic text includes another case:

Nachum of Gaul said, "One is allowed on Shabbos to clean a spout that has become clogged by crushing [the clogged matter] with one's foot. Why? [Is it not forbidden to perform repair work on Shabbos?] Since the repair work is done in an unusual manner, the rabbis permitted it in a case of potential damage."

Based on these Talmudic sources, Rav Engel concludes that the rabbis permitted the performance of melacha with a shinui under extenuating circumstances, even though rabbinic prohibitions are not usually waived in these situations. Furthermore, he points out two other mitigating factors to permit carrying identification papers: According to most opinions, the prohibition to carry on Shabbos in our cities (even in the usual fashion) is rabbinic, because "our public areas do not constitute a public domain according to Torah law." And, carrying identification papers would constitute a melacha done without any need for the result, which would also provide a reason to be lenient, as will be explained.

Melacha She'einah Tzericha Legufah

In several places,[5] the Gemara records a dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Shimon as to whether a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, an action done intentionally and in the normal fashion, but without a need for the result of the action, is forbidden by the Torah or if it is a rabbinic injunction. (Note: an article that I will be issuing in a few weeks discusses this topic in greater detail.) For example, carrying a corpse from a private domain into a public domain would not constitute a Torah desecration of Shabbos according to Rabbi Shimon, since one's purpose is to remove the corpse from the private domain and not because he has a need for it in the public domain. Similarly, snaring or killing a predator insect or reptile when one's concern is only to avoid damage is a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, and therefore constitutes only a rabbinic violation according to Rabbi Shimon. Since one has no need for the caught reptile, Rabbi Shimon considers the violation rabbinic.

Both of these cases violate Torah prohibition according to Rabbi Yehudah, who opines that a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah is a Torah prohibition.

Although the Rambam[6] follows the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah, the majority of halachic authorities follow the opinion of Rabbi Shimon.

Rabbi Engel considers carrying identification papers in one's hat to be a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, because the carrier has no personal use for the papers and is carrying them merely to avoid injury or loss. He compares this to the killing of a snake, where the intent is to avoid injury. Although his point is arguable, as evidenced

by a later responsum,[7] Rabbi Engel reiterates his position that this situation qualifies as a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah.

Furthermore, there is a basis to consider carrying only a rabbinic prohibition, because no public domain according to the Torah definition – reshus harabim – exists today. (It should be noted that notwithstanding Rav Engel's statement on this subject, this position is strongly disputed by many authorities who contend that there is a reshus harabim today.) Because of these two mitigating reasons, Rabbi Engel permitted carrying the identification papers in one's hat, which is an indirect method of carrying, in order to attend synagogue or to perform a different mitzvah.

As we will see shortly, some later authorities quote this responsum as a basis to permit our original question, although certain aspects of our case differ significantly from those of Rav Engel's. Firstly, whereas in Rav Engel's case, the identification papers had no inherent worth to the carrier, the nitroglycerin tablets do have intrinsic value to the patient. This would render them a melacha hatzericha legufah, a melacha performed with interest in the results being done, which constitutes a Torah-forbidden melacha. Thus, one of the reasons for being lenient is nullified.

Secondly, whereas our question includes carrying medication for social or other reasons, Rav Engel permitted the carrying of the identification papers only for the performance of a mitzvah. Would he have allowed a greater leniency for someone who is ill and permitted it even for social reasons? Bearing in mind the case of Rabbi Marinus, where permission is based on medical needs, could leniency be extended to allow carrying with a shinui, even for social or other reasons?

Several later halachic works discuss the question of a patient carrying medication with a shinui as a precaution against a sudden attack. Rav Yekusiel Y. Greenwald[8] suggests that a sugar cube be sewn into the pocket of a diabetic's coat before Shabbos, so that he would not be carrying in the usual manner on Shabbos. Rav Greenwald bases his opinion on the Gemara[9] that allows the carrying of an amulet on Shabbos as a medicinal item, and the responsum of Rav Shmuel Engel quoted above.

Unfortunately, the comparison to the law of kemeiya (amulet) seems strained. The halacha clearly states that the kemeiya must be worn in the way that it is normally worn, and that it can be worn only if it is a proven remedy. Under these circumstances, the kemeiya is considered to be like a garment. There does not seem to be a basis in these considerations to allow carrying an item. Furthermore, Rav Greenwald allows the diabetic to go outside with a sugar cube sewn into his garment, even for non-mitzvah-related activities, whereas Rav Engel permitted the carrying of identification papers only when going outside for mitzvah purposes.

Rav Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg[10] cites the responsum of Rav Greenwald, but disputes his conclusions sharply. In addition to the difficulty we have noted, he also disputes two of Rav Greenwald's assumptions.

1. Whereas Rav Greenwald assumes that these circumstances permit sewing a sugar cube or medicine tablet into a garment in order to carry it, Rav Waldenberg does not feel that the circumstances justify carrying an item in this fashion.

2. Rav Waldenberg writes that the only situation in which Rav Engel permitted carrying with a shinui was when the activity would have constituted a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah. This applies to carrying identification papers, where the carrier has no personal need for the papers and is carrying them only to avoid being apprehended. It does not apply to the case for medication, where the patient wants the medicine available for his own use.

Rav Waldenberg concludes that the leniency proposed by Rav Engel does not apply to the situation at hand, and that this patient would not be allowed to carry his medication outside, even when using a shinui. A mediating position is taken by Rav Yehoshua Neuwirth.[11] Although he equates the situation of the person carrying identification papers to the one carrying medication, and does permit the carrying of medication with a shinui for the purpose of performing a mitzvah, Rav recommends other specific guidelines that would reduce the violations. The reader is encouraged to see Rav Neuwirth's entire ruling, and also see Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah, Volume 1 #248, who understands the Gemara's discussion in Kesubos in a way that preempts the basis for Rav Engel's lenient ruling.

A responsum by Rav Menashe Klein[12] concludes that a patient is allowed to carry nitroglycerin tablets with a shinui for the purpose of going to shul or a different mitzvah. He bases himself on the following two rationales:

1. There is currently no public domain according to Torah definitions.
2. He considers this carrying to be a melacha she'einah tzericha legufah, a point that is certainly disputed by the other authorities quoted.

An interesting comment quoted in the name of the Chasam Sofer by the Levushei Mordechai[13] should also shed light on this issue. Levushei Mordechai reports that the Chasam Sofer was in the habit of carrying a handkerchief tied around his wrist outside of the eruv on Shabbos, because he considered this to be carrying with a shinui that is permitted because of the need for the handkerchief. The prohibition of rabbinic origin is overridden by the need for personal dignity (kavod haberiyos). No stipulation

is made by Levushei Mordechai that the walking is done exclusively for the purpose of performing a mitzvah.

One would think that the discomfort of staying home on Shabbos provides greater reason to be lenient than the concept of personal dignity, and that this responsum could therefore be utilized as a basis to allow carrying of nitroglycerin with a shinui.

However, few later poskim refer to the comment of the Levushei Mordechai.[14]

Having presented the background and references on this issue, I leave it to an individual who finds himself in these circumstances to discuss the question with his or her individual posek.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch (Shemos 20:10) notes that people mistakenly think that work is prohibited on Shabbos in order to provide a day of rest. This is incorrect, he points out, because the Torah does not prohibit doing avodah, which connotes hard work, but melachah, which implies purpose and accomplishment. On Shabbos, we refrain from constructing and altering the world for our own purposes. The goal of Shabbos is to emphasize Hashem's rule as the focus of creation by refraining from our own creative acts (Shemos 20:11)

PARSHAT BESHALACH - A Desert Seminar

ALL ON THE WAY TO HAR SINAI

Bnei Yisrael's journey from Egypt to Har Sinai was certainly not easy. Instead of the anticipated cheerful 'three day journey', Bnei Yisrael endured several weeks of life-threatening situations - including lack of food & water, and military attacks by both Egypt and Amalek.

Did something go wrong, or were all of these events part of God's original 'plan'?

Furthermore, if these 'tests of faith' were indeed part of a divine 'plan' - did God really expect for Bnei Yisrael not to complain?

To answer these questions, this week's shiur analyzes the progressive nature of the events that occur from the time that Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt until they reach Har Sinai, while considering their relationship to the overall theme of Sefer Shmot.

INTRODUCTION - THREE DAYS OR SEVEN WEEKS?

Prior to the actual Exodus, God had made several specific promises that He would take Bnei Yisrael from Egypt to the Promised Land (see Shmot 3:16-17 and 6:5-8, as well as Breishit 15:13-18); yet we never found even a hint that God wanted Bnei Yisrael to dwell for any length of time in the desert (other than to cross it). True, Moshe had told Pharaoh that Bnei Yisrael requested a three day journey to worship God in the desert; however, Moshe was never instructed to convey that message to his own people.

Hence, it only makes sense that Bnei Yisrael would expect to travel directly from Egypt to Eretz Canaan.

Furthermore, the opening pasuk of Parshat Beshalach implies that traveling directly to Eretz Canaan remained the primary goal of the Exodus, while the 're-routing' of that journey (to the southeast) was simply a 'maneuver' taken due to 'military considerations' (see 13:17, and 14:1-3).

However, in Parshat Beshalach, a very different set of events unfold. Instead of leading Bnei Yisrael directly to Israel (or to stop at Har Sinai on the way to Israel), God reroutes their journey towards the Red Sea. Then, after crossing the Red Sea, Bnei Yisrael do embark on a 'three-day journey' into the desert, but only to arrive at 'Mara', rather than 'Har Sinai'. Then, over the course of their five-week excursion from Mara to Har Sinai, they run out of food at Midbar Sin, run out of water at Refidim and then face Amalek's unprovoked attack. Only after some six weeks do they finally arrive at Har Sinai.

In the following shiur we will attempt to find the purpose of this sequence of events - by considering the underlying reason for Bnei Yisrael's redemption from Egypt.

A SECOND CHANCE

In our study thus far of Sefer Shmot, we have shown how the Exodus served as a fulfillment of God's covenant with Avraham Avinu (at "brit bein ha'btarim"). However, the purpose of that covenant was not merely to promise Avraham's offspring salvation from a future oppressor; rather God was 'planting the seeds' of a people that were to become His model nation - to make His Name known to all nations.

From this perspective, the redemption that God promised in "brit bein ha'btarim" was only the first stage in a long historical process. After their redemption from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael would first need to receive the special set of laws and guidelines (better known as 'Matan Torah') - that would facilitate their becoming that 'model nation'. After receiving and studying those laws, the nation would be 'spiritually' ready to inherit the Promised Land.

For this very reason, God found it necessary to first call upon Bnei Yisrael to perform 'teshuvah' [repentance] even **before** the Exodus began. [See Yechezkel 20:4-10, and our shiur on Parshat

Va'era.] Presumably, had Bnei Yisrael indeed obeyed that original call, the redemption process could have proceeded as originally planned, i.e. the nation would have traveled directly to Har Sinai (in three days) - to thank God and receive the Torah. (See Seforno's introduction to Sefer Shmot; see also Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban and Seforno on 2:23-25.)

Unfortunately, the nation did not repent in the manner that God had expected. As we explained in last week's shiur, the offering of the 'korban Pesach' may have rendered them worthy 'just enough' to survive the Tenth Plague; nevertheless, at the time of the Exodus Bnei Yisrael were far from being 'spiritually ready' for Matan Torah. Therefore, we posit that God found it necessary to first challenge His people with a series of 'tests' (as described in Parshat Beshalach) - to help prepare them for Matan Torah!

THE NEW PLAN

The following table lists the key events that take place during Bnei Yisrael's journey from Egypt to Har Sinai:

LOCATION	EVENT
1) Yam Suf (14:11)	Am Yisrael is attacked by Mitzraim;
2) Mara (15:24)	the water is bitter;
3) Midbar Sin (15:2)	there is no food to eat;
4) Refidim I (17:3)	there is no water to drink;
5) Refidim II (17:8)	Am Yisrael is attacked by Amalek.

[Note the chiasmic structure: war-water-food-water-war.]

Despite the distinctive nature of each of these events, we will show how and why God *intentionally* initiates these incidents in order to catalyze Bnei Yisrael's spiritual growth, to 'train' them to become His Nation!

To appreciate the specific purpose of each individual event, we must first consider WHY Bnei Yisrael had not performed proper 'teshuvah' in Egypt.

BREAKING SLAVE MENTALITY

It is extremely difficult for a slave, even after having gained his freedom, to act or think like a free man. As we explained in Parshat Va'era, Bnei Yisrael did not listen to God's original call because of their 'crushed spirits and hard labor': "v'e-lo sham'u el Moshe, mikotzer **ruach** u-meavoda **kasha**" (see 6:9).

The strain of their prolonged bondage and the fatigue of their daily routine had drained them of all spirituality.

Specifically because of this bondage - Bnei Yisrael had grown instinctively dependent upon their Egyptian masters. Therefore, to facilitate their transformation - from Pharaoh's slaves to God's servants - they must change their instinctive physical dependence on Egypt to a cognitive spiritual dependence on God. [See an amazing Ibn Ezra on Shmot 14:10 for a discussion of this topic.]

We all know how difficult it is for an individual to change his character, all the more so for an entire nation. Therefore, the rebuilding of Am Yisrael's character becomes a very complex process. This background can help us understand the need for the variety of events that transpire from the time that Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt. To explain how, we will show how that a change of character occurs in one of two patterns - via:

- 1) A traumatic experience - which may facilitate a sudden change.
- 2) A change of daily routine - which affects instinctive behavior.

As we will see, God employs both approaches.

1) KRIYAT YAM SUF - SPLITTING OLD TIES

Kriyat Yam Suf [the splitting of the Red Sea] may be understood as the traumatic experience that helps Bnei Yisrael break away from their instinctive dependence upon Egypt.

Recall that, at Kriyat Yam Suf, God inflicted His final punishment upon Pharaoh and his army (14:4). Were God's sole intention merely to punish the Egyptians, He could have done so during the Ten Plagues. The fact that Bnei Yisrael must witness this Egyptian defeat suggests that these events occur for the sake of Bnei Yisrael as well.

