

Potomac Torah Study Center

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International Holocaust Memorial Day is this Shabbat, January 27

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his 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 archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

We Jews must learn to change emotions and focus rapidly and completely – something we do this Shabbat. Many synagogues focus on song this Shabbat, when we stand for Shirat HaYam, two songs during the fourth aliyah, after B'Nai Yisrael cross the Sea of Reeds and Hashem destroys the Egyptian army and weapons. When the Egyptian army approaches our ancestors, on a dark night, God brings strong winds over the sea and splits the water to create a dry path for B'Nai Yisrael to cross. After all the Jews reach the other side, the Egyptian army, horses, and chariots follow them. When all the Egyptians are in the sea path, God stops the winds, and the water rushes back to drown the Egyptians. When B'Nai Yisrael awaken the next morning, they see the dead Egyptian army and horses and the broken chariot and weapons. The people break out in a joyous song, which Moshe leads. After Moshe's song, Miriam leads the women in a second, much shorter song.

This Shabbat is also the 78th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz Death Camps on January 27, 1945, which corresponds to 13 Shevat 5705. The International community selected this day (on the secular calendar) as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. On a Shabbat when we would rather be celebrating freedom from Paro and Egypt, we also have memorials to the Holocaust in many parts of the world – the same week as Tu B'Shevat. No wonder Jews observe the Holocaust on Yom HaShoah, during Sefira, rather than on the date that the international community selected.

Rabbi David Fohrman and his scholars at alephbeta.org observe that the Torah identifies Miriam as a prophetess and the sister of Aharon. Rabbi Fohrman concludes that Miriam becomes a prophet when she is a young child and convinces her parents (who had divorced not to bring up children whom Paro would kill) to remarry because they will have a son who will become the savior of B'Nai Yisrael. When their mother can no longer hide the baby, Miriam hides and watches to see how God will save her baby brother. Paro's daughter saves the baby, and Miriam offers to find a wet nurse for the baby. Miriam does not know how God will save her baby brother, but she has complete faith that He will find a way. At the Sea of Reeds and later during every water crisis, Miriam's pure faith in Hashem reinforces Moshe that God will solve every problem for the Jews.

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine reinforces this message by reminding us that God controls the results of a war. When two armies go to war, there is no certainty of outcome. Unexpected events often change the outcome. God changes events in unexpected ways and thereby determines the victor. With the help of Hashem, the little guys can defeat more powerful and better equipped armies – a lesson that Israel has shown the world on many occasions, and one that Ukraine demonstrates to a surprised world.

On Holocaust Remembrance Day, Rabbi Marc Angel recalls Simone Veil, a Holocaust survivor from France who becomes a government minister and later the first President of the European Parliament. Later, she becomes President of the International Victims' Claim Fund, speaks at the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and works hard to obtain compensation for Jews whom the Nazis and their followers had stolen property and homes during World War II. Simone Veil is a symbol of the ultimate victory of a righteous, compassionate, and humane society. As Rabbi Angel concludes, righteous actions define a person, not lofty words.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, taught me to look for signs of Hashem in action when events took unexpected turns. 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 an excellent parsha in the Torah to illustrate the power of true faith.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and 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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilisa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Beshalach: The Essence of Song

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5758

What is the essence of song in the Torah?

Writing about a song is a bit like the comedy routine of the mime who wouldn't stop narrating his own actions, or the great playwright who, when asked his intentions in a certain play, replied that if he were capable of explaining he would not have

had to write the play! In pedestrian life we speak in prose such as “how was your day?”, “what’s for dinner?” or “there’s a phone call for you!” etc.

When is song expressed? Imagine an individual who has just learned that his Lotto ticket was the \$80,000,000.00 winner. When he calls home to his wife will he express himself in prose or poetry? Will he say “dear, we won the Lotto today!”? To this she’ll reply “and I made your favorite eggplant Parmesan for dinner tonight.” “It was \$80,000,000.00 dear” he’d insist, and she’d calmly wish him a safe trip home from the office.

Who would imagine that style of dialogue!? More likely he would begin with some stuttering to hold back the sudden cascade of emotion. At once he would blurt out almost incomprehensible combinations of words, that could only and be understood by those who knew the true context. After years of financial struggle and hardship, the wildest fancy has come true. Those standing nearby will surely discern that something wondrous has occurred. “dear, it happened...I can’t believe it..80 big ones and it’s all ours...all ours...just what you hoped...just what we dreamed ...and now...now...where do we begin?..how can we begin to ever?...oh my G-d, I can’t believe it ...\$80,000,000.00!!” His wife would probably join in echoing some refrain from his spontaneous burst of original poetry, repeating “where do we begin?...how do we begin?...ad infinitum...ad absurdum.

What is song? Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch defines it as *“an inspired or rapturous expression of what some external event has revealed to the inner self, that which the physical eye can not see, but what has become clear to the mind’s eye.”*

Perhaps this helps to explain why “The Song” of the Jewish nation by the sea is written in a block form with intermittent open spaces. Sometimes the silence of what is not said is often more profound than what is actually expressed. The “bank account” of emotions and ideas is an ocean compared to the few drops of ink scrawled on the tiny “check.” When the inner world of feelings swells beyond what the mouth can express, the result is potentially...song.

What was the depth of emotion which expressed itself as the Song at the Sea? What was revealed to the inner-self in the collective soul of the Jewish Nation?

There is a controversy recorded in the Talmud regarding the scriptural book “Song of Songs,” written by King Solomon. There were those who did not want to include it in the scriptures because its content can be misunderstood. The book is an analogy of the love between G-d and the Jewish People in terms of the love between man and woman. The Talmud quotes the great Rabbi Akiva who spoke in defense of the inherent holiness of King Solomon’s “Song of Songs.” He said that all of “the writings” are holy and “Song of Songs” is the holy of holies.

The Torah is filled with many harsh rebukes and criticisms of the Jewish people and its leaders. We are called a “stiff necked” people, and almost no one, not even Moshe escapes sharp and scathing criticism for a seemingly slight error. One might wrongly conclude, that somehow we are the least-favored nation in the A-Imighty’s world. King David reminds us in his book of Psalms: *“Praiseworthy is the man whom G-d disciplines etc.”* The superficial appearance is that the one who is haunted with difficulty and criticism is despised. That is the superficial mask. What is the heart of the matter, however? The Song of Songs tells us that an intense love exists deep down. The caring teacher drives the promising student to fulfill his or her potential. Loving parents correct their child’s imperfections for the sake of the child. More love is contained on the inside than can ever be understood by those who do not see the true context. “Song of Songs” is the expression of the inner world of feelings between G-d and the Jews. It is the world behind the mask. That is what makes it “Holy of Holies.”

The Jewish nation stood by the Sea of Reeds in the surprising repose of safety, only a short time earlier escaping for dear life. They expressed in exalted song their clearest cognition that the pain and suffering of the Egyptian exile was truly not punitive, but in fact, rehabilitative. The dawning recognition of divine love instantly eclipsed 210 years of physical and spiritual privation. This resulted in spontaneous song. This is the essence of the song in the heart of hearts of the Torah!

Good Shabbos.

Beshalach --The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Brakhah on Steamed Bread

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

“And Moshe said unto them, This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat... Bake that which you will bake to day, and cook that which you will cook.” (Shemot 16:15 and 23)

QUESTION - Chicago, IL

What is the brakhah on Bao Buns? They are prepared similarly to bread dough, but are steamed, not baked.

ANSWER

The brakhah is mezonot, even if you eat enough of them to be making a meal of it (koveya se'udah). According to halakha, only baking makes something bread. There are some poskim who make an exception to this rule, and state that if something was cooked and has the appearance of bread, then in some cases, the proper brakhah might be HaMotzi, but that is not relevant here, as Bao Buns do not have the appearance of bread.

There is a category known as pat haba'ah bekisnim, “bread with pockets, or filling,” which may apply to certain filled pastries or the like. One would recite a HaMotzi over things that fall into this category if she were to be koveya se'udah, make them into a meal. That is not relevant here, however, since those items are genuine pat, that is, bread that is baked. In our case, there is no pat or lechem at all, so making a meal of them does not change the brakhah. See Mishna Berurah 168:72 who writes: *“For something is not called lechem, bread, unless it is baked. And since this item has not been baked in an oven or on a pan without liquid, the name lechem, bread, does not apply to it.”*

FOLLOW UP QUESTION

Fancier baking ovens actually have the capacity to steam as they bake. What's the threshold that makes something “steamed” vs “baked” in this case?

ANSWER

The brakhah for bread baked in such ovens would definitely be HaMotzi, since we rule that the brakhah for bread that is first baked and then cooked, or first cooked and then baked is HaMotzi. Doing both cooking and baking simultaneously would be the same halakah, and this is certainly true when it comes to steaming which is less significant halakhically than cooking (see *Shulkhan Arukh*, Orach Chayim 168:10 and 14).

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

Which One Are YOU: Miriam or Moses?

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

In this week's parsha we read about the Jews' reaction to their miraculous redemption from Egypt. After they safely crossed the Red Sea, they are led in song by their leaders, Moses and Miriam. The songs serve as a spiritual expression of thanksgiving for their good fortune.

The Torah gives us detailed descriptions of the celebrations, telling us exactly how these two communal leaders chose to guide their followers through their first spiritual exercise. Although there is some overlap between these two models of spiritual expression, there are also significant differences between them. They are two siblings whose worlds are refracted through very distinct prisms. Both miraculously crossed the Red Sea, yet, their reactions are vastly different.

First the Torah tells us about Moses' spiritual reaction to the events. Here are the opening verses:

Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song to Hashem, they spoke, saying: I will sing to Hashem, for He is highly exalted; He has thrown the horse and his rider into the sea. (Shemot 15:1-2) [Hebrew omitted]

This is the introduction and starting verses of Moses' poem. The poem then continues for seventeen additional verses, in which Moshe spells out in great detail the specifics of what transpired from when they left Egypt until their enemies were drowned and defeated.

After we read about the celebration of Moses and the community, we are told that Miriam followed suit: she too led the community in song, expressing spiritual gratitude for their redemption. In only two verses the Torah describes their singing as follows:

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam sang unto them: Sing to Hashem, for He is highly exalted: He threw the horse and his rider into the sea. (Shemot 15:20-21) [Hebrew text omitted]

On the surface these celebrations seem quite similar. Yet, if one takes a closer look, one notices many differences between the two.

To enumerate:

First, Moses is not given any title; the only thing we are told about him is his name. Miriam on the other hand is described as a prophetess. נב'אה

Second, Moses is explicit about the recipient of his spiritual enthusiasm, 'לְהָ' to God. Miriam is a bit amorphous; in the introduction she does not explicitly address the poem to God

Third, In Moshe's poem, he and the community come across as being cerebral; their singing doesn't involve any physical or emotional expression. Miriam's thanksgiving is very different. There is a deeply felt psychological component to the experience; the singing is accompanied by dancing and the playing of musical instruments. Their gratitude is felt emotionally and expressed physically.

And finally, Moses' is verbose, Miriam is concise. Moses's poem is long, elaborate, contemplative, and very specific. Miriam's poem is the mirror opposite. Moses' poem takes nineteen verses in the Torah, Miriam's has all of nine words.

In other words, Moshe ruminates; Miriam celebrates. Moshe reflects; Miriam reacts. Moshe's response is cerebral; Miriam's reaction is embodied. Moshe composes prose; Miriam breaks out in dance.

In essence, Moshe reacts like a philosopher who has come to a profound realization, Miriam responds like a believer who has been overwhelmed by a transcendental experience.

Personally, I prefer Miriam's poetic celebration over Moshe's philosophical exposition. Miriam, it seems, better understands the contours of the religious experience.

Spiritual ecstasy should be an emotional experience, originating in our hearts, not a cerebral experience located in our brains. Religiosity is when an insight or experience overwhelms us with a sense of awe and appreciation. The insight and conviction during those moments feels powerful, and absolute, bordering on the prophetic. This is why we are reminded in this story that Miriam was a prophet. Rationality is the tools of the philosopher, not of the prophet. The prophet's encounter of the Divine is a-rational, transcending logic or reason.

During those times we, like Miriam, are completely overtaken by the moment, allowing our senses to fill us with an enthusiasm and fervor that is expressed physically and emotionally. Our bodies break out in ecstatic song, negating logic and numbing our intellectual faculties.

In the weeks ahead we will come to appreciate Moses' intellectual prowess. He transmitted to us an incredibly sophisticated judicial system, one that intrigues our minds, stimulates our brains and challenges our thinking. That will happen eventually. For now though, we need to pause and celebrate the religious genius of Miriam. In the realm of spirituality her approach is far superior to Moshe's. Because, ultimately, in the age-old mind/body conundrum, at least as far as religiosity is concerned, she got it right: it is the body over the mind; the heart over the brain.

* Rabbi of the Prospect Heights Shul in Brooklyn, New York. Hebrew texts omitted because of difficulties keeping Hebrew consistent across word processing platforms. For the Hebrew, go to the source below.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/01/beshalach5784/>

Together and Apart: Thoughts for Parashat Beshallah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

After the Israelites crossed the sea and were miraculously saved from their Egyptian oppressors, they broke out in a song of praise to the Almighty. *"Then sang Moshe and the children of Israel."* Yet, the actual words of the song are in the singular... *"I will sing to God....God is my strength and song..."* Although the people sang as a vast crowd, each voice was individual.

In his memoir, *The Torch in My Ear*, the Sephardic Jewish writer Elias Canetti (who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981) reflects on an insight that came to him as a young man: *"I realized that there is such a thing as a crowd instinct, which is always in conflict with the personality instinct, and that the struggle between the two of them can explain the course of human history."* (*The Memoirs of Elias Canetti*, p. 387). This idea became central to Canetti's life, ultimately resulting in his classic book *Crowds and Power*.

What is the *"crowd instinct?"* It is the desire to blend into a crowd, to dissolve one's personality into a large mass of people. The crowd instinct can be witnessed in sports' arenas, where fans become one with each other and with the players on the field. It can be experienced in mass rallies where fiery orators fire up the crowd, or at rock concerts where fans lose themselves in their wild admiration of the singers and their music. People have a deep desire to be part of such crowds.

Yet, crowds can become dangerous. When individuals succumb to crowds, demagogues can control them, can drive them to do terrible things, can turn them into lynch mobs or murderous gangs, can push them into terrorism and war.

And so there is also a “*personality instinct*,” a deep desire to retain our own ideas and values, to resist the mesmerizing power of crowds. Although we at times want to share in the enthusiasms and griefs of crowds, we simultaneously want to maintain our inner freedom from the crowds. We want to blend in...but not to blend in.