This purpose becomes clearer in light of Bnei Yisrael's reaction to the imminent threat of the approaching Egyptian army:

"And they complained to Moshe saying... What have you done to us by taking us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing **we told you in Egypt**: Let us be and **we will serve the Egyptians**, for it is better for us to **serve** the Egyptians than die in the desert?!" (14:11-12)

[See Ibn Ezra on 14:13 where he explains why Bnei Yisrael did not even consider confronting the Egyptians in battle.]

God responds to Bnei Yisrael's complaint by commanding them to 'break away' from this instinctive dependence:

"Do not fear, stand upright and watch God's salvation... for the manner in which you see Mitzraim today - you will **never see them again**" ["**lo tosifu** lir'otam od ad olam"] (14:13).

Although God's reassurance appears to be a **promise**, for some reason Chazal interpret this statement as a **commandment**! According to Ramban (14:13), Chazal interpret this pasuk as follows: "In the manner by which you look at Mitzraim today - **do not look at them this way ever again**" (14:13).

God here does **not** promise His nation that they will never face an Egyptian army again. Rather, He **commands** them to 'never again' look to Egypt for their salvation.

Although this interpretation of "lo tosifu lir'otam" does not appear to be the simple 'pschat' of this pasuk, it does find support in a parallel reference in the 'tochacha' in Parshat Ki Tavo (see Devarim 28:1-69). At the conclusion of that lengthy rebuke, God warns Bnei Yisrael that - should they disobey Him - they will be exiled and sold into slavery (see Devarim 28:62-67 / note "ki **lo shama'ta** be-kol Hashem..."). Their condition will deteriorate to such an extent, the Torah warns, that they will actually **hope** that someone will 'purchase them as slaves'.

To emphasize this point, note how the end of that Tochacha employs a phrase very similar to the phrase used to describe God's command before "kriyat Yam Suf":

"And God will return you to Egypt in ships, in the manner that I told you: '**lo tosif od lir'otah**' [do not look at them this way again], and you will offer yourselves to your enemies for sale as slaves and maidservants, but no one will purchase you" (28:68).

[The word 'ba-derech' - 'in the manner' - should not be understood as a description of the ship-route to Egypt, but rather as a description of their 'state of mind' as they are exiled to Egypt inside of those crowded ships.]

Ironically, the last stage of the 'tochacha' has Am Yisrael returning to the same state they were in before they left Egypt, where they yearn for total dependence on their human masters! In the slave-market, their only hope for survival would be for an Egyptian to buy them (to become his slave); otherwise they will starve to death. [See also Devarim 17:16 & Yeshayahu 31:1-3 to support this interpretation of "**lo tosifu li'rotam**...".]

Thus, after the miracle of "kriyat Yam Suf", it appears as though God's plan had succeeded. Upon seeing the drowning of the Egyptians, Bnei Yisrael arrive at the 'proper' conclusion:

"...and Yisrael recognized His great Hand.. and the people **feared God and believed** in God and Moshe His servant" (Shmot 14:30-31).

Then,

They instinctively respond with a song of praise to God: "Az yashir Moshe u-vnei Yisrael..." (see 15:1).

2) MARA - A DESERT SEMINAR

After crossing the Red Sea, Bnei Yisrael set out on their 'three-day journey' into the desert. However, instead of arriving at Har Sinai, they arrive at Mara, where the only water they could find is bitter and hence undrinkable (see 15:22-23). As we'd expect, the people complain to Moshe, their leader; who in turns complains to God. As their complaints appear to be justified, God provides Moshe with a solution to 'sweeten' the water (see 15:24-25).

Certainly God realized that the people could not survive without water, nonetheless He led them to a location *without* water - **in order** that the people would complain. In this manner, God teaches

the nation not to take their water supply for granted; rather - it now becomes clear to them that their physical survival is dependent upon God - who now tends to their water supply. [Recall that in Egypt, the Nile River supplied drinking water for the entire country, and hence it became like a God to Egypt - and Pharaoh considered himself as the god-like master over the Nile / see Yechezkel 29:1-3.]

Now, after these two traumatic events have shown the nation who their real 'master' is, Chumash informs us how God gives the people another chance to show their readiness to accept His laws:

"And He said - im **shamoa tishma** le-kol Hashem Elokecha - Should you **listen** to the voice of God, and do what is proper in His eyes, and listen to His commandments, then the affliction that I put on the Egyptians I will not put on you, for I am God your Healer" (15:26 / see shiur on Parshat Va'era.).

Note how Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of this offer can 'cure' their original 'attitude problem' reflected by "**ve-lo sham'u el Moshe**..." (see 6:9, and our shiur on Parshat Va'era).

Furthermore, by linking the sweetness of the water to their readiness to obey His laws, God teaches Bnei Yisrael an important lesson of spiritual dependence. This connection between 'water' and 'following God' will emerge numerous times in Chumash, and forms the basis of the famous Midrash Chazal of 'ein mayim ela Torah' - that the term 'water' in Tanach symbolically refers to Torah.

[The 'message' of the 'eit' which God instructs Moshe to cast into the water (see 15:23-25) may also relate back to Gan Eden, itself a motif of an environment that demands obedience to God. See also Mishlei 3:18 and its context ("etz chayim hi la-machazikim bah...").]

A 'MODEL CAMP' FOR A 'MODEL NATION'

At their next camp-site, at Eilim (see 15:27), God gives Am Yisrael a short 'rest' - as there is plenty of water and food. But note how they 'just so happen' to find **twelve** springs and **seventy** palm trees!

The 'twelve springs' obviously reflect the twelve Tribes. [Recall the twelve monuments erected at Har Sinai to represent Am Yisrael when they accept the covenant in Shmot 24:4-7.] We posit as well that the seventy palm trees represent the 'seventy nations'. Just as the spring provides 'water' - so the trees can bear their best fruit; so too when Bnei Yisrael will become a nation properly keeping God's Laws, the other nations can learn from this 'model' and thus reach their fullest potential.

After this educational 'time out', Bnei Yisrael arrive in Midbar Sin, where God creates yet another crisis.

3) MIDBAR SIN - BASIC TRAINING

After arriving in Midbar Sin, the food supply runs out, triggering yet another round of complaints (16:2-3). Even though Bnei Yisrael have the right to ask for food, the way in which they ask is inexcusable:

"If only we had died by the Hand of God in Egypt, when we had plenty of meat and bread to eat! Now you have brought us out into this desert to die of famine" (16:3).

The very tone of their complaint (and its content), indicate that Bnei Yisrael had retained their instinctive dependence upon Mitzraim. Their instinctive reaction to this terrible hunger includes reminiscing about the 'good old days' in Egypt. The trauma they had experienced heretofore was not sufficient to totally change their character. To rectify this, God will force them into a **daily routine** that hopefully will slowly change their instinctive behavior.

The manna served this very purpose, as it provided a daily routine that transformed what was once their physical dependence on Mitzraim into a physical dependence on God. As explained in Sefer Devarim:

"And He tormented you and starved you, then gave you 'manna' to eat... **in order to teach you** that man does not live on bread alone, rather, man lives by whatever God commands" (Devarim 8:3).

By allowing only enough food for one day at a time, Bnei Yisrael

learn to become dependent solely on God. To emphasize this point, their food falls directly from heaven. Note how the Torah uses a key word - 'nisayon' (a test) in its description of the purpose of the manna:

"Behold I will rain down bread for you from the heavens, and the people shall go out and gather each day that day's portion - lema'an **anasenu** (= 'nisayon') - **in order that I may test them**, to see whether or not they **will follow my instructions...**" (16:4).

The word "nisayon" here should not be understood simply as a 'test' that will help God assess Bnei Yisrael's obedience. The purpose of this "nisayon" was to raise the nation to a higher level in their relationship with God. In a similar manner, we find that the Torah uses this same root in the story of the Akeida where God 'tests' Avraham ["ve-Hashem **nisa** et Avraham..." /see Breishit 22:1] - not to find out **if** he is worthy, but rather **to make** him worthy.

The manna served a similar purpose. God is not testing Bnei Yisrael to find out **IF** they will obey Him, rather He is **training** them in order that they learn **HOW** to obey Him.

4) REFIDIM - PREPARING FOR HAR SINAI

The next stop on their journey (and the last stop before arriving at Har Sinai) is Refidim - where they can't find any water to drink (17:1-3). But why does God lead them to such a location? Certainly He realizes that Bnei Yisrael cannot survive without water.

Once again, God **wants** Bnei Yisrael to complain!

However, this time God's plan is more complex, as His scheme at Refidim will prepare Bnei Yisrael both physically and spiritually for Har Sinai. As you review the details of that story (see 17:1-6), note how God solves their water shortage.

As you probably remember, God instructs Moshe to hit the rock - and it would supply water. But we would expect that rock (and hence the water source) to be in Refidim - where the people are suffering from thirst. Instead, God instructs Moshe to gather some elders (see 17:5-6) and **travel** from Refidim to the rock at "Chorev" - the same site where God first appeared to him at the burning bush (see 3:1) - the same site that later becomes Har Sinai! [See Shmot 3:12 & Devarim 5:2.]

But would it not have made more sense for God to supply this dearly needed water at Refidim, where the people are encamped!

One could suggest that God is providing water purposely only at Har Sinai, for He wants the nation to first encounter Har Sinai as a source for their physical salvation - that will quench their terrible thirst. By providing water at Har Sinai, the nation will now eagerly travel from Refidim directly to Har Sinai.

Note the wording 17:5, where God instructs Moshe to take his staff with which 'he hit the Nile' - to hit the rock at Chorev. Even though Moshe's staff also turned into a "nachash", and had also split the sea, etc. - yet God specifically refers to it here as the one with which he 'hit the Nile' - for Har Sinai will now become the new source of water for Bnei Yisrael, replacing their old source of water - the mighty Nile River of Egypt.

Let's consider the reality of this situation. After Moshe hits the rock, the water would gush forth from Chorev and flow into the desert. But to drink that water, Bnei Yisrael will need to travel from Refidim to Har Sinai, to their **new source** of water. [For proof that hitting the rock created a gushing river flowing down the mountain - see Devarim 9:21.]

This initial encounter with Mount Sinai - where it becomes the source for their physical existence, sets the stage for Matan Torah, when Har Sinai will become the source for their spiritual existence. Not only has heaven replaced earth as the source of bread (the manna food), but now Har Sinai has replaced the Nile as their constant source of water.

In this manner, Bnei Yisrael's total dependence on Mitzraim has now been replaced by their total dependence on God.

5) THE WAR WITH AMALEK - LOOKING UP TO HAR SINAI

As Bnei Yisrael begin their journey from Refidim to Har Sinai (to their new source of water), Amalek attacks. War breaks out, and

God orders that Yehoshua lead Bnei Yisrael in battle.

In contrast to passive nature of Bnei Yisrael's participation in battle against the Egyptian army - when God split the Red Sea, here Bnei Yisrael do the fighting themselves. But to assure that the people recognize that God Himself brings them victory - despite their own military efforts - God instructs Moshe to climb the hill and raise his staff heavenward. Upon which hill does Moshe stand?

Based on the juxtaposition between this narrative and the incident at 'masa u-meriva', Ibn Ezra explains that Moshe stands with his hands raised high - on Har Sinai! Just as Har Sinai has become their source of water, it now becomes their source of military salvation, as well.

For Yisrael to become victorious, Moshe must raise his hands (see 17:11) to show and teach the people to look to Hashem, to Har Sinai, for their salvation.

[See Midrash in Rashi (17:11) & Rosh Hashana 29:1.]

FROM PESACH TO SHAVUOT

We have shown that during the seven weeks from the Exodus to Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael encounter several traumatic experiences and changes in their daily routine that helped prepare them for Matan Torah. During this 'training period' they have also become more active in the process of their redemption - they are now ready to take on the next stage of the redemption process: to receive the Torah in order to become God's special Nation in His land.

Not only was this seven week time period significant for Bnei Yisrael at the time of Exodus, this same time period of the year remains no less significant for future generations as well. It is not by chance that Chazal identify a similar purpose in the seven weeks of the Sefirat ha-Omer, where we count the seven weeks from the celebration of our freedom from Egypt [on Pesach] in preparation for our commemoration of Matan Torah on Shavuot.

Each year, after we thank God for our freedom from slavery, we prepare ourselves for seven weeks - to become worthy of, and to be thankful for - our receiving of the Torah.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

FOR FURTHER IYUN

Many traditional sources indicate that Bnei Yisrael required an educational process of one sort or another upon their departure from Egypt in order to recover from the effects of the lengthy period of bondage. The type of process required comes in two forms: PHYSICAL & SPIRITUAL

PHYSICAL

Military training and the development of confidence. Several mefarshim emphasize that, as they leave Egypt, Bnei Yisrael are in no position to conduct a war - the implication of the opening pasuk of Parshat Beshalach ("pen yinachem ha-am bir'otam milchama..."). The Ibn Ezra stresses this point at least twice in his commentary (peirush ha-katzar - 13:17; peirush ha-aroch - 14:13).

The Ibn Ezra (in the second source mentioned) goes so far as to say that Hashem had to see to it that this generation would die in the wilderness rather than enter the land, because the period of bondage had crushed their spirits to the point where they would never be able to fight for the land. (This comment obviously has ramifications with regards to the sin of the spies and other related topics.)

The Malbim (commenting on the parsha's opening pasuk) likewise writes that Bnei Yisrael needed time to develop the courage necessary to wage war. Hashem therefore decided not to lead them along the shortest route to Canaan.

The Abarbanel comments that the second pasuk of the parsha mentions Bnei Yisrael's being equipped with arms to emphasize that their resources were useless as they had no heart for battle.

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:24, 32) writes that the grueling experience of the wilderness travel was necessary to physically prepare Bnei Yisrael for the conquest.

SPIRITUAL

Spiritual rehabilitation - the approach we take in the shiur. Within this approach, however, we find two versions: Bnei Yisrael's spiritual growth is necessary as preparation for Matan Torah, or for their entry into Eretz Canaan.

In the shiur we adopt the former view, which appears explicitly in Rabbenu Bechaye's comments to the opening pasuk of the parsha. He writes that all the travails that Bnei Yisrael experienced constituted a 'nisayon' - "in order that their inner intellect would grow in the levels of trust [in Hashem], which forms the root of faith, in order that they are worthy to receive the Torah." This approach may have a much earlier source, as well. The Midrash Tanchuma (Yitro 10) writes that Hashem did not give Bnei Yisrael the Torah immediately upon their departure from Egypt because they had 'blemishes'. A recovery period was therefore necessary before they could receive the Torah. The Abarbanel (Yitro 19) interprets these 'blemishes' as the spiritual influence of Egypt. As we claim in the shiur, he explains that the miracles at sea and in the wilderness cured these spiritual ills by reinforcing Bnei Yisrael's trust in Hashem.