In the Song at the Sea, we can detect both the crowd instinct and the personality instinct. The Israelites were in the early stage of developing into a nation. Nation-building entails working with crowds, striving to create consensus among various factions. Nations demand patriotism, national symbols that inspire citizens to feel united with each other. But nations can become dangerous crowds. Demagogues can manipulate the crowd’s emotions and can control information that they share with the masses. Crowds can become dangerous; crowds can be turned into murdering, war-mongering and hateful entities.

How can one resist the power of crowds? For this we need the personality instinct. Each person needs to understand the crowd, but keep enough independence not to totally succumb to the power of the crowd. Each person literally has to be a hero, has to be willing to stand up and stand out...and possibly take terrible risks in order to maintain personal integrity. So the throngs on Israelites sang together...but separately. They had to learn to keep a balance.

Throughout human history, there has been an ongoing tension between the crowd instinct and the personality instinct. Too often, the crowd instinct has prevailed. Masses of people have been whipped up to commit the worst atrocities, to murder innocents, to vent hatred. Too seldom have the masses acted like stars who can and do resist the power of dangerous crowds.

In our time, like throughout history, there are those who seek to manipulate crowds in dangerous, murderous and hateful ways. There are those who play on the fears and gullibility of the masses, who dissolve individuality and turn people into frenzied sheep.

But there are also those who refuse to become part of such crowds, who resist the crowd instinct and maintain the personality instinct.

“*Then sang Moshe and the children of Israel...I will sing to God...*” A crowd, a nation, with each individual voice singing its own song...together and apart.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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 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 during its winter fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3194>

For Holocaust Remembrance Day: Simone Veil: From Survivor to World Leader

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Simone Veil (1927-2017) was born in Nice, France, into a secular middle class Jewish family. Her pleasant childhood was abruptly ended by the rise of the Nazis and the fall of France to German control. In 1944 she was deported to Auschwitz. Her father and brother were deported and murdered. Her mother died of typhus before the concentration camp was liberated in April 1945. She and two sisters survived.

Veil considered herself to be French; she felt betrayed that France allowed its Jewish citizens to be oppressed, deported and murdered. Yes, there were good French people who saved Jews, who spoke up for their Jewish neighbors. But too many did not. Moreover, after Jewish survivors began to return to their homes in France, they were not greeted with the warmth and understanding that Veil expected. Even the government remained aloof. *"From top to bottom of the government, the same attitude prevailed: no one felt concerned by what the Jews had suffered. You can imagine how shocking this was for everyone whose lives had been disrupted by the Holocaust"* (A Life: A Memoir by Simon Veil, p. 87).

After the liberation, she decided to study law at the University of Paris, where she met her future husband Antoine Veil. They were married in October 1946, and had three sons. She practiced law for several years, and in 1956 she passed the national examination to become a magistrate. She received a senior position at the National Penitentiary Administration, under the Ministry of Justice. From May 1974 to March 1977, she served as Minister of Health, and was responsible for advocating a number of significant laws, including legalizing abortion in France.

In 1979 she was elected as a member of the European Parliament; in the first European parliamentary election she was elected President, a position she held until 1982. She continued with her active political life, including years of service in the cabinet of France's Prime Minister. During the course of her remarkable career, she won many awards and honors. When she died, her funeral was conducted as a national ceremony. It was attended by President Macron and many dignitaries, along with Holocaust survivors. President Macron announced the decision to rebury Veil and her husband in the Pantheon, a rare honor, and this was done on July 1, 2018.

Veil devoted her career to efforts to improve society. *"No doubt what I suffered in the camps developed my extreme sensitivity to anything in human relations that generates humiliation and loss of human dignity"* (Ibid. p. 101). She worked for prison reform; she advocated for women's rights; she was a champion of environmental issues. Her devotion to France was central to her life...even though France had betrayed her and its Jewish citizens during World War II. She was sympathetic to Israel and saw its role as *"a home for people who no longer had one, to provide a haven of peace for all those who had been displaced and lost families, houses and professions, and to give them a piece of land where they could finally put down roots"* (Ibid., p. 118).

In 2003, she accepted the Presidency of the International Victims' Claims Fund in the International Criminal Court. She made it clear that she was doing so in defense of the rights of victims, not to pose as a judge of actions from which they had suffered. *"After the war, when the survivors of the Holocaust returned to France, they had to provide proof of the expropriations they had suffered. Even so, they were poorly compensated and only after a struggle. Seldom did money deposited in banks or contracts underwritten by insurance companies result in the payment of damages"* (Ibid., p. 171).

It was not until 1995 that France officially recognized its complicity in the crimes against its Jewish citizens during the Second World War. President Jacques Chirac, on July 16, 1995, called on France to face its past and to make amends to the extent possible. A commission was established to deal with the immense losses of Jews whose property was expropriated during the war. The commission found that 50,000 Jewish businesses had been "Aryanized" and 90,000 Jewish bank accounts and insurance contracts had never been honored; 38,000 Jewish apartments had been looted of their furniture. Restoration of assets to Jewish families was arranged, to the extent possible. The commission pointed to France's responsibility to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust, and Simone Veil was asked to serve as the first President of the Foundation for the Memory of the Holocaust.

On January 27, 2005, she spoke at Auschwitz on the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. To an audience including survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, she recounted the horrors of those days; she remembered the more than one and a half million people murdered here, simply because they were born Jewish. *“Today, sixty years later, a new pledge must be made for people to unite at least to combat hatred of other people, anti-Semitism and racism, and intolerance....It is the right and duty of us, the last survivors, to put you on your guard and to ask you to turn our companions’ cry ‘never again’ into reality”* (Ibid., pp. 248-49).

She not only worked to foster an understanding of the Holocaust and its victims; she also strove to highlight the heroism of those righteous people who fought against Nazism, who saved Jewish lives, who behaved honestly and admirably during a very difficult period of time. On January 18, 2007, she spoke as President of the Foundation for the Memory of the Holocaust at a ceremony honoring the righteous of France:

“All of you, the Righteous of France, to whom we pay tribute today, illustrate the honor of our country which thanks to you, found a sense of fraternity, justice and courage....For those of us still haunted by the memory of our loved ones who vanished in smoke and have no gravestone, for all those who want a better world, more just and more fraternal, cleansed of the poison of anti-Semitism, racism and hatred, these walls will resonate now and forever with the echo of your voices, you, the Righteous of France, who give us reasons to hope” (Ibid., pp. 284-85).

Although she was fully and personally aware of human viciousness and cruelty, Simone Veil wanted very much to believe in the ultimate victory of a righteous, compassionate and humane society. She stressed the role of righteous French non-Jews who acted nobly during the war years. *“I am convinced that there will always be men and women, of all origins and in all countries, capable of doing what is right and just. Based on the example of the Righteous, I should like to believe that moral strength and individual conscience can win out”* (Ibid., p.295).

* * *

Although Simone Veil did not identify herself as being religious, her life embodied significant elements of a religious worldview. If faith in God was not part of her mindset, her faith in humanity was remarkable. After all she witnessed in Auschwitz, it might have been expected that she could no longer trust the goodness of human beings. After the cold reception she and other survivors experienced upon returning to France after the war, it would have been natural for her to feel alienation from France and the French people. But she did not lose faith in humanity, in the French people, in France. This faith was — in religious terms — messianic. She believed in a future age when humanity would overcome its hatreds and prejudices, when people of all nations, religions, races would live in peace and mutual respect.

But her faith was not merely a matter of lip-service to high ideals. She devoted her life to working for the betterment of her society. She strove to enact policies that enhanced human rights and human dignity.