In a similar vein, the Alshich (14:10) writes that the Yam Suf experience was necessary in order to prevent any arrogance on Bnei Yisrael's part. The threat posed at the sea humbled them in preparation for Matan Torah. Later, in his comments to 19:1, the Alshich compares the process that Bnei Yisrael undergo during this period to the period of purification required after the onset of certain forms of tum'a. Yetziat Mitzraim constituted the cessation of tum'a; the following seven weeks correspond to the 'shiv'a nekiyim' - the seven 'clean days' - that spiritually prepared them for Matan Torah.

On a more kabbalistic level, the Ramchal (Choker U-mekubal 18) writes that after Bnei Yisrael had sunken to the forty-nine 'levels of impurity' in Egypt, over the next 49 days Hashem shone upon them the forty-nine 'levels of sanctity' to render them worthy of Matan Torah. All this relates to the point made in the shiur, that the events that occurred in between yetziat Mitzraim and Matan Torah served to spiritually prepare Bnei Yisrael for Matan Torah.

By contrast, Rav Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk (Meshech Chochma) and the Netziv (in He-amek Davar) maintain that Hashem led the people into the wilderness in order to spiritually prepare them for their entry into the land.

Rav Meir Simcha focuses specifically on the need for Bnei Yisrael to rid themselves of Egyptian paganism; the Netziv speaks more generally about the need for Bnei Yisrael to establish their individual character, which necessitated a journey through the wilderness, far away from other societies and cultures.

We should perhaps note in this context a passage in Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer 42, which states that, as Bnei Yisrael saw the Egyptians closing in on them at sea, they repented and discarded their Egyptian idols. Apparently, they had not adequately repented from their avoda zara while in Egypt.

There are also indications of the fact that Bnei Yisrael had not yet broken their sense of dependence on Egypt, for one reason or another. The Mechilta (on the first pasuk of the parsha) writes that Pharaoh had sent escorts to accompany Bnei Yisrael as they departed from Egypt.

Rav Baruch Epstein (Torah Temima) and Rav Dov Rabinowitz (Da'at Sofrim) use this Midrash to explain how Bnei Yisrael could have considered returning to Egypt (as Hashem was concerned about - "ve-shavu Mitzrayma"). As the Egyptians had begun treating Bnei Yisrael with dignity, they felt that all the plagues and miracles had brought about a change of heart on the part of the Egyptians. Thus, Bnei Yisrael had yet to turn their backs entirely on Egypt.

Furthermore, the Da'at Sofrim notes that the parsha's opening pasuk describes yetziat Mitzraim as "be-shalach Par'o et ha-am" - Pharaoh letting the people go, rather than Hashem taking them out. (This was noted already by the Abarbanel, who explains differently; see also Ozneyim La-Torah and Nechama Leibowitz's *Studies* on this parsha, 1.)

Da'at Sofrim explains that Bnei Yisrael still felt dependent on Pharaoh's decision to set them free, rather than guided by Hashem's providence. An extreme expression of Bnei Yisrael's continued sense of dependence on Egypt appears in the Akeidat Yitzchak, in his comments to 14:11. He claims that Bnei Yisrael had thought that Hashem intended for them to live permanently in Ramses (as they had when Yaakov and his family first resettled in Egypt). It was Moshe, they felt, who forced them to leave Ramses and continue into the wilderness. This clearly reflects that they had not yet seen themselves as an independent nation. They were content to live as free people under Egyptian rule; they had not resigned themselves to the fact that they would establish their own society in Canaan.

PARSHAT BESHALACH

"AMALEK - - V'LO YA'RAY ELOKIM"

Many nations have attacked and oppressed Am Yisrael throughout its history. Yet, for some reason, Amalek is singled out as Israel's 'arch enemy.' What was so terrible about Amalek's attack that requires a battle 'for all generations'?

To answer this question, we examine some very interesting details in the Torah's description of this event (that are often overlooked) in attempt to determine if the commandment to destroy Amalek should be understood as something 'genetic' or 'generic'.

INTRODUCTION

The details of Amalek's attack on Israel in Parshat Beshalach are quite scant. However, by considering *when* this battle takes place, as well as the parallel source in Sefer Devarim, a more complete picture emerges - that can help us understand why Amalek remains Israel's 'eternal' enemy.

We begin our study with a discussion of 'who' is 'where' when Amalek first attacks.

WHO'S IN REFIDIM?

Note how the Torah begins the story of Amalek, immediately after the story of "massa u'meriva":

"And Amalek came, and attacked Israel at REFIDIM..."

(see Shmot 17:8, after 17:1-7)

From this pasuk alone, it would seem as though ALL of Bnei Yisrael are encamped in Refidim when Amalek attacked. However, when we consider what took place during the previous event (i.e. the story of "massa u'meriva"), a very different picture emerges. Let's review those events:

"And Bnei Yisrael traveled from MIDBAR SIN... and encamped in REFIDIM, and there was **no water** for the people to drink... and they quarreled with Moshe..." (17:1-3)

To solve this water shortage, God instructs Moshe to take his staff hit the rock etc. However, recall **where** that rock is located:

"God said to Moshe, PASS BEFORE the people, TAKE with you SOME OF THE ELDERS, and take the staff... I will be standing before you at the ROCK at CHOREV; strike the rock [there] and water will issue from it..." (17:5-6)

The rock that Moshe hits is NOT in Refidim - rather, it is located at Har Sinai! Therefore, to drink this water, the entire nation will now need to travel from Refidim to Har Sinai (as we discussed in our first shiur on Parshat Beshalach).

Imagine the resulting situation: The entire nation, who had suffered several days of life-threatening thirst in a hot desert, must now first quench its immediate thirst, and then move its camp to the new water source at Har Sinai. Those who still had ample strength probably went first to the water source - to bring supplies back to those who were too weak to travel.

One could also assume that this journey was not very organized, with the stronger men advancing ahead to set up the new campsite, while those who were 'weak and tired' lingered behind.

AMALEK ATTACKS

It is precisely at this point when Amalek attacks: "Amalek came, and attacked Israel at REFIDIM..." (see 17:8). But who is in Refidim? - Only a remnant of the camp - the weak and the tired -

most probably, primarily the women and children.

Agreed, our interpretation thus far has been based on conjecture and 'reading between the lines.' However, in the parallel account of this story in Sefer Devarim, we find precisely these missing details:

"Remember what Amalek did to you BA'DERECH (on your journey) when you left Egypt - for he surprised you BA'DERECH [i.e. while you were traveling] and cut down ALL THE STRAGGLERS IN YOUR REAR, while you were FAMISHED & WEARY..." (see Devarim 25:17-18)

Amalek capitalizes on Bnei Yisrael's disadvantage. [They break the laws of the 'Geneva Convention.'] Even in war there are accepted norms of conduct; men fight men, armies engage armies. Amalek's attack is outright unethical, even by wartime standards. [See Rashi & Ibn Ezra on "ayeif v'yagaya" on Devarim 25:18.]

YIRAT ELOKIM

Further support of this interpretation may be drawn from the conclusion of the pasuk cited earlier from Sefer Devarim: "...v'LO YA'RAY ELOKIM - and he (Amalek) did not fear God." (Devarim 25:18, see Rashi & Ibn Ezra in contrast to Chizkuni)

This phrase - YA'RAY ELOKIM - in the context of unethical (or immoral) behavior is found numerous times in Chumash. For example, Avraham offers Avimelech the following explanation for lying about his wife:

"And Avraham explained (to Avimelech), for I said (to myself) there is no YIRAT ELOKIM in this place, and therefore they will kill me (to take my wife)..." (Breishit 20:11)

In this context, a lack of "yirat Elokim" describes one who would kill a visitor in order to take his wife. [Rather unethical according to even the lowest moral standards.]

Similarly, Yosef - pretending to be an Egyptian official - tells the brothers that he will release them from jail, allowing them a chance to prove that they are not spies. He prefaces this decision to his brothers with the phrase: "... ET HA'ELOKIM ANI YA'RAY..." (see Breishit 42:15-18). From this conversation, we see once again how the phrase "yirat Elokim" in the Bible seems to be 'internationally' understood as a description of ethical behavior.

We find yet another example at the beginning of Sefer Shmot, as the Torah describes how the midwives 'feared Elokim' by not obeying Pharaoh's command to kill the male babies: "v'ti'rena ha'myaldot et ha'Elokim..." (see Shmot 1:21).

[Note as well Yitro's comment in Shmot 18:21, suggesting to appoint judges who are "yirei Elokim", among a list of other 'ethical' characteristics. / See also our TSC shiur on the Akeyda. (www.tanach.org/breishit/vayera.doc), which discusses this phrase in greater detail.]

All of these examples support our interpretation of the phrase "v'lo yarey Elokim" by Amalek - as reflective of their unethical behavior - waging war on the weak and unprotected.

Based on this analysis, we conclude that Torah may have singled out Amalek as Israel's 'arch enemy' not merely because they were the first nation to attack Israel, but rather due to the unethical nature of that attack.

In this sense, one could suggest that "zecher Amalek" - the remembrance of Amalek - could be understood as a 'generic' term describing any aggressive nation that would act in a similar unethical manner, and not necessarily a 'genetic' term, describing any family descendent of those people who attacked Israel at Refidim.

Let's attempt to support this conclusion, and its underlying logic.

AMALEK IN THE BIBLE

The commandment to remember what Amalek did (see both Shmot 17:16 and Devarim 25:17) seems to apply to every generation, even after the original ('genetic') Amalek is wiped out. The eternal nature of this law - to 'remember Amalek' - suggests that Amalek may also represent any similar ('generic') type of enemy that may emerge in future generations.

To support this understanding, note how Amalek emerges in mass numbers during the time of David (see Shmuel Aleph 27:7-9 and 30:1-3!), only a short time after they were 'totally wiped out' by Shaul (ibid. chapter 15).

Note as well how Amalek attacked the 'women and children' of David's camp in Tziklag, taking them captive - at the same time when David and his men had left on a mission. [It is recommended that you read that entire account (see 30:1-19).] Here, we find not only the name Amalek, but a very similar manner of ('unethical') warfare.

In fact, if one follows Amalek's whereabouts in Chumash - we find them all over:

- * In the western Sinai desert -
when Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt (Parshat Beshalach).
- * in the northern Negev (near Kadesh Barnea)
when the spies return (in Parshat Shlach / see 14:25).
- * east of the Dead Sea (in Jordan),
when Bilam 'blesses' them in Parshat Balak (see 24:20).

Then, in Sefer Shoftim, we find them joining in battle against Israel, no matter who the primary enemy was:

- * joining the Moabites in battle in the time Ehud
(see Shoftim 3:13)
- * attacking in the area of Ephraim in the time of Devora
(see Shoftim 5:14, precise context unclear)
- * attacking Emek Yizrael, joining Midyan, in the time of Gidon
(see Shoftim 6:3 & 6:33)

[Not to mention the battles of Shaul and David against Amalek, as mentioned above.]

Yet in all of these battles, we never find Amalek living in any specific land, rather they appear as a nomadic tribe - roaming the desert, and especially the highways crossing the desert; looking for easy prey. Furthermore, we never find a mention of their god. Even when Sefer Shoftim mentions the gods of the other nations that Bnei Yisrael worshiped, we find the gods of Aram, Tzidon, Edom, Moav, Amon, and Philistim (see Shoftim 10:6), we never find even a mention of the god of Amalek.

Amalek emerges as a nation with no god, and no land. Their very existence centers around plundering the unprotected. In relation to Israel, and neighboring nations as well; at any time of weakness or vulnerability, they swoop in and attack.

Another proof that Amalek must be destroyed because of their deeds, and not only because of their 'genes', is found in Sefer Shmuel when God commands Shaul to destroy them. Note how Shmuel describes Amalek (at that time) as a nation who had sinned against God (see Shmuel Aleph 15:18).

Furthermore, from the commandment not to take any booty from that battle (see again 15:18 and context of that entire chapter), we find a parallel to Avraham's attitude to the city of Sodom. Recall from Breishit 14:22-23, how Avraham shunned the very thought of taking anything that once belonged to Sodom - the city of iniquity.

Therefore, it is not incidental that it becomes the mitzvah of the King of Israel to defeat Amalek (see I Shmuel 15:1-2 and Rambam Hilchot Melachim 1:1). Recall how the king of Israel should be known for his ability to establish a nation characterized by acts of "tzedaka & mishpat" - see Shmuel Bet 8:15, Melachim Aleph 10:9, and Yirmiyahu 22:1-5, 13-16 & 23:5-8. From that perspective, it also becomes his responsibility (when capable of doing so) to pursue nations such as Amalek, who wage war in unethical ways - taking advantage of the weak and helpless.

[Note as well at the end of Parshat Ki-teyze, immediately before the mitzvah to 'remember Amalek', we find a set of laws that emphasize the enforcement of "tzedek u'mishpat" - see Devarim 25:13-16.)]

In summary, there definitely appears to be something 'genetic' about Amalek, at least in Am Yisrael's first encounter with that nation. However, the unethical nature of that attack, and the Torah's immediate command to remember that event for all generations, suggests a 'generic' understanding as well, for by remembering what Amalek had done wrong - Am Yisrael is encouraged to remember their own national goal - to do what is 'right and just'.

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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PRO'S & CON'S

There are certain pro's & con's that come with this 'generic' understanding of Amalek. The obvious advantage, is that it would solve the 'ethical' problem of how and why would God command us to kill any descendant of that nation, even if those later generations did nothing wrong. After all, Chumash itself teaches us that: "parents should die for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents, each man is responsible for his own sin" (Devarim 24:16).

The obvious disadvantage is that the simple pshat of the psukim suggests that this commandment applies specifically to the people Amalek, the descendants of Esav's grandson (see Breishit 36:12). Furthermore, this nation appears again several times in Tanach, which supports the 'genetic' interpretation. For example, in Bilam's blessings, he sees Amalek, in a manner very similar to how he sees Israel, and the Kenites etc. (see Bamidbar 24:20-22). Later on, the books of Shoftim and Shmuel, the nation of Amalek appears numerous times, and appears to a nation like any other in the Bible.

Therefore, in our shiur, we have tried to find the 'middle ground'.

THE COUNTER ATTACK

This interpretation also explains an enigmatic detail in the Torah's description of the counterattack, as presented in Parshat Beshalach. When Moshe hears of Amalek's attack, he instructs Yehoshua to launch a counteroffensive - machar - on the next day: "Go fight Amalek... MACHAR - TOMORROW - I (Moshe) will be standing at the top of the hill with the MATEH ELOKIM..."

(17:9/ See Ibn Ezra - "givah" = Har Sinai!)

Should not Yehoshua engage Amalek immediately? Why wait for another day of hostilities to pass before mobilizing the nation's defense? According to our explanation, the leaders (Moshe & the elders) and most of the men are already at Har Sinai. It will therefore take a full day for Yehoshua to organize the troops and march them back towards Refidim.

THE WATER AT SINAI

The Moshav Zekeinim (Ba'alei Tosfot on the Torah) cites the question as to how the water-producing rock in Chorev (Sinai) gave water to Bnei Yisrael in Refidim. However, the Ramban (17:5) claims, as we mentioned in the shiur, that the gushing water formed several rivers and streams that flowed to Refidim.

As for the significance of the water flowing specifically from Har Sinai - this point is developed at length by the Abarbanel, in his commentary to this parsha. He writes that as water symbolizes Torah, Hashem had intended all along to provide the nation's water needs from Sinai, the site of the giving of the Torah. Refidim was to have been a brief, preparatory stopover before the nation's arrival at Sinai.

The Abarbanel adds that for this reason Hashem ordered Moshe to bring the elders along with him to Sinai. The presentation of water was to correspond to the presentation of the Torah, which also required the presence of the zekeinim (Shmot 24:9). The Abarbanel also notes that the Beit Hamikdash, which, like Har Sinai, is the place where Torah is given ("ki mi'Tzion tetze Torah" - Yeshayahu 2:3; Michah 4:2), is also destined to serve as a source of water - Yoel 4:18; Zecharya 14:8.

SPOILING HAR SINAI

Up until this point we have discussed the particularly unethical nature of Amalek's attack. Yet, the eternal mitzvah to 'erase the memory of Amalek' for all generations may also suggest a spiritual theme. Recall from Part I that the entire journey from Egypt to Har Sinai served as a 'training mission' of sorts to spiritually prepare Bnei Yisrael for Matan Torah. At Refidim, the 'stage has been set' for Matan Torah - but Amalek's attack 'spoils' this encounter. [See Shir Ha'shirim 1:4.] In effect, Amalek attempts to prevent Am Yisrael from achieving their Divine destiny.

The nature of this struggle remains throughout our history. Even

once Am Yisrael conquers its internal enemy and is finally prepared to follow God, external, human forces of evil, unwilling to allow God's message to be heard, will always make one last attack. Am Yisrael must remain prepared to fight this battle against Amalek for all generations: "ki yad al kes Kah, MILCHAMA I'HASHEM b'AMALEK, m'dor dor." (17:16)

Parshas Beshalach: From Egypt to Sinai

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. A DETAILED TRAVELOGUE

Our entire Parashah – along with the last sixteen verses of Parashat Bo and the first chapter and a half of Parashat Yitro – essentially map out the road from Egypt to Sinai. Following the climactic verse at the end of Chapter 12 – “And on that very day YHVH brought the B’nei Yisra’el out of Egypt by their divisions.” (Sh’mot [Exodus] 12:51) – We would expect to come directly to Sinai, following the divine promise given at the beginning of the entire process:

Therefore, say to the B’nei Yisra’el: “I am YHVH, and I WILL BRING YOU OUT (v’hotzeiti et’khem) from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I WILL FREE YOU (vhitzalti et’khem) from being slaves to them, and I WILL REDEEM YOU (v’ga’alti et’khem) with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I WILL TAKE YOU AS MY OWN PEOPLE (v’lakachti et’khem li l’am), and I will be your God...” (Sh’mot 6:6-7).

The first three prongs of the divine promise had been fulfilled – God redeemed us at the slaying of the first-born (see last week’s shiur); He freed us from their enslavement that night, when the Egyptians deported us and we left the slave-town of Ra’amse and He took us out when we moved from Sukkot (again, see last week’s shiur). All that remained, following the events presented in Chapter 12, was for God to take us as His people – the covenant at Sinai (see Sh’mot 3:12).

Why doesn’t the next chapter move us directly to Sinai and to the fourth step of the Exodus? Why does the Torah detail certain events of our travels to Sinai – and take 6 chapters to do so?

A verse in D’varim (Deuteronomy) may hold the key to solving this puzzle:

...or has any god ventured to go and take for himself one nation from the midst of another by prodigious acts, by signs and portents, by war, by a mighty and outstretched arm and awesome power, as YHVH your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (4:34)

In this reference to the Exodus, we are described as “a nation” in the midst of “another nation” – in other words, we were the same as the nation around us (the Egyptians); yet God took us out and “made us His”.

I would like to propose that the events spanning chapters 13-19 (v. 6) describe the process by which we became worthy and ready to enter into the eternal covenant with God at Sinai.

II. “DOUBLED” EVENTS

Why does Mosheh exhort the people about observance of Mitzvot at Marah (15:26) – before the Torah has been given?

What is the significance of the “twelve springs and seventy date-palms” at Elim (15:27)? We are generally not given such detailed landmarks in our travels. Note that this seemingly minor detail is repeated in the much terser travelogue in Bamidbar (Numbers) 33.

What is the significance of the second water-scene, where the waters flow from a rock on Horev (=Sinai)?

Why is Shabbat introduced before we get to Mount Sinai (in the Mahn [Mannah] story – 16:23,29)?

There seem to be a number of “doubles” in this section – two water scenes (15:22-26; 17:1-7); two wars (Amalek, Egypt); two educationally-oriented commands (teaching children – 13:8; training judges – 18:20). Why the “doubling”?

A BRIEF OUTLINE

Let’s first take a look at the events – in outline form:

- A: Kiddush B’khorot – the Divine command to sanctify the firstborn (13:1-2)
- B: The commemoration of the Exodus – including instructing our children (13:3-16)
- C: The events at the Reed Sea (including the Song at the Sea) – (14:1-15:21)
- D: The waters at Marah (15:22-26)
- E: The Mahn (Mannah) (16:1-36)
- F: The waters from Horev (17:1-7)
- G: Amalek (17:8-16)
- H: Yitro and the appointment of judges (18:1-27)
- I: The preparation for entering the covenant (19:1-6)

Looking at it again with a few added details, will give us a new perspective on this sequence. First, a word about structure within Biblical narrative.

III. STRUCTURE AS MESSAGE

The Torah not only informs us in words – it also informs us in style and structure. Not only by juxtaposing certain laws or

narratives (e.g. the juxtaposition of the Mitzvah of Tzitzit with the prohibition of mixed-garments – see BT Yevamot 4a); but even the greater structure of the narrative can often be instructive. A wonderful example of this is R. Yoel Bin-Nun's explanation of the prophecies of Zekhariah (Megadim 12:49-97) – as is the structure of the “28 times” of Shelomo in the third chapter of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) [I hope to write a shiur on this before Sukkot].

Perhaps the most powerful example of this “message via structure” style in Tanakh is found in the first two chapters of the book of Amos [yet another shiur!].

CHIASMUS

One common feature of Biblical literary structure – chiefly found in “Shirah” (poetry) – is known as “Chiasmus”. This form, taken from the Greek letter X (Chi), is basically an A-B-B-A (or more intricate – like A-B-C-B-A etc.) structure, with which we are all familiar in Biblical poetry. An obvious example is found in this week's Haftarah:

Most blessed of women be Ya'el, the wife of Hever the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. (Shoftim [Judges] 5:24) – we could better see it as follows:

A: Most blessed...
B: ...of women...
C: ...be Ya'el, the wife of Hever the Kenite...
B': ...of tent-dwelling women...
A': ...most blessed.

(The original is, as always, much clearer; but in this case, the translation works well).

The purpose of a chiasmus is to create a center and put the focus on the middle section – in this case, Ya'el.

I would like to propose that the six and a half chapters under discussion are also arranged in a chiastic structure – as follows [I will include (in parentheses) those terms or ideas which connect the given section with its chiastic partner]:

A: Kiddush B'khorot – (*Kadesh LI...LI heim* – “sanctify UNTO ME...they are MINE”)
B: The commemoration of the Exodus – (instructing children)
C: The events at the Reed Sea (God's war against Egypt – 14:14, 25; 15:3)
D: The waters at Marah (thirst)
E: The Mahn (Mannah)
D': The waters from Horev (thirst)
C': Amalek (God's war against Amalek – 17:16)
B': Yitro and the delegation of judges (instructing the people)
A': The preparation for entering the covenant (*v'hiy'tem LI...v'atem tih'yu LI* – “you will be UNTO ME...and you will be TO ME”)

This scheme allows to understand two basic things about the events as they are presented:

The apparent “doubling” (e.g. the water-scenes) are sequenced in order to highlight the changes that take place from one occurrence to the next (the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el);

The “fulcrum” of the chiasmus is the point of dramatic turning, which helps us understand the goal and method of this educational process in readying the B'nei Yisra'el to enter into the covenant at Sinai. Since the fulcrum of our chiasmus is the narrative of the Mahn (Mannah), we will have to examine that section with an eye towards finding the “secret” of this evolution.

Let's take a closer look at the components of our structure to understand the developments.

IV. A: SANCTIFICATION

13:1-2:

At the first steps out of Egypt, God commands us to sanctify our first-born. Although this involves some level of sacrifice (offering the firstborn animals, redeeming the firstborn children), its scope is minimal in two ways:

It involves a one-time act (offering/redemption);

It takes place solely within the purview of the family. Each family must sanctify its own firstborn – but this does not impact on the rest of the nation.

In addition, this act is a confirmation of God's sanctification of the firstborn during the last plague (see last week's shiur) – but it involves no new sanctification on the part of the B'nei Yisra'el.

19:5-6:

As we now stand at the foot of Sinai, we are called to become God's people. Instead of merely confirming that which God already did that night in Egypt, we are asked to move forward and become holy. This holiness is distinct from the earlier one in two ways:

It involves a constant sanctification involving a life of Mitzvot;

It involves every member of the nation – not just the B'khorot.

We might posit that the earlier sanctification was a foreshadowing of the latter one – as if the *sanctify unto me* was the first step in fulfilling “I will take you unto Me” – and “you will be unto Me a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation” was the consummation.

V. B: INSTRUCTION

13:3-16:

We are instructed to commemorate the Exodus and to tell our children about it – the T'fillin are even presented as a way to constantly keep this story “in our mouths” (v. 9).

Here again, we find the same two features:

The story is only to be told within the context of family;

The information to be transmitted is a one-time event – the Exodus. There is no mention of teaching children about laws, statutes, ethics etc.

Keep in mind (we will see more about this later) that until this time, the B'nei Yisra'el had a group of Mitzvot to fulfill – some in perpetuity – but they all related to the Exodus and were all commemorative. The one exception to this rule is B'rit Milah.

18:19-27:

Here, Mosheh is advised to teach the Torah to two groups – the entire nation, and a select group of “minor” judges. The two features, noted above, are again expanded:

The teaching takes place on a national level – to the nation or its representatives.

The information is an ongoing, growing process – “teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do” (v. 20).

Several things have changed here. Besides the scope of involvement becoming broadened to include everyone interacting with Mosheh and his designated judges, the nature of the information has changed. Instead of one static story to transmit, Torah has taken on a life – a life of new circumstances and applications. As God instructs Mosheh regarding new Mitzvot and Dinim (laws) – and he faithfully transmits this instruction to the people – new situations arise which demand analysis and discussion of those divine words. The “story-time” of Chapter 13 has evolved into the “Beit-Midrash” of Chapter 18! The dynamic discussion which is the inevitable blessing of Torah analysis carries with it a tremendous sense of creativity (I highly recommend reading Rabbi Soloveitchik's “Halakhic Man” on this point). As R. Yehoshua avers (BT Hagigah 3a): There is no session of the Beit Midrash without a novel explanation.

Beyond the creativity, this type of learning invests the student with a sense of involvement in Torah – a partnership in creating Torah. Many statements found in Rabbinic literature attest to this approach to Torah study – the best illustration is the story of the Akhnai oven (BT Bava Metzia 59b).

VI. C: WAR

14:1-15:21:

One might ask what was the necessity of the entire scene at the Reed Sea. Besides the obvious need to defeat (and destroy the army of) Egypt and to ensure the safe Exodus of the B'nei Yisra'el – there was another component which is a significant piece of this evolution.

For all of the miracles and plagues in Egypt, we never have a clear indication that the B'nei Yisra'el witnessed any of them first hand. Some of the plagues only took place in the Egyptian neighborhoods (e.g. darkness) – which means that the B'nei Yisra'el were only aware (by viewing the destruction afterwards) that a plague had taken place – but that is not the same as seeing it firsthand. That is why the verse at the end of Chapter 14 notes that

“Yisra'el saw the great work which YHVH did against Egypt ; they feared YHVH and believed in YHVH and in Mosheh his servant.” (v. 31)

This is, clearly, a necessary prerequisite to entering into the covenant – having the full experience of seeing God's power. However, note a salient feature of this war:

God does all of the fighting and the B'nei Yisra'el are totally passive. The verse is quite clear:

YHVH will fight for you, and you have only to keep still. (14:14).

When the B'nei Yisra'el sing to God, they describe Him as a “Man of War” (15:3) – it is God who fights for the B'nei Yisra'el, just as He did in Egypt via the plagues.