In my more than fifty years of rabbinic service, I've learned to pay more attention to what people do rather than to what they say. Professions of faith and pious preachments may be fine, but they do not define one's religiosity. Righteous action is the true test.

Reference

A Life: A Memoir by Simone Veil, Haus Publishing, London, 2007.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/changing-world-one-person-time-thoughts-parashat-bo>

Beshalach: Winning the War

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The relationship between the Jews and the Mitzrim had been a painful one. For years the Mitzrim had abused the Jews by enslaving them and killing them in all kinds of ways. But once Hashem redeemed the Jews from Mitzrayim there was no longer any abuse. Instead, what the Mitzrim attempted was an all-out war.

Paroh and his army chased the Jews. They shot projectiles (aka rockets) throughout the night. Miraculously, the cloud separating the Jews from the Mitzri army absorbed the projectiles and even bounced them back on the wicked senders. Eventually, the chase placed the Jews in a no-win situation. It seemed like it was a choice of death or enslavement by the Mitzrim or death by drowning in the Yam Suf. At that moment Hashem made a miracle and the sea split, letting the Jews pass through it. The Mitzrim who continued chasing the Jews entered the waterbed and then experienced how the sea turned back into water and were drowned.

As the Jews reflected on the redemption and on the miraculous victory from the battle the Mitzrim had attempted, they recited “Oz Yoshir.” For sure, it is a song of thanksgiving. But it is also filled with lessons for Jews of all time. “Oz Yoshir” addresses the questions: What was the secret of the miraculous victory in battle which they had just experienced? And what is the secret that will win wars for the Jewish people in future generations?

[emphasis added]

Centuries later, a well-known Jewish general would make a terrible mistake. Bar Kochba, a Jewish leader who was so respected that some thought he could potentially be Moshiach, made a mistake in his battles against Rome. Bar Kochba's army was so powerful and dedicated that Bar Kochba thought that he could naturally beat the Romans in battle. He declared in prayer, *“Hashem, we don't need your help.”* The result was that Bar Kochba lost the battle and countless people died with him. (Yerushalmi, Taanis 4:5)

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Dirash Moshe) asks: Why did this prayer of Bar Kochba's not work? If indeed he had an army that was stronger than the Romans, then if Hashem would just leave things alone, Bar Kochba should have won by laws of nature. Why is it that he lost?

Rav Moshe explains that there is a passage in “Oz Yoshir” that must guide us in understanding how wars work. The verse states (Shemos 15:3), *“Hashem is the Master of Wars.”* Rav Moshe explains that this means that when it comes to wars there is no such thing as Hashem leaving it to nature. There is neither nature nor miracles in war. Only Hashem. He is the Master. Thus, at the moment that Bar Kochba declared that Hashem should not help him — “Just leave it to nature” — he effectively lost the war.

There is no such thing as nature by war. If Hashem is not helping you, you cannot win by laws of nature.

[emphasis added]

This illuminates the story of Chanuka in a remarkable way. In the prayer “Al Hanissim” we note that Hashem placed the mighty in the hands of the weak and the many in the hands of the few. We certainly view this as a miracle. It is not what was expected. But in the deeper levels of understanding war, there is neither nature nor miracle in war. Only Hashem. When He is with us every victory is possible.

In current events today the Jewish world is in a difficult place, as it often has been throughout history. The battles are dangerous and come with tragic loss. The truths of right and wrong have been blurred as every man and his opinion is promoted on social media. The organizations that were created to promote peace and safety have facilitated danger and evil. Even where we thought victory was achieved, evil sprouts forth again. In some ways the situation seems hopeless.

Yet, the principle that “Hashem is the Master of Wars,” is powerful. We certainly must do our part to further the safety of the Jewish people and to fight in its defense. As we do, we recognize ourselves as merely agents of Hashem — Hashem

is the Master of War. We yearn for fulfillment of the prophetic words of Yirmiya 31(that we reference each evening in Maariv. *"Hashem saves the Jews from those who are stronger."* Hashem is the one who decides victory.

When we say, *"Hashem is the Master of War,"* we do not mean that the war will be won with great pomp and ceremony in some grand and momentous showdown. "Hashem is the Master" implies that He is such a master that with the simplest of gestures or by causing a change of heart in some influential figure, Hashem can calmly change the course of battle and the course of history.

I am fond of recounting the story of General George Washington as he led the fledgling American army during the revolutionary war.

On one occasion the British were approaching steadily with troops that could soon surround Washington's army. Realizing the crisis, Washington ordered his men to build grand campfires, giving the impression that they would be staying for the night. Then he gave the order to quietly break camp and travel.

Most of the soldiers obeyed. But the soldiers in charge of the cannon came to Washington and objected. They said, *"The roads are muddy. Our wagons, weighed down by the cannon, will not be able to travel."* Washington dismissed their objections. He said, *"The danger of staying is too great. Figure it out."*

Well, Hashem wanted there to be a United States of America, and apparently cannon were to be part of that program. So that night a freezing cold wind blew, the temperatures dropped dramatically, and the ground froze. The wagons weighed down by the cannon passed easily on the frozen roads, and Washington's army escaped from the British to fight another day.

When we say "Hashem is Master of War" we don't necessarily mean with great drama. Hashem who controls the hearts of people, who controls the winds, as well as the trends of mankind, is the one who decides.

And so, it is not merely that despite hopelessness Hashem can provide victory. It is precisely from a sense of hopelessness that victory emerges. It is at that moment when we deeply feel that we cannot do this on our own despite our best efforts that we recognize, "Hashem is the Master of War." We turn to Him to provide victory and salvation in the calmest and most effective way that we couldn't even have imagined.

This is related to a different Mitzva which instructs us not to practice Divinations)Vayikra 19:26(. That means that if a Jew is on his way to do something significant and something bad happens, such as he drops his bread or stubs his toe, he should not read into that and say that it is going to be a bad day. We do not Divine — attribute our interpretations to the spiritual. Instead, we recognize that Hashem is in charge. Despite a bad "omen" we proceed with faith that Hashem is in charge.

In fact, a bad occurrence might actually be the harbinger of awesome blessing and salvation. In the aftermath of sorrow, we realize profoundly that we are mortal and limited. We are not G-d. In our humility we still try to do our best, but we leave the "driving" to Hashem.)See Ramban, Shaar HaGimul 1.(

That is the personal moment that Dovid described in Tehillim 94(, *"If I declare, 'My feet falter,' the kindness of Hashem supports me."*

And so, I invite us all to say: Hashem, we are deeply committed. But sometimes we notice that we aren't achieving the effectiveness that we had hoped for. We simply can't do it on our own. So, please surround us with Your protection. Bless us with Your support. "Master of War," grant the Jewish people success and victory as only You can.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Beshalach - Inspiration Starts With I

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 5783

The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 22:3) notes that we learn the proper approach to prayer from *Az Yashir*, the Song of the Sea, and that one is therefore required to recount the Splitting of the Sea every morning before beginning the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the Silent Devotion:

Why does one have to mention the Splitting of the Sea in Emes v'Yatziv (the blessing after the Shema)? Since once He split the sea for them, they believed in Him, as it says, "And they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant," and in the merit of the belief that they believed they merited to say a song of praise and the Divine Spirit resided upon them, for so it is written after that, "Then, Moshe sang," therefore a person needs to place redemption close to prayer just as they placed a song of praise close after the belief and the Splitting of the Sea, and just as they purified their hearts and sang a song of praise for so it is written, "and the nation revered G-d and they believed" and afterwards, "Then he sang" so too a person must purify his heart before he prays.