17:8-16:

See how much has changed! When Amalek attack the B'nei Yisra'el, Mosheh immediately charges Yehoshua (Joshua) (where did he come from?) to choose valorous men to go and fight Amalek. Mosheh, for his part, ascended the mountain and raised his hands. The Torah relates that as long as his hands were raised, the B'nei Yisra'el were successful in war – and when they fell, so did the fortunes of the B'nei Yisra'el. The Mishnah in Rosh haShanah (3:8) astutely explains that it was not Mosheh's hands that were fighting – but that when he raised his hands, the B'nei Yisra'el would look heavenward and succeed. In other words, this war was an almost direct inversion of the one that opened our Parashah (note that our Parashah is also arranged chiastically – war, thirst, mahn, thirst, war). In this war, the B'nei Yisra'el are doing the fighting and God is apparently passive. I say apparently because it is a basic tenet of faith and philosophy that God is never passive – but, within the description of the war, God and the B'nei Yisra'el almost reverse roles. The denouement of this war and of our Parashah comes when God declares that the war against Amalek is His war forever (17:16) – the wars of the B'nei Yisra'el are also God's wars.

VII. D: THIRST

15:22-26:

The scene at Marah is enigmatic. The B'nei Yisra'el have wandered for three days without water – yet we hear nothing of their legendary complaining. They only lodge a complaint when they come to the waters of Marah and they prove to be undrinkable. In spite of this obstacle, they don't yet phrase their complaints in the familiar litany of "...why did you take us out of Egypt" (17:3) or, worse yet "...let us choose a captain, and go back to Egypt." (Bamidbar [Numbers] 14:4).

Surely the name of the place and the bitterness of the waters must have caused great chagrin among the people. They had just left the bitter work of Egypt (1:14) – and celebrated that by eating bitter herbs (*M'rorim*) with their Korban Pesach (12:8). Suddenly, their first stop after seeing the end of Egypt and the embittering Egyptians is – Marah – a place of bitter waters. The lesson here is powerful: The Exodus was not a one-shot deal, where you are now out of trouble forever. There is always the potential for bitterness and trouble. This is a brand-new lesson for the B'nei Yisra'el – that their relationship with God is not over (which they had every reason to believe until this point); rather, they have an ongoing interaction with Him.

This idea is underscored in two ways. First of all, Mosheh throws a stick into the water, making them sweet and drinkable. This is a clear inversion of the first Egyptian plague – where sweet, drinkable waters were made unusable when he struck his staff on them. Mosheh is showing that the same God who can embitter waters and destroy Egyptians is the source of life and sweetness. This is followed by Mosheh's statement of the relationship between their allegiance to God and their welfare:

If you will listen carefully to the voice of YHVH your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am YHVH who heals you (15:26).

There is new information here – that the duties to God extend beyond the few Mitzvot which He already gave, (almost) all of which focus around a commemoration of the Exodus.

Note that the waters of Marah are stagnant (although the verse does not say so, there is no indication that these waters flowed in any way and every indication points to settled waters) and that Mosheh takes the existent waters and changes their taste.

17:1-7:

Here, we have an entirely different "water-experience". Besides the stronger complaint of the B'nei Yisra'el (which is beyond the scope of this shiur to discuss), note what type of waters Mosheh brings forth. He hits a rock which is on Horev (Mount Sinai) and waters gush forth. The symbolism of new waters flowing from Sinai is almost too obvious to mention. Unlike Marah, these waters are flowing (indicating dynamism and growth) and come from Sinai (the source of that dynamism and growth).

VIII. INTERLUDE: 12 SPRINGS, 70 DATE-PALMS

15:27:

The Mekhilta (Parashat vaYassa #1) makes the connection

R. Elazar haModa'i says: When the Holy One, Who is blessed created the world, he created twelve springs corresponding to the twelve tribes of Ya'akov and seventy date-palms corresponding to the seventy elders.

Before addressing the connection – why are there always seventy elders among the B'nei Yisra'el (see Sh'mot 24:1, Bamidbar 11:16)? I would like to suggest that this number held great significance for the B'nei Yisra'el – since it is the exact number of their ancestors who had descended to Egypt (1:5). The B'nei Yisra'el understood that their future was strongly rooted in their past – a past of twelve brothers, constituting seventy family members.

This is the connection with our springs and date-palms (which represent nourishment). First, let's summarize the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el since the Exodus:

They take the first step towards sanctification.

They are given a system of perpetuating the story of their Exodus and transmitting it to their children.

They experience – first-hand – God’s power.

They learn that their relationship with God is eternal.

Now – they also learn that their relationship is not beginning now – nor did it begin in Egypt. Their relationship is built on an ancient one that goes back to the Land where they are headed – and to their ancestral family which came down from there to Egypt. With this lesson in hand, they were ready for the big lesson of the Mahn.

IX. E: MAHN (Manna)

16:1-27:

As mentioned above, since the story of the Mahn sits at the center of our chiasmus, it must include some clue as to how the B’nei Yisra’el evolved into the people who could stand at Sinai and become God’s nation.

There are two central features of how the B’nei Yisra’el were to respond to the Mahn.

They were to only take the proper amount per person in the household.

They were to take double on Friday and take none on Shabbat.

Each of these commands (which, for the most part, the whole nation followed) carries a critical step in the development of the holy nation.

R. Yaakov Medan, in a wonderful article (Megadim 17:61-90), points out that the command for each person to restrict himself to a daily portion for each member of the household represented not only a good deal of faith in God – but also tremendous self-restraint and concern for one’s fellow. This is how he explains the “test” of the Mahn (16:4) – that we were tested to see how much concern each of us could demonstrate for our fellow, knowing that if we took more than our portion, someone else would go hungry. Indeed, the B’nei Yisra’el passed this test with flying colors! (v. 18) For a slave people, wandering in a desert to exercise this much self-restraint was a demonstration of their readiness to stand as a unified nation and to enter into a covenant which includes mutual responsibility.

The second piece is an even stronger statement. We first learn about Shabbat in the beginning of B’resheet (Genesis). God created the world in six days and ceases creating on the seventh day. For the first time, we are given the command to abstain from certain types of creative actions on Shabbat – in imitation of God (more on this next week). The lesson of Shabbat is integral to the education of the B’nei Yisra’el: They are not just to be the recipients of God’s bounty; they are to be His partners in this world!

X. SUMMARY

Now we can see the step-by-step education of the B’nei Yisra’el and how they come from being a “nation in the midst of another nation” to “a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation”.

Moving from

a static relationship with God which revolves around one event in their personal past and which would be celebrated and commemorated in the family – (13:1-16)...

...to experiencing of God’s power “firsthand”; (14:1-15:21)...

...to learning that the relationship with God will be ongoing (15:22-26)...

...to a reminder that their roots are ancient and that their nourishment comes from those roots (15:27)...

...to an exercise in concerned fellowship and partnership with God (16:1-27)...

...to a demonstration that the relationship with God will be a flowing source of life coming from Sinai (17:1-7)....

...to demonstrating their own readiness to fight and play a role in their own survival (17:8-16)...

...to being introduced to the Beit Midrash of Mosheh Rabbenu (18:1-27)...

...to standing at Mount Sinai and being invited to become God’s holy people (19:1-6).

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Parshat Beshalach: Trust Me

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's parasha introduces several new themes which we will revisit many times as we make our way through the Torah. As a transition between the period of enslavement in Mitzrayyim (Egypt) and the journey through the desert, our parasha sets the stage for the rest of the Torah, which follows Bnei Yisrael through their desert journey toward Canaan.

A. THE BLIND WALK:

Do Bnei Yisrael trust Moshe, their leader? Do they trust Hashem, their God? Several events of this week's parasha typify events we will encounter throughout the rest of the Torah which respond to these questions of trust:

SHEMOT 13:17 --

It happened, when Paro sent out the nation, that Hashem did not lead them by the way of the Land of Philistines, although it was shorter, because He said, "Lest the nation regret [leaving Egypt] when they see war, and return to Egypt."

The parasha opens with Hashem's leading the people toward Canaan, their destination -- but He doesn't take the shortest route. Hashem knows that if Bnei Yisrael run into adversity (like a war with hostile nations), they might turn right around and run back to Mitzrayyim. They don't yet have the confidence and resolve to fight an enemy in order to preserve their independence; their most likely response to a threat is flight to familiarity and safety. People react to uncertainty, anxiety, or danger by reaching for the familiar. Even though the life the people knew in Egypt brought them slavery, cruelty, pain, death, hatred, and oppression, they might, Hashem knows, still try to return to that life if they feel like they are standing on quicksand. People are willing to pay an enormous price to cling to the feeling of security.

How does this impact their relationship with Hashem?

Sometimes, as here, Hashem makes allowances for the people's mentality. But at other times, He challenges them to take risks and not allow their experiences to control them. Sometimes this results in His becoming angry when they fail.

SHEMOT 13:21-22 --

Hashem went before them by day, leading them by a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to illuminate for them, traveling by day and by night. The pillar of cloud did not depart by day, nor the pillar of fire at night, from before the people.

Hashem's presence -- His guidance and protection -- remains with the people at all times. But this does not banish their insecurity: despite constant signs of Hashem's presence, the people continue to wonder whether Hashem is truly with them. Besides the cloud and the fire, the "man" ("manna") which falls from the sky every day, the water which comes from rocks when stricken (on several occasions), and the birds ("selav") which are sent to them every evening for dinner all testify to Hashem's presence. But the people remain unsure: is Hashem truly among them? Can they truly depend on Him?

Why don't the people "get it"? Can't they see the cloud, the fire, the birds? Did their bread fall from the sky back in Egypt, too? Why don't they understand that Hashem is truly with them?

"TRUST ME":

Trust is built on facts, but it is made of emotion and supported by experience, encouragement, and familiarity. The people certainly see the pillars of cloud and fire, they certainly gape at the food falling from the sky and the water from rocks. But these very miracles contribute to their insecurity, offering them the impossible and the bizarre in place of the unremarkable but familiar. The miracles say "Hashem is present" to their intellect, but their hearts tell them that tomorrow there will be no more water from rocks or manna from heaven, that this is all a dream. This is why they violate Hashem's instructions and leave over manna from the day's gleanings: they do not believe it will be there tomorrow. It is all a fairy tale. Their eyes tell them what is here today, but this miraculous ground doesn't look solid enough to step on; if they begin to trust this state of fantastic affairs and depend on it for their needs, it will suddenly evaporate and disappear.

Awhile ago I participated in a training session at a conference. The topic of the session was "Building Leadership by Building Trust." We started off with an exercise called the "Blind Walk." We split into pairs; one member of the pair would close his eyes, and the other would keep his eyes open. The one with his eyes open would lead the other around the conference center -- down the hallways, up and down stairs, escalators, and elevators, outside the building, into the pool (it was in Miami), into the gift shop, down the boardwalk. I started to lead my partner down the hall, and the first thing I noticed was that he did not trust me! Although we know each other well, he refused to walk at the brisk pace at which I wanted to walk. I was surprised -- did he think I would steer him into a wall or trip him down a flight of stairs? If he trusted me, wouldn't he put his fate into my hands, relax, and walk willingly?

He couldn't do it. Being blind was so unfamiliar and so unsettling that he was unable to let me be his eyes. When it came my turn to close my eyes and have him lead me, I was able to relax and participate only by a tremendous act of will. I did not trust him any more than he trusted me -- the situation was just too unfamiliar -- but for seven minutes I made this leap of faith (hoping it would not involve a leap down the stairs) and forced myself to tolerate it.

This is what Bnei Yisrael face in the desert -- the Blind Walk. But instead of seven minutes, they are walking the Blind Walk all day and all night. Nothing they can see means anything to them; everything is completely unfamiliar. They know

Hashem is acting as their eyes, but this knowledge alone does not create trust. They do make the leap of faith at certain times, like when they walk right into the middle of the split ocean, but they cannot maintain the "Blind Walk" at all times. Imagine that the Egyptian army is at your heels, chasing hard in chariots, armed and angry. You turn to your leader frantically, and he tells them that the proper thing to do is to do nothing -- that the invisible God will save you! It is to Bnei Yisrael's immense credit that they accept Moshe's words and obey his command to walk into the sea.

B. HORSES AND CHARIOTS:

Last week we developed the idea that one of the primary aims of the plagues is to introduce Hashem into the public sphere as the Power behind everything. This was expressed by the repeated formula, "They [Mitzrayyim] shall know that I am Y-HVH." If, as we suggested, "Y-HVH" means "The One who is Present," then Hashem's saying "They shall know that I am Y-HVH" means, "They will know that I am the God Who is aware of events in the world and intervenes in those events." The specific nature of the plagues expresses the surprising truth (to the pagan mindset) that one God is Master of the water, air, land, animals, and humans, and that these different spheres are not each controlled by a "local" deity.

In this week's parasha, the "education" of the Egyptians comes to an end. Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael, who have just left Egypt, to behave as if they are confused and lost in the desert so that Paro and his people will be tempted to chase them down and recapture them. According to Hashem, the point of this is to show them that "I am Y-HVH" -- "I am present; they cannot do a thing against My will." But since the Egyptian army does not survive the parasha, what is the point of teaching them that "I am Y-HVH"?

Part of the lesson is for the world at large. Although Mitzrayyim is the direct object of Hashem's lesson as the immediate oppressor and evildoer, the lesson is targeted toward all of humanity. "I am Y-HVH" is a message broadcast to all nations; Mitzrayyim is only the current target/example. That this message is heard by the international community (despite the ancient world's appalling lack of CNN) is confirmed by a) the latter part of the Shirat Ha-Yam (Song of the Sea), which focuses on the reaction of some of the nations, b) next week's parasha, where we hear that Yitro has heard of the miracle at the sea, and also c) in Sefer Yehoshua by Rahav, a resident of Yeriho (Jericho), who tells the spies sent to the city by Yehoshua that everyone is terrified of Bnei Yisrael because they have all heard of the miracles done for them.

"EILEH BA-REKHEV VE-EILEH BA-SUSIM"

We now move to the actual confrontation between Mitzrayyim and Bnei Yisrael. In that context, one theme appears with great prominence: the focus on the chariots and horses of the Egyptians. This begins with Paro himself, who leads the move to the chariots:

SHEMOT 14:6 --

He harnessed his CHARIOT and took his nation with him.

We then hear about the quality and quantity of the chariot forces Paro takes with him:

SHEMOT 14:7 --

He took six hundred choice CHARIOTS, and all the CHARIOTS of Mitzrayyim, with officers over all of them.

We hear about the chariots again when the Egyptians catch up with Bnei Yisrael:

SHEMOT 14:9 --

Mitzrayyim chased after them and caught up with them camped at the desert; all the HORSES of Paro's CHARIOTS, his HORSEMEN, and his army, at Pi Ha-Hirot, before Ba'al Tzefon.

We next hear about the chariots from Hashem himself:

SHEMOT 14:17 --

"I will strengthen the heart of Mitzrayyim, and they will come after them; I will be bear down upon Paro, his whole army, his CHARIOTS and his HORSEMEN."

We hear about the horses and the chariots again as they begin to follow the Bnei Yisrael into the water:

SHEMOT 14:23 --

Mitzrayyim chased and came after them -- all the HORSES of Paro, his CHARIOTS and HORSEMEN, into the sea.

We next hear the curious detail that Hashem rips the wheels off of the chariots, and that the chariots begin to drag "roughshod" over the temporarily exposed seabed:

SHEMOT 4:25 --

He [Hashem] removed the wheels of their CHARIOTS, and they dragged heavily

We next hear about the chariots in Hashem's command to Moshe to rejoin the split waters:

SHEMOT 14:26 --

Hashem said to Moshe, "Stretch your hand over the waters, and they will return upon Mitzrayyim, on his CHARIOTS and

on his HORSEMEN."

And we hear about them again as they are destroyed:

SHEMOT 14:28 --

The waters returned and covered the CHARIOTS and the HORSEMEN of all of the army of Paro which had come after them in the sea; not even one was left.

We next hear about the horses and chariots in the first line of the Shirat Ha-Yam:

SHEMOT 15:1 --

Then Moshe and the Bnei Yisrael sang this song to Hashem: "I shall sing to Hashem, who has been exalted; the HORSES and CHARIOTS, He tossed into the sea."

And then once more during the Song, once just after the Song, and once more in Miryam's song:

SHEMOT 15:4 --

The CHARIOTS of Paro and his army, he threw into the sea; the choicest of his officers sank in the Yam Suf.

SHEMOT 15:19 --

For the HORSES of Paro came, with his CHARIOTS and HORSEMEN, into the sea, and Hashem returned upon them the waters of the sea

SHEMOT 15:21 --

Miriam responded to them, "Sing to Hashem, for He has triumphed; HORSE and its CHARIOT He threw into the sea."

Why do horses and chariots get so much attention here? Why does the Torah mention them so many times in the process of the story and in recounting the songs?

One other question has been bothering me since we left Sefer Bereishit: remember that when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and sent them back to Cana'an to bring Ya'akov down to Egypt, Ya'akov did not believe his sons when they told him that Yosef was still alive and was the (de facto) king of Egypt. The Torah says that he believed the story only when he saw the wagons which Yosef had sent from Egypt to pick him up. What is there about wagons that convinces Ya'akov that the story is true? And, for that matter, why does Paro himself make such a big deal out of the wagons when he tells Yosef how to arrange for his father to come down to Egypt?

Here, a bit of Torah U-Mada seems warranted: what role did chariots play in warfare at the time of the Exodus, and what role did wheeled vehicles play in general? Archaeological, textual, and other historical evidence has convinced many scholars that while the wheel was certainly known in Cana'an at the time of the Avot, it was not widely used for either transportation (wagons) or war (chariots and war-wagons). On the other hand, we know very well from the Torah that wagons and chariots are very much in use in Egypt. Several reasons are advanced by scholars:

1) Cana'an tends to be hilly and rocky, which makes life hard on the wheels. Until technology had produced a more sturdy wheel, it was more practical to use pack animals like donkeys for transportation (remember that Ya'akov's sons use donkeys to transport the food they buy from Mitzrayyim back to Cana'an). Egypt's softer, flatter terrain, on the other hand, is gentler to wheeled vehicles.

2) If you think producing and maintaining a modern automobile is a complicated process, it was no easier 4,000 years ago to build a wagon or chariot and keep it in good repair. Producing and maintaining wheeled vehicles was an industry which required:

- a) Considerable technical know-how.
- b) Skilled craftsmen to build and fix the various parts of the vehicles.
- c) Special workshops.
- d) Storehouses for parts.
- e) The gathering of different types of material (including several types of wood, leather, reeds, and later on, large amounts of metal)
- f) Plenty of money in order to pay for the whole industry. (Think "Detroit.")

For these reasons, **only organized nations with powerful economies could afford to support a wheeled-vehicle industry.** Cana'an was highly splintered, tribal, and somewhat nomadic, while Egypt was more unified and had a more stable agricultural economy (supported by the fertile Nile delta).

This may explain why the appearance of the wagons convinced Ya'akov that the story about Yosef was true: the wagons could only have been supplied by a powerful person from Egypt, someone who could allocate valuable resources (wheeled vehicles) to the task of carrying Ya'akov and his family down to Egypt. And who would have done such a thing for him besides his son?

In Tanakh, the first time we hear of a large-scale chariot force being used by Bnei Yisrael is in the time of Shlomo Ha-Melekh (see I Melakhim 4:26, II Divrei Ha-Yamim 9:25, I Melakhim 10:26). Only once David had unified the country and Shlomo had built it into an economic power was it practical to field a military force of chariots. In fact, Shlomo built cities

just for the chariots (see I Melakhim 9:19).

CHARIOTS OF WAR:

In our parasha, we encounter wheeled Egyptian vehicles once again: chariots drawn by horses. According to historians, chariots served a dual purpose on the battlefield:

- 1) They served as a moving platform from which to fire arrows (and occasionally to toss javelins).
- 2) They served to scare the enemy out of its wits (see Devarim 20:1).

Horses, which were used to draw chariots, were used mostly for this purpose alone; it was fairly rare (and considered somewhat low-class) for a person to ride on the horse itself (later on, this changes, as we see from Qohelet 10:7). Just as the automobile industry of today is always tinkering with new designs and ideas, introducing new models every year, ancient civilizations did a lot of experimenting with different chariot designs. In order to design effective models for different terrain and different purposes, and in order to take advantage of better technology and better materials, there was constant experimentation with different ways of building chariots. The Egyptian war-chariot reached the height of its development in the 14th century BCE, shortly before the reign of Ramses II -- the Pharaoh who is supposed to be the Paro we know so well.

One other element is critical to the story: in several places in Tanakh, we see that Mitzrayyim is *the* place to buy horses. Horse-breeding and trading are major industries there. In fact, the Torah specifically forbids Jewish kings to send people to Egypt to buy horses (Devarim 17:16); the warning is necessary only because Egypt is so attractive a market for horses, which are necessary for a strong chariot force and for less violent purposes. Later in Tanakh, we hear that Shlomo Ha-Melekh does indeed buy horses from Mitzrayyim (I Melakhim 10:28-29). In addition, he buys chariots from Mitzrayyim.

BACK TO THE SCENE ON THE SEA:

Now we return to our original question: why does the Torah place so much emphasis on the Egyptian chariots, horsemen, and horses? Furthermore, of all the details which the Torah could have reported to us about the destruction of the Egyptian army, why do we hear that Hashem "removed the wheels from their chariots" and dragged them over the seabed?

Several possibilities:

- 1) To account for Bnei Yisrael's great fear in facing this army.
- 2) To dramatically depict the power and momentum of the Egyptian pursuit and Hashem's sweeping destruction of the Egyptian army.
- 3) The Torah's emphasis on horses and chariots is meant to hint to *Mitzrayyim's* emphasis: the Egyptians, horse-breeders and horse-traders par excellence, professional chariot-makers and chariot-sellers, have built the technology of warfare to a pinnacle. And they *believe* in what they have built. Their chariots and horses will bring the Jewish slaves back, no matter what Power is helping the fleeing Bnei Yisrael. With sophisticated and deadly weapons, Egypt believes it can best even the awesome Y-HVH, whose great power has just demolished mighty Egypt. In modern terms, they believe that the final factor in war is more accurate missiles, faster and stealthier airplanes, and more powerful nuclear weapons -- not the support of Hashem.

This is why the Torah makes special mention of Hashem's removal of the wheels of the chariots as they cross the seabed. Using Bnei Yisrael as a decoy, Hashem draws the Egyptians into the danger zone and then overpowers them by paralyzing their trusty weapons. Removing the wheels of their chariots strips the Egyptians bare of the war-tools they trust to guarantee their victory. They drag to a halt with the walls of water trembling around them, and in the moments between the removal of the wheels and their deaths, the Egyptians have just enough time to understand what has happened:

SHEMOT 14:25 --

Mitzrayyim said, "I must run away from Bnei Yisrael, for Hashem is fighting for them against Mitzrayyim!"

C. DEATH UNDER COVER:

At what time of day does the sea split, and at what time of day do the people cross the exposed seabed? A look at the text supplies the answer:

SHEMOT 14:21 --

. . . Hashem moved the sea with a powerful east wind ALL NIGHT, and made the sea into dry land. The waters were split.

Apparently, the waters separate slowly, under the pressure of the wind Hashem causes to blow all through the night. This means that it is dark. Keep reading:

SHEMOT 14:24-25 --

It happened, at the MORNING WATCH, that Hashem faced the Egyptian camp through a pillar of fire and cloud, and confounded the Egyptian camp. He [Hashem] removed the wheels of their chariots . . .

Bnei Yisrael enter the parted sea and begin to cross while it is yet dark (the morning watch means the third of the night closest to morning), and Egypt gives chase through the darkness. Sometime during this pursuit, Hashem causes the chariots to lose their wheels, grounding the Egyptian pursuers in their tracks.

SHEMOT 14:27 --

Moshe stretched his hand out over the sea, and the water returned to its strength TOWARD MORNING; Egypt was running toward him, but Hashem overturned Mitzrayyim in the midst of the sea.

Sometime shortly before dawn (morning), Bnei Yisrael complete their crossing. Moshe turns back to the parted sea, stretches out his hand, and the walls of water crash onto the seabed, drowning the trapped Egyptians - in the dark before morning.

To review the process briefly:

- 1) The wind blows "all night" in order to split the water;
- 2) Hashem "looks" in fury at the Egyptians, terrifies them, and removes their wheels at the "ashmoret ha-boker" -- the night being divided into three "ashmorot," "watches," and the "ashmoret ha-boker" being the final third of the night;
- 3) Finally, Moshe is commanded to return the waters to normal "towards morning," whereupon the Egyptians drown.

In other words, Bnei Yisrael do not actually witness the Egyptians drowning, since it takes place just before dawn! They only know for sure what has happened when they see the bodies float to shore after sunrise, as the text emphasizes:

SHEMOT 14:30-31 --

... Yisrael saw Mitzrayyim dead on the shore of the sea. Yisrael saw the mighty hand which Hashem had used against Mitzrayyim; the nation feared Hashem, and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.

Only now do Bnei Yisrael know what has happened, when they "see Mitzrayyim dead on the shore"; only *then* do they "see the mighty hand . . ." because only THEN do they realize what has happened.

Where else do we find "unwitnessed destructions" in the Torah?

1) No'ah is commanded to build a "tzohar" for the teiva (Ark), which is something like a window. The Midrash cites two opinions about this tzohar: one says it was a window, the other says it was a luminous gem-like material which provided light for the teiva. According to some interpretations (early sources for which I am currently unable to trace), what drives this second opinion is that No'ah was not considered worthy enough to witness the destruction of the rest of the world. He merits being saved, but he is not so perfect that he can stand above all of humanity and watch everyone else die.

2) As Lot and his family leave Sodom, they are commanded not to turn around to see the destruction of the city. Of course, Mrs. Lot disobeys and turns into a pillar of salt.

As the sun rises over the sea and the Egyptian bodies become visible on the shoreline, Bnei Yisrael finally understand what has happened to their pursuers. But they do not witness the crashing of the sea over their enemies. The Egyptians deserve their fate, but Bnei Yisrael are not so perfect that they can stand above the Egyptians and witness their destruction. For this reason, the whole scene takes place under cover of night. Only as the day dawns do Bnei Yisrael "see the mighty hand with which Hashem did to Mitzrayyim."

WHY SING?

This brings us to the next theme of the parasha, which we will deal with only briefly: the Song. What is its purpose? Why do the people sing, and why is the Song recorded in the Torah? The most obvious function of the Song is praise. But what else might be the purpose of the Song?

Looking at the structure of the Song may yield a clue. It splits neatly into three parts:

PART I: PESUKIM 1-6:

- a) Begins in third person, describing Hashem, and moves to second person in the last line as a transition to the second part.
- b) Ends with a poetic "summary" line.
- c) Topic: praise of Hashem's power

PART II: PESUKIM 7-12:

- a) All in second person, addressing Hashem.

b) Ends with a poetic "summary" line.

c) Topic: description of the actual event of the splitting and joining of the sea.

PART III: PESUKIM 13-18:

a) All in second person, addressing Hashem, until the last line, which returns to third person (like the beginning of the Song).

b) Ends with a poetic "summary" line.

c) Topic: The fear of the nations as the Bnei Yisrael travel through the desert, and a look forward to establishing a place of holiness on a special mountain once they get to Eretz Canaan.

Looking at other songs which appear in the Torah and their function also provides possibilities:

The Song of Ha'azinu: Moshe is commanded to teach it to the people and make sure they remember it so that it will be passed down to later generations. The predictions it contains will serve as a resource to explain to the people how to understand events which happen to them in the course of history. In other words, the purpose of the Song is educational.

The same may be true of the Song in our parasha: one of its purposes is to teach the people something and remind them of it in future generations: Part I reminds them of the power of Hashem; Part II reminds them of how He saved them at the sea; and Part III reminds them of the international reaction to the event and directs their attention toward the ultimate goal: establishing a center for worship of Hashem in Eretz Canaan.

Song is an excellent medium for education because of its vivid imagery and, of course, because it is easier to remember a song than a list of facts.

Shabbat Shalom



PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Bridge to Change

"G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer..." (13:17)

It's very difficult to change things we don't like about ourselves. We are creatures of habit.

One of the hardest aspects of modifying negative behavior is breaking the patterns we weave for ourselves. How long do our "New Year's resolutions" last? A day? A week? Not through lack of resolution, but because resolution is no match for habit.

Resolution is not the solution. To succeed, we must do something much more fundamental.

When Hashem took the Jewish People out of Egypt, He did not take them on the quickest and easiest and most direct route from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael – northeast, along the coast of the Mediterranean, through what is today Gaza. Rather, He took them on a long, difficult and tortuous path across a sea and through a major desert. Why?