This Medrash is learning two things from the way our ancestors sang this lofty and prophetic song. The first is that prayer should be recited as a response to an experience of redemption. The second is that the experience alone wasn't enough. They had to actively purify their hearts, and only then did they engage in singing G-d's praises. This lesson is clear from the wording of the verse. Our ancestors first revered G-d, and only then did they believe in Him. They first had the reverence to stop and focus on what G-d had just done for them. Only after they actively focused and purified their hearts were they able to truly believe in G-d.

I would like to ask two questions on this second lesson. First, how could it be that our ancestors needed to focus on their experiences? They had just been through the year-long upheaval of all of the rules of nature through the Ten Plagues, and it culminated with the Splitting of the Sea. As we recite in the Haggadah on Pesach, the Egyptians suffered from many more plagues during the Splitting of the Sea than they did during all ten plagues in Egypt combined. Surely, anyone living through such an experience would recognize G-d.

Second, why does the Medrash say that we need to purify our hearts every single day before we pray? Our ancestors focused once after the Splitting of the Sea and then merited to sing G-d's praises. It would seem to suffice for us to remember the experience once and focus on it as they did. In that way we would purify our hearts and have that faith in G-d. We should then be ready to pray whenever we want to.

I believe that one question answers the other. Our ancestors certainly recognized that G-d exists. However, prayer requires more than knowledge of G-d's existence. That knowledge has to inspire one to feel a powerful sense of reliance on G-d, a deep appreciation of His love and His goodness. Only through that inspiration can one sing His praises and ask for His help. This is why our ancestors needed to focus. They understood that our emotions respond to our thoughts. If we want to feel inspired by our knowledge of G-d's love and concern for us, then we need to actively focus on His love and concern.

This is also why we need to purify our hearts on a daily basis. Prayer is not merely an intellectual exercise. It is an expression of feeling G-d's embrace and concern for my welfare. If we want to feel that love, we need to actively inspire ourselves. The fact that I was inspired yesterday will not help me today. That inspiration has come and gone. Even living through the Splitting of the Sea is not enough. If I want to truly be inspired, then I need to focus my attention on the miracle. If I want to be inspired, I need to make it happen.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Beshalach

by Rabbi Herzl Heftter *

]Rabbi Heftter did not send a new Dvar Torah for Beshalach. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Heftter in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Parashat Beshalah/Shabbat Shira: Musically Observant

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * © 2024

*"Create light, complain not about darkness,
Create goodness, complain not about evil"*

(R. Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, ערפלי טוהר)

Our generation is a wonderful one. People are constantly searching for meaning in life, spirituality and goodness. The amazing invention of the internet has enabled a global network of loving kindness, created by people from all walks of life, hi-tech moguls and simple citizens, whose purpose is to make this world a better place. It also allowed hundreds of millions around the world to stand for their rights, hope for a better life, be creative and innovative and realize their potential. There is a growing awareness of the equality of all races, individuals and religions as well as of our role in preserving and protecting Planet Earth. In short, according to the standards of the Torah, ours is a very religious generation. You might think that these words stand in stark contrast to the constant feed of negative news and to the fire and brimstone prophecies by doomsayers who promise us that the physical or moral end of the world is around the corner, but these words were guided by the beautiful teaching of Rav Kook, quoted above. It is true that not too long ago a self-proclaimed rabbi said that every minute another Jew is diagnosed with cancer because people are having mixed weddings, although with 525,600 minutes a year and a population of 13,500,000 Jews, it would have taken the Jewish people approximately 25 years to be all sick and die out. Since mixed weddings have been around for much longer, the fact that there are still non-cancerous Jews around should be celebrated as a miracle according to this rabbi. Other rabbis complain about the low attendance at the synagogues and about the fact that most Jews do not identify themselves as orthodox, but I want to look at the positive and show that not only the world is not deteriorating, it is improving.

The coming of Mashiah will be marked by a new song... (בג'ו)

People, I believe, are still very spiritual and have faith and a sense of purpose in life, but their center has shifted from the synagogues and the prayers to the world of music and self-expression.

The Gaon of Vilna is quoted as saying that had there been no Torah, we would have engaged ourselves with music. Music can provide spirituality, guidance, tradition and direction. It can be a tool for expressing emotions, concerns, prayer and more. It can be studied thoroughly and abstractly, just like the Torah, yet it can be celebrated joyously and spontaneously as a deep religious experience. In recent years we have seen a proliferation of vehicles and channels for people to create and present their own music. On the internet, YouTube led the way, Smule continued, and now there are endless apps and websites helping people create and promulgate their music. On the small screen, a similar trend has evolved with endless reality shows searching for new talent, such as AGT, X-Factor, The Voice, American Idol and more. These shows have spread all over the world, attracting millions of contestants who try to woo the crowd with their singing and musical skills.

Like many others, I initially dismissed this phenomenon thinking that it is all about fame and fortune, even if just Andy Warhol's 15 minutes of it, but after a good friend prompted me to watch an Israeli version, called "A Star is Born," I changed my mind. The contestants I saw there represented the full gamut of Israeli society. Soldiers, doctors, teachers and butchers; teenagers, grandparents and housewives; ex-secular turned Breslav Hassidim and ex-religious turned punk; For many of them singing was not about show business but rather about finding their voice, their identity and purpose in life. Singing was also a prayer, a dialogue with the God they were either looking for, thought has abandoned them or that they have abandoned. There were songs of healing, therapy and catharsis releasing suppressed emotions and traumatic events. Contestants were singing their hearts out, praying for some recognition from their parents, family and friends, pleading with them and with God not to leave them alone.

There were many touching moments and many songs which I will never view again in the same light after singers made them their own and told their life story through them. There was the bereaved father whose son died in a car accident coming back from a party. The father decided to volunteer, teaching teenagers about drinking and driving, but also to audition for the show because that was what his son always wanted. He chose a melodramatic love song I never cared for before, but which now received a totally new meaning:

An ocean of tears in my eyes... my heart pleads: return to me... my room is so bleak and deserted... I utter a sincere prayer for you to return...]Hebrew original omitted[

Then there was the girl who came accompanied by her parents and siblings and said that she was one of seven, although in reality they were only six. It turned out that an older brother had died before she was born, and through the external joy and exuberance of the family, the pain and the loss were apparent. She chose a song which for me felt kind of cheesy and Christian: What if god was one of us... just a stranger on the bus..., but as she started singing the crowd around her dissolved and she was alone in the world, standing on a cloud, talking to God, and demanding to know where her brother is. Her rage and frustration conveyed the question through the words of the song: why couldn't God be one of us? Why couldn't He ride the bus like one of us, feel our love for our brother and not let him die? When the song was over, she was depleted, shaking and could barely talk. She has just released questions, doubts, fears and tears she has suppressed for years, but she was talking to God. It was a purely religious, cathartic and healing, albeit very painful, moment.

The Gat brothers became a phenomenon in Israel. Dressed in full Hassidic regalia, locks and all, they would not change their appearance, despite the judges' recommendation and still made it to the finals, winning second place. The two, who previously lived a fully secular life, one of them also working as a lifeguard in Eilat, never quit playing their beloved guitars, and when they first came up to the stage they wowed the crowd with "The Sounds of Silence." But their most powerful and memorable performance was with a song written by another bohemian turned Breslav, Shuli Rand, whom some of you may remember from the movie Ushpizin. The simple lyrics, woven around God's question to Adam after he ate from the forbidden fruit, are piercing and penetrating, revealing the believer's most inner dilemmas:

Dear God, frankly speaking, sometimes I cannot bear being in Your world. Where can I hide from You? What shall I argue, say or claim?]Hebrew omitted[

A critic wrote in one of the Israeli magazines that despite not considering himself a religious person, this song sent shivers down his spine.