As the saying goes, "Easy come, easy go." When the Jewish People left Egypt, they had not entirely freed themselves from the clutches of the negative drive, the *yetzer hara*. If Hashem had brought them on the easy way, they would have been in danger of being lured back to the constricting but comfortable life of slavery in the fleshpots of Egypt. Hashem, as it were, burned their bridges. He made it virtually impossible to return to Egypt – which was just as well. For, as we see, when the going got tough in the wilderness, the Jews were more than willing to return to Egypt. Had that been an easy option, the history of the Jewish People might have been very different.

Ostensibly, then, when faced with trying to escape the clutches of our negative drive, we must burn our bridges. If we want to separate from bad company, we must be prepared to leave and move to a different neighborhood. If we have a serious weight problem, we must put a lock on the fridge and entrust the key to our spouse (unless he's/she's trying to lose weight as well).

However, in *Parshat Vaera* (8:23), the Torah presents an apparent contradiction to this logic. When Moshe tells Pharaoh that the Jews are leaving, he talks of "only a three-day journey." Moshe knew full well that once they were out, they were not coming back, so why did he tell Pharaoh it was for only three days?

Part of Moshe's intention was to appease the latent negative drive still lingering in the hearts of the Jewish People. Leaving for three days is a far less daunting prospect than leaving forever. The Jews thus felt they had a "get-out clause," if they needed it, and were prepared to go along with Moshe. For three days, at least.

But was this bridge-burning?

The Exodus was effected then both through a bribe to the negative drive, the lure of a three-day round-trip ticket on the one hand, and on the other, an iron-fisted scorched earth policy of no return.

When we wish to leave our own personal "Egypt" – our personal prisons that the negative drive

constructs for us – which is the correct course to follow?

The answer is that we need both. For someone who smokes forty cigarettes a day, the idea of going cold turkey is horrendous. But tell him that if after two weeks he's not happy, he can go back to smoking like a chimney, you will see a different picture.

Seduction and bribery are our opening guns against the negative drive. Afterwards we have to follow up

by burning our bridges. It was the lure of a round-trip ticket that got the Jewish People as far as the edge of the water, but it was only Nachson ben Amiadv's jumping headlong into the sea, showing there was no turning back, that made the waters divide.

- Sources: based on Rabbi E. E. Dessler and *Lekach Tov*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends the *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the *Pelishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves, and chases after the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff, and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks.

After three days' travel, only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain mitzvahs. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quail for meat and provides manna, miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday, a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations.

When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle, and Moshe prays for their welfare.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Beshalach: *Pesachim* 72-78

Service with a Smile

Rabban Gamliel asked Rabbi Tarfon, "Why were you not in the Beit Midrash last night?"

On our *daf* we learn a *beraita* that records a clever verbal exchange between Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Tarfon. When Rabban Gamliel made the above query of Rabbi Tarfon, who was normally studying Torah at night in the Beit Midrash with Rabban Gamliel, the reply Rabbi Tarfon gave was a puzzling “riddle.” Rabbi Tarfon, who was a *kohen*, explained “*avadti avodah*” — a term whose simple meaning is that he was preoccupied with his priestly sacrificial duties in the Beit Hamikdash.

Rabban Gamliel replied, “All of your words are nothing but amazing (i.e. absurd!)” He continued, rhetorically, “Where do you get such an idea that there exists sacrificial service nowadays (i.e. after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash)?”

(I recall a commentary which asks: “Why did Rabban Gamliel consider only the possibility of *avodah* as referring to the Beit Hamikdash service, but did not consider that Rabbi Tarfon perhaps meant *prayer* when he spoke of his *avodah*? Prayer is also called *avodah* — *avodah sh'balev*, service of the heart — as taught in Masechet Ta'anit 2a: “The verse states, ‘To love Hashem and to serve Him with all of your heart’ (Devarim 10:12). What service (*avodah*) is done with the heart? You must say: This is *tefillah* (prayer).” Rather, it must be that understanding the word *avodah* in this case as a reference to prayer was not considered for obvious reasons: Rabbi Tarfon would have prayed in the Beit Midrash, in addition to the fact that the evening prayer service elsewhere would not be sufficient reason for him not learning

Torah in the Beit Midrash after the prayer concluded.)

So, what, in fact, was the *avodah* that preoccupied Rabbi Tarfon the previous night? Rabbi Tarfon explained his specific *avodah* in the following manner: “The verse states (in Bamidbar 18:7) ‘And you (Aharon) and your sons shall keep your *kehunah* in all matters concerning the Altar, and concerning what is within the *parochet*, and you shall serve; *avodat matana* (literally, ‘service of a gift’) I have given you *kehunah*, and any non-*kohen* who approaches will die.’ We see here that the Torah makes an equation between the *eating of terumah* by a *kohen* with the *avodah* of a *kohen* who is offering sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash.” Rabbi Tarfon’s reply was that he *needed to go home* to eat *terumah* in a state of ritual purity and an environment safeguarded to be ritually pure — and he was therefore not able to go to the Beit Midrash that night. (As we learn in the first *mishna* in *Shas*, in many cases a person who became ritually impure needed to wait until nightfall before eating *terumah*.)

The Torah did not write *matnat avodah* — “the gift of *avodah*” — which would imply that the merit given to the *kohen* to do *avodah* in the Beit Hamikdash is a gift to *kehunah*. (This is actually the *pshat* that Rashi gives in explaining the verse i.e. that Hashem is saying to Aharon HaKohen and his descendants that the *avodah* service that will be performed by them is a gift to them.) Rabbi Tarfon, however, sees from the “reversed order” of the words — *avodat matana* — that the *matana* gifts that are given to a *kohen* are also

to be seen as, and called, *avodah*. This means that when a *kohen*, such as Rabbi Tarfon, would eat *terumah*, it is also a type of *avodah* of a *kohen*. (And, of course, this does not mean the work of preparing and eating the *terumah* food...)

In what sense is a *kohen* eating *terumah* considered an *avodah*? One explanation offered is that the Torah mandates that *terumah* and another twenty-three special gifts be given to the *kohanim* to enable them to fulfill their purpose as *kohanim*. The *kohanim* were not given a share in the Land of Israel at the time when the Land was divided among the tribes by Yehoshua bin Nun. This type of gift to them is not their 'share.' Rather, "Hashem is their share." The *kohanim* were designated to offer the *korbanot* for the public and individuals at the time when the Beit Hamikdash stood. And they were also to be teachers of Torah to the Jewish People. Everything they did was a type of *avodah* – including accepting and eating the twenty-four types of gifts from the nation. The people of the nation gave them these gifts to sustain them, and, in turn, these gifts returned to the people in the many forms of *avodah* of the *kohanim* serving the Jewish People and serving Hashem on behalf of the nation. The goal of this 'arrangement' is to help the Jewish People become closer to their Creator by

means of the various *korbanot* offered by the *kohanim*, mitzvah fulfillment which they were instructed by the *kohanim*, and, last but not least – through dedicated Torah study, which they learned from the mouths of the *kohanim*.

(I have seen the following idea, which is appropriate to our *gemara*, in the writings of Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, on the topic of the exact meaning of various words in the Torah that mean 'gift.' Rabbi Klein writes, based on the works of Rabbi Tzvi Yaakov Mecklenburg (1785-1865): "It is inappropriate to use the term *matana* when discussing an offering to Hashem. A *matana* serves to fill a certain need on the part of the recipient. In the case of Hashem, He is complete and has no needs, so He certainly does not require any sort of gift. For this reason, sacrifices to Hashem are never described as a *matana* in the Torah." In this sense, the *avodah* in our verse is not (only) the offering of *korbanot*, but the *avodah* of fulfilling the needs of the *kohanim* by their accepting and consuming the twenty-four gifts for the purpose of enabling them to help fulfill the needs of the Jewish People.)

● *Pesachim 72b-73a*

**Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet
on
The Morning Blessings
by Rabbi Reuven Laufer
www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings**

BESHALACH

Questions

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead, and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling"?
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech eretz* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo ...*" ~ "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar* 12:12)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiety.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river...."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Beshalach: Through the Looking Window

In the *Haftarah* of *Shabbat Shirah*, Deborah and Barak sing G-d's praises for delivering the Canaanite general Sisera into their hands.

Their poetic song lists all the heroes who led the Jews to victory. Towards the end of the song, it switches scenes to focus on Sisera's mother and her anxious anticipation of Sisera's triumphant return: "She gazed through the window (*chalon*) and she sobbed / Sisera's mother [peeked] through the window (*eshnav*)..." (Judges 5:28). In this short passage we encounter two Hebrew words that mean "window." What, if anything, is the difference between a *chalon* and an *eshnav*?

Let's start with the word *chalon* because it is more common (appearing 31 times in the Bible) and its etymology is much simpler.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the etymology of the word *chalon* to the two-letter root CHET-LAMMED, which means "circular movement" and the "empty space" within a circle. Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim understands derive from this root include: *chalil* ("flute," a hollow musical instrument), *machol* (a type of "dance" performed by going around in a circle), *chalom* ("dream" because it is a reflection of one's thoughts going around and around in one's mind), *chillul* ("desecration," a reference to the empty void in lieu of holiness), *challal* (a "human corpse" emptied of its life-force), *choli/machalah* (a "sickness" that affects the body all around), and *cheil* (a "short wall" that surrounds a higher wall, effectively creating an empty space between the two walls).

In the same vein, Rabbi Pappenheim explains in *Yerios Shlomo* that *chalon* derives from this root because a "window" is essentially just an empty space or hole in a wall. Interestingly, in *Cheshek Shlomo* Rabbi Pappenheim adds that *chalon* specifically denotes a "round window," thus connecting the word to both core meanings of the

biliteral CHET-LAMMED. Even grammarians like Radak and Ibn Janach — who do not subscribe to the notion of biliteralism — list the word *chalon* as a derivative of the triliteral root CHET-LAMMED-LAMMED ("emptiness"), but the meaning is just the same.

We may now turn our attention to the word *eshnav*. This rather obscure word appears only twice in the entire Bible. Once in the above-cited passage concerning Sisera's mother, and once in Proverbs 7:6 when warning how the strange woman (a metaphor for strange wisdom) might entice a person through the window. In Modern Hebrew, *eshnav* refers to a "service window," like that which you would find in a post office or a bank. However, as we will soon see, that is nothing but a modern neologism.

Rashi (to Judges 5:28) defines *eshnav* as *chalon*, as do Ibn Janach and Radak. This suggests that both words mean "window" in the same sense. However, other commentators differentiate between the sort of window denoted by *chalon* and that denoted by *eshnav*. For example, Rabbi Yosef Kara (to Judges 5:28) and Meiri (to Proverbs 7:6) write that an *eshnav* is a "small window," while, presumably, *chalon* is a general term for any type of "window."

Rabbi Yishaya of Trani (1180-1250) explains *eshnav* as akin to a peephole, in that it is smaller on the end that opens to the outside and wider on the end that opens to the inside. (Rabbi Yishaya then offers a Latin/Italian translation of *eshnav*, which Rabbi Shaul Goldman reads as *balustraria*, "a narrow opening or slit from which arrows may be fired.")

The Malbim (to Proverbs 7:6) somewhat cryptically comments that through a *chalon* one sees revealed things, while through an *eshnav* one sees hidden things. But, what does this mean?

The *Zohar* (Toldot 140b) relates that some idolaters would use the powers of astrology to see things hidden to the naked eye. These visions were seen by gazing through an enchanted window, using some form of witchcraft. The *Zohar* explicitly says that Sisera's mother engaged in this sort of witcheries' divination when she looked out the window to find out if her son would return from battle. Another example of this is Avimelech using a window to divine that Rebecca was Isaac's wife and not his sister (see also *Tzror HaMor* to Gen. 26:8, *Sefer Ikkarim* 4:43, *Abarbanel* to Judges 5:28, and *Alshich* there). Based on this, the Malbim (to Judges 5:28) writes that *eshnav* denotes an enchanted window created through witchcraft, by which Sisera's mother expected to be able to see her son's fate. By contrast, *chalon* denotes a regular "window."

The Malbim's explanation proves somewhat difficult because in the case of Avimelech, the Torah reports him gazing through a *chalon*, which suggests that the *Zohar*'s explanation concerning enchanted windows should apply to the word *chalon*, not *eshnav*. In fact, Rabbi Shmuel Landiado of Aleppo (d. 1610) writes in *Kli Yakar* (to Judges 5:28) just the opposite of the Malbim: In the case of Sisera's mother, he explains that the term *chalon* refers to a mirror on the wall used for divination, while *eshnav* was a real "window" in her room that opened to the outside street. He explains that Sisera's mother would first consult with her "hexed window," and only then would she actually look out through her real window to see what was happening outside.

In his later work — *Yair Ohr* (on synonyms in the Hebrew language) — Malbim offers another fascinating way to differentiate between *chalon* and *eshnav*. In that work, Malbim writes that an *eshnav* is a window/mirror/lens that makes objects farther away appear to be closer. As the Malbim notes, fashioning such an item requires somewhat advanced knowledge of optics. Rabbi Chaim Futernik points out that the Malbim fails to give his source for this novel interpretation. Interestingly, the Malbim's explanation is also found almost word-for-word in two works by Rabbi Elazar Reines (d. 1903), *Shorashei Leshon HaKodesh* and *Mishlei Shlomo*.

Other commentators take an entirely different approach to the word *eshnav*. Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) writes that *eshnav* refers to the mesh/lattice openings on upper floors. Rabbi Moshe David Valle (1697-1777) similarly explains that *eshnav* refers to wooden latticework that pampered women would tie to their window to allow them to look outside without being seen. The Latin term for this sort of apparatus is *gelosia* (which is, believe it or not, related to the English word *jealous*). Rabbi Valle then posits that the very word *eshnav* ought to be read as an acronym/abbreviation for the term *ishah notenet b'chalonoteha* — "a woman places [this] at her windows."

The Italian scholar Rabbi Moshe Yitzchak Tedeschi Ashkenazi (1821-1898) explains in his work *Hoil Moshe* that the root of *eshnav* is the trilateral SHIN-NUN-BET, which (through the interchangeability of NUN and LAMMED) is related to SHIN-LAMMED-BET ("step" or "layer"). The way he explains it, *eshnav* refers specifically to a window equipped with metal shutters.