Finally, look at the stories of Idan Emmedi and Shmuley Behar, contestants in the eighth season of "A Star is Born." Both came to the audition with an original song, both told the interviewer that it is about their own experience and both refused to reveal or discuss those experiences. But as Emmedi, who is a commander in the IDF, started singing, it was clear that he is discussing the traumatic events in the lives of young Israeli soldiers, drafted right out of high school and turning from boys to men almost overnight. He sang about living through war, bloodshed and bereavement, and of his attempts to hide all these from his beloved. Although the lyrics were so lucid and vivid he would not refer to the content of the song or the circumstances of writing it in his conversation with the judges. Behar then went up to the mike and his song was an explicit account of the paralyzing fear and helplessness he felt as a kid, curling alone in his bed and hearing his mom screaming as his dad would beat her. During the audition his mom waited outside, putting her ear to the door to eavesdrop, while he sang about the efforts she made to hide her bruises under large scarves and the silent promise he made to always protect her. After the song was over, still listening to the judges assessments, the 26 year old Behar collapsed, something that never happened to him before.

Obviously telling his story for the first time took its toll on him. The stories of these two young men were disheartening, yet it was amazing to see how music served for them as a therapeutic vehicle, allowing them express what for them was unspeakable. Idan Emmedi, who is religious, went on to win second place and is now one of the leading singers in Israel, presenting a beautiful combination of blues, soul and contemporary rock which can definitely be part of the new Israeli prayer book.

Alongside all this, there is an unbelievable awakening taking place in Israel as people reconnect to old musical traditions. Rock singers and bearded rabbis mix together, performing Baqqashot and old liturgy with new arrangements, some of which could be found on the fabulous Piyut website: www.piyut.org.il

There is much more to be said, or rather sung, about the power of music, but let us say for now that we are witnessing a new era of religiosity ushered in, the era of Musical Observance. Jews the world over should hop on the bandwagon and find ways to enrich their spiritual experience and synagogue life by connecting to music they love, telling their story and talking to God, and may God bless us all to merit and be musically observant.

Shabbat Shalom.

Note: No harmful videos were watched for the preparation of this article. All data was gleaned from written article or by your friendly non-Jewish, Goy Shel internet service: GOOGLE.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

This Dvar Torah is from an unpublished draft of a forthcoming book on Tanach by Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared his manuscript draft with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

A Time to Sing and Dance

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

If we consider folk tunes the true music of a nation, then the "Song of the Sea" would be the most Jewish music we could find. As "Danny Boy" is to the Irish or "Brigg Fair" to the English, the "Song of the Sea" is to the Jews.

Percy Grainger, an Australian-English composer, defined folk music as music that came from a nation's soil. The "Song of the Sea" was the first spontaneous eruption of song the Jews ever experienced as a people. It emerged as beautifully as a tree from the soil when the time was right.

But when the Jews left Egypt, they were not out of the woods just yet. They still had to cross the desert, and Pharaoh would not let them get far. It took all of three days for Pharaoh to chase after the Jews to bring them back into slavery.

As Pharaoh closed in on them, the Jews had an impenetrable army on one side and the raging Red Sea on the other. God told Moses to stop praying and head into the sea and he would "fight for them and silence those who meant them harm." The Jews jumped into the Sea and it miraculously split, providing them with a dry path to traverse across. As the Jews emerged at the other side, the sea walls collapsed and destroyed the Egyptian army who had foolishly followed them.

Through this miracle, the Jews saw a vision of God which not even our greatest prophets saw. Such a revelation caused them to burst forth into song and dance.

It's not every day in a nation's history such amazing things happen.

But sometimes, in our own lives, we have an opportunity to feel amazing joy connected to a big, momentous event. We have such an event this Shabbat. The Bar Mitzvah of Nuku Spiro. A Bar Mitzvah is an event where we have an opportunity to sing and dance to mark the happy occasion of a man joining his ranks among the Jewish people.

We are so happy and proud of you Nuku, and wish that you too continue to experience miracles and joy throughout your life which inspire you to rejoice, sing and dance.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera (Auckland), New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel (Birmingham, AL).

Rav Kook Torah Beshalach: The Inner Song of the Soul

The Talmud portrays Shirat HaYam, the Israelites' song of thanksgiving at their miraculous deliverance at the Red Sea, as a song of young children and babies:

"When the Israelites exited the sea, they wanted to sing. How did they sing? A young child was sitting on his mother's lap, and a baby was nursing at his mother's breast. When they witnessed the Shechinah, the young child lifted his neck and the baby stopped nursing, and they sang out, "This is my God and I will honor Him")Ex. 15:2(.")Sotah 30b(

Why did the Sages describe Shirat HaYam as a song breaking forth spontaneously from the mouths of babes?

Knowledge and Honor

Kri'at Yam Suf, when the Red Sea split so that the Hebrew slaves could pass through to freedom, was the culmination of the Exodus from Egypt. A careful examination of the text, however, indicates that the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea had different objectives. The Ten Plagues and the Exodus were meant to ensure that "*Egypt will know that I am God*")Ex. 7:5(. The goal was knowledge of God. Through these wonders and miracles, the world would learn to acknowledge God's existence and recognize His control over the universe.

As the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, however, God announced, “*I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his armies*”)Ex. 14:17(. The miracle at the sea aimed for a higher goal: not just yedi'at Hashem, knowing God, but kevod Hashem — honoring God.

From the Throat

The obligation to honor God is learned from Proverbs: “*Honor God from your wealth*”)3:9(. The Midrash Tanchuma explains that in addition to honoring God with one’s monetary wealth, one can also honor him with other gifts and talents, including song. For example, an individual blessed with a melodic voice should lead the communal prayers. Rashi explains that the word 'mei-honecha')“from your wealth”(, may be read as 'mei-gronecha' — “from your throat.”

This leads us to a deeper understanding of what it means to honor God. Knowledge of God is a function of our intellectual faculties; but kavod comes from a deeper, more visceral part of our existence. Like the throat, it is connected to our essential life force — “*If one’s neck is removed, one cannot live*”)Midrash Shir HaShirim 4:6(.

For this reason, the Midrash describes Shirat HaYam as a song that burst forth from the mouths of infants. The song at the Red Sea was a natural expression of the Israelites’ innate feeling of kevod Hashem. It emanated from their yearnings for God, even before they had proper knowledge of God, when they were like young children.

Beyond Set Measures

The Talmud teaches that one reciting the Shema prayer should mention both the Exodus and the Splitting of the Sea)Jer. Talmud Berakhot 1:6(. The commentaries explain that we mention both events, since the redemption from Egypt began with the plagues and was completed with the miracle at the sea. And yet the Sages taught a surprising rule: one who forgot to mention the Exodus must go back and recite the Shema again, but one who forgot to mention the Splitting of the Sea does not need to recite the Shema again)Shemot Rabbah 23(. If the Splitting of the Sea was the consummation of the Exodus, why is it not a mandatory part of the prayers?

We may better understand the difference between knowing God and honoring Him by contrasting basic mitzvah performance with hiddur mitzvah, the elaboration and beautification of a mitzvah. Every mitzvah has parameters and minimum requirements in order to properly fulfill it. Hiddur mitzvah means going beyond those basic requirements. Hiddur mitzvah is a reflection of our inner aesthetic side and an expression of unrestricted kevod Hashem. The Sages derived the concept of hiddur mitzvah from the poetic Song at the Sea, “*This is my God and I will honor [or: beautify] Him*”)Ex. 15:2(.

This enables us to understand why one who failed to mention the Splitting of the Sea does not repeat his prayers. Honoring God, unlike knowledge and wisdom, is not defined within a fixed framework. Precisely because of its loftiness, kevod Hashem cannot be bound by set limits. It reflects a deeper and more innate aspect of our essence - a stirring of the inner song of the soul.

)*Sapphire from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Shemuot HaRe’iyah*)Beshalach 5630(, quoted in *Peninei HaRe’iyah*, pp. 143-145.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/BESHALACH-69.htm>

Music, Language of the Soul (Beshallach 5772)

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

For the first time since their departure from Egypt the Israelites do something together. They sing.

“*Then sang Moses and the children of Israel.*”

Rashi, explaining the view of R. Nehemiah in the Talmud)*Sotah* 30b(that they spontaneously sang the song together, says that the holy spirit rested on them and miraculously the same words came into their minds at the same time. In recollection of that moment, tradition has named this week Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song. What is the place of song in Judaism?

There is an inner connection between music and the spirit. When language aspires to the transcendent and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Music, said Arnold Bennett is “*a language which the soul alone understands but which the soul can never translate.*” It is, in Richter’s words “*the poetry of the air.*” Tolstoy called it “*the shorthand of emotion.*” Goethe said, “*Religious worship cannot do without music. It is one of the foremost means to work upon man with an effect of marvel.*” Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.

So when we seek to express or evoke emotion we turn to melody. Deborah sang after Israel’s victory over the forces of Sisera (Judges 5). Hannah sang when she had a child (1 Sam. 2). When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored (1 Sam. 16). David himself was known as the “*sweet singer of Israel*” (2 Sam. 23:1). Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him (2 Kings 3:15). The Levites sang in the Temple. Every day, in Judaism, we preface our morning prayers with Pesukei de-Zimra, the ‘Verses of Song’ with their magnificent crescendo, Psalm 150, in which instruments and the human voice combine to sing God’s praises.

Mystics go further and speak of the song of the universe, what Pythagoras called ‘the music of the spheres.’ This is what Psalm 19 means when it says,

‘The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands . . . There is no speech, there are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music [carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world.]’ Psalm 19

Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.

So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for shacharit, mincha and maariv, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Succot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the haftorah from the prophetic books, and yet another for Ketuvim, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah, for studying Mishnah and Gemarah. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. There is a map of holy words and it is written in melodies and songs.

Music has extraordinary power to evoke emotion. The Kol Nidrei prayer with which Yom Kippur begins is not really a prayer at all. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that it is its ancient, haunting melody that has given it its hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment, standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they pleaded with heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul. (Lehavdil, Beethoven came close to it in the opening notes of the sixth movement of the C Sharp Minor Quartet op. 131, his most sublime and spiritual work).

Nor can you sit on Tisha B’Av reading Eichah, the book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul.

Each year for the past ten years I have been privileged to be part of a mission of song (together with the Shabbaton Choir and singers Rabbi Lionel Rosenfeld and Chazanim Shimon Craimer and Jonny Turgel) to Israel to sing to victims of terror, as well as to people in hospitals, community centres and food kitchens. We sing for and with the injured, the bereaved, the

sick and the broken hearted. We dance with people in wheelchairs. One boy who had lost half of his family, as well as being blinded, in a suicide bombing, sang a duet with the youngest member of the choir, reducing the nurses and his fellow patients to tears. Such moments are epiphanies, redeeming a fragment of humanity and hope from the random cruelties of fate.

Beethoven wrote over the manuscript of the third movement of his A Minor Quartet the words Neue Kraft fühlend, “*Feeling new strength.*” That is what you sense in those hospital wards. You understand what King David meant when he sang to God the words: “*You turned my grief into dance; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent.*” You feel the strength of the human spirit no terror can destroy.

In his book, *Musicophilia*, the neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks (no relative, alas) tells the poignant story of Clive Wearing, an eminent musicologist who was struck by a devastating brain infection. The result was acute amnesia. He was unable to remember anything for more than a few seconds. As his wife Deborah put it, ‘*It was as if every waking moment was the first waking moment.*’

Unable to thread experiences together, he was caught in an endless present that had no connection with anything that had gone before. One day his wife found him holding a chocolate in one hand and repeatedly covering and uncovering it with the other hand, saying each time, ‘Look, it’s new.’ ‘It’s the same chocolate’, she said. ‘No’, he replied, ‘look. It’s changed.’ He had no past at all. In a moment of awareness he said about himself, ‘I haven’t heard anything, seen anything, touched anything, smelled anything. It’s like being dead.’

Two things broke through his isolation. One was his love for his wife. The other was music. He could still sing, play the organ and conduct a choir with all his old skill and verve. What was it about music, Sacks asked, that enabled him, while playing or conducting, to overcome his amnesia? He suggests that when we ‘remember’ a melody, we recall one note at a time, yet each note relates to the whole. He quotes the philosopher of music, Victor Zuckerkandl, who wrote, ‘*Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once. Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown.*’ Music is a form of sensed continuity that can sometimes break through the most overpowering disconnections in our experience of time.

Faith is more like music than like science. Science analyzes, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time. God is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of God’s song. Faith teaches us to hear the music beneath the noise.

So music is a signal of transcendence. The philosopher and musician Roger Scruton writes that it is “*an encounter with the pure subject, released from the world of objects, and moving in obedience to the laws of freedom alone.*” He quotes Rilke: “*Words still go softly out towards the unsayable / And music, always new, from palpitating stones / builds in useless space its godly home.*” The history of the Jewish spirit is written in its songs. The words do not change, but each generation needs its own melodies.

Our generation needs new songs so that we too can sing joyously to God as our ancestors did at that moment of transfiguration when they crossed the Red Sea and emerged, the other side, free at last. When the soul sings, the spirit soars.

FOOTNOTE:

]1[Kavam, literally “their line,” possibly meaning the reverberating string of a musical instrument.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshallach/music-language-of-the-soul/> 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.

What Happened at Marah?

By Yehuda Shurpin * © Chabad 2024

Immediately following the Splitting of the Sea, the Torah recounts how our ancestors came to a place they would ultimately call Marah, which means “bitter.” Indeed, the water there was bitter and undrinkable.

Thirsting, the people complained to Moses about not having anything to drink, at which point Moses cried out to G d. G d then instructed Moses to cast a piece of wood into the water, which then turned into sweet water.

At this point, the Torah tells us rather cryptically, *“There He gave them a statute and an ordinance, and there He tested them.”* Scripture continues with G d telling the people that if they are careful to keep all of the mitzvahs and statutes, He will not bring upon them *“all the sickness”* that He had placed upon the Egyptians, *“for I, the L rd, heal you.”*¹

Since this occurred before the Giving of the Torah at Sinai, what were these statutes and ordinances that the people were given and admonished to keep?