The Israeli archaeologist Dr. Shmuel Yeivin (1896-1982) independently came up with this explanation as well. In a 1959 article published in *Leshonenu*, Yeivin further buttresses this explanation by noting that several archeological artifacts were found across the Levant that depict the motif of a woman looking outwards from the top half of a window. In those ivory images (which were said to depict the Canaanite fertility goddess Ashtoreth), the bottom half of the window was typically closed shut with various forms of mesh or lattice bars. According to him, the Biblical *eshnav* refers exclusively to a window that was partially blocked with such blinds. (Once we are already connecting *eshnav* to ivory depictions of women looking through a window, we could also consider parsing the word *eshnav* as comprised of ALEPH-SHIN for "man," i.e. woman, and NUN-BET for "tooth," i.e. ivory).

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) suggests that the word *eshnav* is derived from the root NUN-SHIN-BET (by way of metathesis), which refers to the "blowing" of the wind. Needless to say, opening a window allows the wind to blow inside. Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein (1860-1941) writes the

same thing, adding that *eshnav* specifically denotes a window used for cooling. This etymology of *eshnav* is the one preferred by the eminent linguist Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983). It is reminiscent of how the English word *window* is derived from the English word *wind*. Another

English word for “window” is *fenster* (more common in German and Yiddish), which is borrowed from the Latin word *fenestra* (“hole” or “breach”). The semantics of this etymology actually resembles our explanation of the Hebrew word *chalon*, allowing our discussion to come full circle.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rklein@ohr.edu

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

A BLESSING ON YOUR HEAD (PART 2)

“May Hashem bless you and guard you. May Hashem illuminate His Countenance upon you and be gracious to you. May Hashem turn His countenance to you and establish peace for you.” (Numbers 6:24-26)

The second verse reads, “May Hashem illuminate His Countenance upon you and be gracious to you.” In general, our Sages teach us that light is a metaphor for the Torah. The Midrash on our verse follows that approach and teaches that G-d’s illumination is referring to the “light of the Torah.” It is clear that this verse refers to the spiritual blessings, which is why it follows the previous verse which focused on the physical. Our Sages teach us as a general rule that in our religious endeavors we must always strive to move upwards in spirituality, and not to lessen our enthusiasm. Accordingly, the verses are moving in an upward trajectory, and therefore the second verse represents a concept more spiritual than the first.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his indomitably eloquent style, explains that it is through the teachings of the Torah that G-d spreads His light throughout the world and runs His world. The more we expose ourselves to the brilliant and dazzling spiritual aura that is the Torah, the more we perceive that G-d controls the world. And our ability to understand that all of our material blessings derive only from Him is also greater.

And, just as in the previous verse, the Midrash spells out in distinct and lucid language: “G-d *should illuminate His Countenance upon you* — your eyes and

your heart should be enlightened through the Torah and He should grant you children who live according to the Torah.”

The verse ends with the request that the accumulation of Torah wisdom “be gracious to you.” The commentaries have a fascinating disagreement about to whom the “you” in the verse refers. Nachmanides understands that the verse is a plea that we find grace and favor in the Eyes of G-d. However, the simple understanding of the verse seems to suggest that it refers to the person who has accumulated Torah knowledge. The verse teaches us that it is not enough to be a brilliant and erudite scholar. Together with scholarship, one needs to find favor in the eyes of others in order to have the maximum impact on the community and for the community.

Toward the end of his life, the saintly Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933) attempted to have a series of laws being legislated in the Polish Senate abrogated. The underlying purpose of these laws was the Senate’s desire to undermine and finally destroy the educational and communal infrastructure of Polish Jewry. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim was so disturbed by the impact the legislation would have that he undertook a journey from his

hometown of Radin all the way to Warsaw (approximately 400 kilometers!), despite the fact that he was more than ninety years old and extremely frail. Thus, together with the Rebbe of the three largest Chassidic sects in Poland, the Chofetz Chaim traveled to Warsaw, where he was granted an audience with the Polish Prime Minister. The Chofetz Chaim began to speak in impassioned and heartfelt Yiddish about the dangers that the legislation presented for the Jewish community. As

the interpreter began to translate the Chofetz Chaim's words into Polish, the Prime Minister stopped him and told him that the passionate words of the venerable Rabbi require no translation. "The words of this holy man pierce the heart. No one can listen to him and remain unmoved." And, with that, the vicious and destructive legislation was dropped.

To be continued...

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Beshalach

Education in the Wilderness

In this one Torah portion, the people have several formative experiences that will shape their understanding of their relationship with nature and with other nations.

The exodus from Egypt and the parting of the sea demonstrated to Israel for all time G-d's special closeness at extraordinary moments. But only by their journey through the wilderness were they to learn that one can place his trust in G-d under *all* circumstances – such as for the provision of everyday necessities like food and drink.

Through the manna, they learn that survival requires trust in the Almighty along with a degree of disengagement from the anxiety of worrying about sustenance. The ruthless pursuit of security is not only futile, but can easily overtake life and leave no room for other aims and goals.

The manna also laid the foundation for the Sabbath, as it did not fall on the Sabbath, and people saw double provision on Friday. More than any other mitzvah, the Sabbath requires the unshakable conviction that G-d watches over the individual and over all the requirements of his

daily livelihood. The entire experience of sustenance through manna taught that man's own efforts will not yield mastery of nature and security in sustenance. Instead, only by following G-d's Will and seeking a livelihood in accordance therewith – by not greedily hoarding, and by observing the Sabbath – will one realize that security in sustenance.

Their thirsting for water and questioning whether G-d is in their midst was met with water gushing from a rock – testimony that G-d is not bound by nature, but freely controls it.

Finally, after these experiences had taught the people about their relationship with nature and that independence from the forces of nature is possible only through subjugation to and trust in G-d, the experience of Amalek's attack would teach them about their standing vis-à-vis other nations.

Amalek was the first to attack this fledgling nation – families, women, children, described as "weak and weary," without any obvious threat or provocation. However weak they may have appeared, the power of G-d hovered over them so

that all the other nations trembled — *Philistia feared, Edom was stunned, Mo'av trembled, Canaan was dumfounded*. (Shemot 15:14-15). Only Amalek *had no fear of G-d*. (Devarim 25:18) They chose the sword as their lot, seeking renown in the laurels of blood.

There is only one indomitable threat to the glory-seeking sword — as long as one nation's heart keeps beating and pays no homage to it, it will not rest. Amalek does not hate nations that are its equal in power and armament, but rather regards their military preparedness as a sign of respect for its sword. Amalek fights them but honors them, since they acknowledge its power and shares its principles.

Amalek reserves its scorn for those who dare view the sword as dispensable — and instead place their trust in spiritual and moral power. This is the one enemy of Amalek, and the war between the sword and spirit will rage for generations. Israel, here, is taught that winning this war is only through the staff of Moshe, not through the sword of soldiers. The hands of Moshe are termed *emunah* (17:12), for it is the devoted trust of the people, awakened by the uplifted hand, that prevails over Amalek.

This war only weakened Amalek — the struggle would continue until the final defeat at the end of days, when that trust in G-d reaches full bloom.

- Sources: Commentary, Shemot 15:25; 16:8, 28; 17:9-12

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The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

Book Review

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

Food: A Halachic Analysis

By Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Mosaica Press (2020) 483 pages

I was tempted to begin my review of Rabbi Spitz's newest addition to Ohr Somayach's Jewish Learning Library by saying that one cannot read it and remain *parve*. But that sounded too corny (which is *parve*) so I rejected it in favor of the following:

When I was asked by Ohrnet's editor, Rabbi Moshe Newman, to review Rabbi Spitz's book, *Food: a Halachic Analysis*, I was hesitant. I told him that I would consider it. It is a big book – with over 480 pages. And I thought to myself, it's probably very densely written with esoteric discussions on the various problems involved in the certification of food products and most likely filled with extensive footnotes, referencing *halachic* discussions. In short, I thought it was going to be quite boring.

Boy, was I wrong! This book reads more like a fast-paced, page-turning detective novel than a dry *Halacha sefer*. But that is its uniqueness and brilliance. The author has managed to write a *sefer* that is both comprehensive in its treatment of every topic discussed *and* excellently written. Even the footnotes, which account for most of the text, are intriguing and well written.

In his Foreword to the *sefer*, attesting to Rabbi Spitz's scholarship Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz, well known for his own encyclopedic knowledge, noted several remarkable features of this book.

“Accuracy: many *halachic* works, both in English and in Hebrew, will quote or paraphrase sources based on how those sources are cited in earlier works without bothering to verify the original source. More than once, this has led to the widespread perpetuation of error, as a mistake or omission by one author gets automatically followed by later authors, as each one uses the predecessor text as the source. Rabbi Spitz has gone to great effort to trace every quoted *psak* and *sevara* to its original source and does not rely on secondary quotations or paraphrases. And if there is ambiguity in the reports he will note it.

“A completeness: When Rabbi Spitz addresses a topic, he will give you all the views on the topic. He does not limit himself to a selection of the views he finds most persuasive. He includes many oral *psakim* that cannot always be found in writing and carefully documents the source of them as well....”

The subjects discussed are also very topical and interesting. They include, among others, the following chapters headings: Hard Cheese Complexities; The Great Dishwasher Debate; Genetically Engineered Meat; Buffalo Burgers and Zebu Controversy; The *Erev Pesach* Meat Scandal; The *Halachic* Adventures of the Potato; The Quinoa-Kitniyos Conundrum; The Coca-Cola Kashrus Controversy; *Chodosh* in *Chutz La'aretz*; Margarine, Misconceptions, and *Maris Ayin*; *Chalav Yisrael*: A *Halachic* History; *Kashering* Teeth; and my favorite, Leeuwenhoek's *Halachic* Legacy: Microscopes and Magnifying Glasses.

He masterfully shows connections between stories in the *Chumash* and contemporary *halachic* issues. In discussing the need for a *hekker* (a physical object which functions as a reminder not to mix milk and meat) when two or more individuals are eating their separate dairy and meat meals at the same table, he brings *halachic* sources that cite the story in *Parshat Vayera* of *Avraham Avinu* feeding the three angels, disguised as Arabs, tongue and butter. The Torah tells us: “And he stood over them, under the tree, and they ate.” Why was it necessary to mention the fact that *Avraham* stood over them while they ate? Because, say these authorities, the three might have been eating milk and meat meals at the same time and *Avraham* needed to supervise them to ensure that one wouldn't take food from the other's plate. And a *shomer* (a supervisor) can also function as a *hekker*.

I was particularly impressed by Rabbi Spitz's mastery of the science behind many of the *Halachic* issues discussed. In his chapter on genetically engineered meat, he seems to have a firm grasp on the biology and chemistry involved in its making. This is especially important in today's world of food production, which is increasingly high-tech and difficult for even the average rabbi, not involved in this specialty, to understand.

Rabbi Spitz seems to be indefatigable in his research. Even after exhausting all the written literature on a topic, he recounts extensive discussions of these issues with the top *poskim* of our day.

I have seen many excellent *halacha sefarim* in English which are informative, some which are even scholarly, but none which are informative and scholarly and humorous. As an example, in his chapter titled “Microscopes and Magnifying glasses,” he concludes as follows:

“Still, the bottom line is that using a magnifier or microscope to see something that *cannot* be seen at all by the naked eye would have no *halachic* bearing whatsoever, ‘*bein lehakel bein lehachmir*’. So, although Leeuwenhoek's (the inventor of the microscope) impact on the world in various important areas is immeasurable, nevertheless, his *halachic* legacy remains – quite ironically - microscopic.”

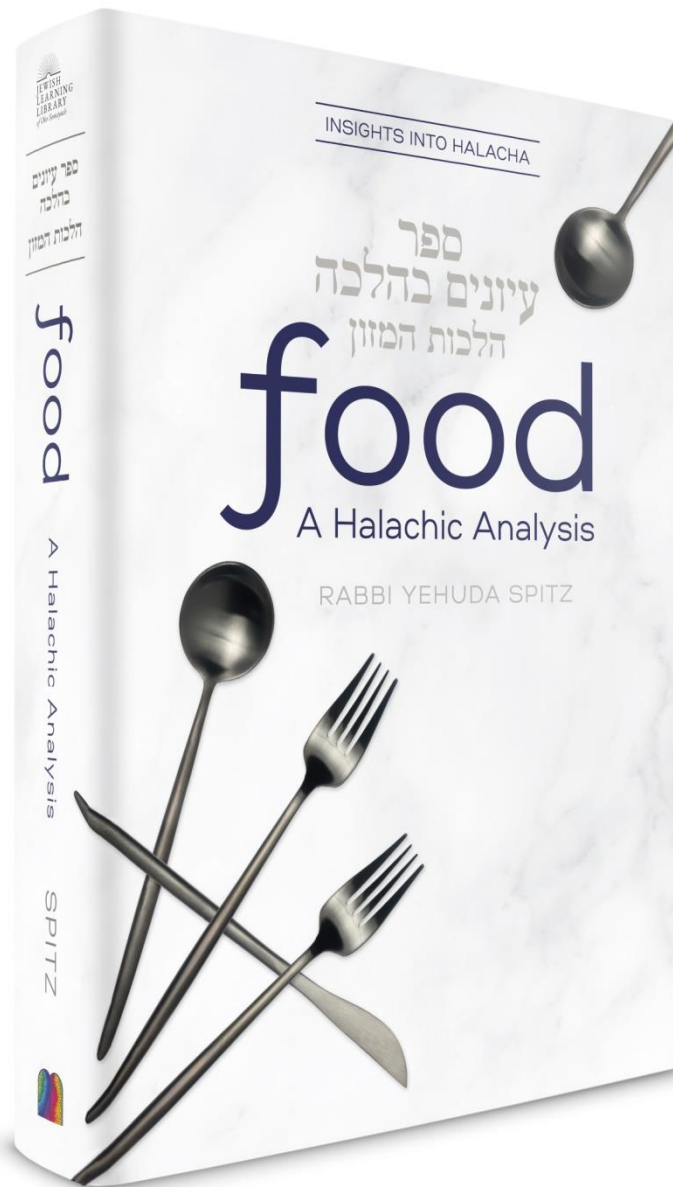
I highly recommend this book to every Jew who likes to eat, wants a deeper understanding of kashruth and who has a sense of humor.

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz is a lecturer and the shoel u'meshiv for the Ohr LaGolah smicha program.

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