Mitzvahs Given at Marah

We find several traditions in the Talmud and Midrash regarding what these statutes and ordinances were, based on the meaning of the words we translated as “statute” and “ordinance,” *]chok[* and *]mishpat[* in Hebrew. Here are some:

- Shabbat *]חֲנִינָה* (and honoring parents *]בְּרִיתָמָה*)²
- Forbidden sexual relationships *]חֲנִינָה* (and civil law/torts *]בְּנִינָה*)³
- Shabbat *]חֲנִינָה* (and civil law/torts *]בְּנִינָה*)⁴
- Shabbat and honoring parents *]חֲנִינָה* (and civil law/torts *]בְּנִינָה*)⁵
- Shabbat and laws of the red heifer *]חֲנִינָה* (and civil law/torts *]בְּנִינָה*)⁶
- According to one opinion in the Talmud, they were also given the Seven Noahide Laws at that time.⁷

Laws Before Torah Was Given

According to some opinions, these laws were already in effect at Marah.⁸ However, Rashi opines that these laws were first taught and studied at Marah as a preparation for the giving of the Torah, but they were not binding until G d “gave” them again together with the rest of the Torah on Mount Sinai.⁹

Why were these laws specifically given after the people complained? Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashi’s grandson, known as Rashbam, c.1085–c.1158) explains this was teaching them that the way to get one’s needs fulfilled by G d is through keeping His Torah and mitzvahs.¹⁰

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 15:23-26.
2. Mechilta, D’Rashbi, Exodus 15:25.
3. Ibid.
4. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed* 3:32.

5. Sanhedrin 56b.
6. Rashi on Exodus 15:25. One manuscript of Rashi on Exodus 15:25 adds “honoring parents”; see, however, *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 140, fn. 15, as to why Rashi does not include “honoring parents” in his list here.
7. Sanhedrin 56b; see *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 140, fn. 15, as to whether Rashi follows this opinion as well.
8. Basic reading of Sanhedrin 56b.
9. Rashi on Exodus 15:25; *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 142, fn 24.
10. Rashbam on Exodus 15:25: see also *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 165, fn. 21..

* Rabbi of the Chabad Shul in St. Louis Park, MN, content editor at Chabad.org, and author of the popular weekly Ask Rabbi Y column.
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5802368/jewish/What-Happened-at-Marah.htm

Beshalach: Bitter Sweetness

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Bitter Sweetness

Pharaoh agreed to Moses’ request to allow the people to go into the desert for three days to offer up sacrifices to G-d, and asked who would be going.

Following Our Children

They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water from Marah, for it was bitter; that is why it was named “Marah” (“bitter”). (Ex. 14:23)

The words “*for it was bitter*” literally mean, “*for they were bitter*.” This may be understood to mean that the people, rather than the water, were bitter. In this context, the whole phrase reads, “*they could not drink the water from marah for they were bitter*.”

When we are bitter, everything tastes bitter. Only when we ourselves are “sweetened” with the positive attitude fostered by Divine consciousness can the water – as well as everything else in life – begin to taste sweet as well.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a decisive victory over our enemies.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
 Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Renewable Energy

The first translation of the Torah into another language – Greek – took place in around the second century BCE, in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II. It is known as the Septuagint, in Hebrew HaShivim, because it was done by a team of seventy scholars. The Talmud, however, says that at various points the Sages at work on the project deliberately mistranslated certain texts because they believed that a literal translation would simply be unintelligible to a Greek readership. One of these texts was the phrase, “On the seventh day God finished all the work He had made.” Instead, the translators wrote, “On the sixth day God finished.”[1]

What was it that they thought the Greeks would not understand? How did the idea that God made the universe in six days make more sense than that He did so in seven? It seems puzzling, yet the answer is simple. The Greeks could not understand the seventh day, Shabbat, as itself part of the work of Creation. What is creative about resting? What do we achieve by not making, not working, not inventing? The idea seems to make no sense at all.

Indeed, we have the independent testimony of the Greek writers of that period, that one of the things they ridiculed in Judaism was Shabbat. One day in seven Jews do not work, they said, because they are lazy. The idea that the day itself might have independent value was apparently beyond their comprehension. Oddly enough, within a very short period of time the empire of Alexander the Great began to crumble, just as had the earlier city state of Athens that gave rise to some of the greatest thinkers and writers in history. Civilisations, like individuals, can suffer from burnout. It's what happens when you don't have a day of rest written into your schedule. As Ahad HaAm said: “More than the Jewish people has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people.”

Rest one day in seven and you won't burn out. Shabbat, which we encounter for the first time in this week's parsha, is one of the greatest institutions the world has ever known. It changed the way the world thought about time. Prior to Judaism, people measured time either by the sun – the solar calendar of 365 days aligning us with the seasons – or by the moon,

that is, by months (“month” comes from the word “moon”) of roughly thirty days. The idea of the seven-day week – which has no counterpart in nature – was born in the Torah and spread throughout the world via Christianity and Islam, both of which borrowed it from Judaism, marking the difference simply by having it on a different day. We have years because of the sun, months because of the moon, and weeks because of the Jews.

What Shabbat gave – and still gives – is the unique opportunity to create space within our lives, and within society as a whole, in which we are truly free. Free from the pressures of work; free from the demands of ruthless employers; free from the siren calls of a consumer society urging us to spend our way to happiness; free to be ourselves in the company of those we love. Somehow this one day has renewed its meaning in generation after generation, despite the most profound economic and industrial change. In Moses' day it meant freedom from slavery to Pharaoh. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it meant freedom from sweatshop working conditions of long hours for little pay. In ours, it means freedom from emails, smartphones, and the demands of 24/7 availability.

What our parsha tells us is that Shabbat was among the first commands the Israelites received on leaving Egypt. Having complained about the lack of food, God told them that He would send them manna from heaven, but they were not to gather it on the seventh day. Instead, a double portion would fall on the sixth. That is why to this day we have two challot on Shabbat, in memory of that time.

Not only was Shabbat culturally unprecedented. Conceptually, it was so as well. Throughout history people have dreamed of an ideal world. We call such visions, utopias, from the Greek *ou* meaning “no” and *topos* meaning “place.”[2] They are called that because no such dream has ever come true, except in one instance, namely Shabbat. Shabbat is “utopia now,” because on it we create, for twenty-five hours a week, a world in which there are no hierarchies, no employers and employees, no buyers and sellers, no inequalities of wealth or power, no production, no traffic, no din of the factory or clamour of the marketplace. It is “the still point of the turning world,” a pause between symphonic movements, a break between the chapters of our days, an equivalent in time of the open countryside between towns where you can feel the breeze and hear the song of birds. Shabbat is utopia, not as it will be at the

end of time but rather, as we rehearse for it now in the midst of time.

God wanted the Israelites to begin their one-day-in-seven rehearsal of freedom almost as soon as they left Egypt, because real freedom, of the seven-days-in-seven kind, takes time, centuries, millennia. The Torah regards slavery as wrong,[3] but it did not abolish it immediately because people were not yet ready for this. Neither Britain nor America abolished it until the nineteenth century, and even then not without a struggle. Yet the outcome was inevitable once Shabbat had been set in motion, because slaves who know freedom one day in seven will eventually rise against their chains.

The human spirit needs time to breathe, to inhale, to grow. The first rule in time management is to distinguish between matters that are important, and those that are merely urgent. Under pressure, the things that are important but not urgent tend to get crowded out. Yet these are often what matter most to our happiness and sense of a life well-lived. Shabbat is time dedicated to the things that are important but not urgent: family, friends, community, a sense of sanctity, prayer in which we thank God for the good things in our life, and Torah reading in which we retell the long, dramatic story of our people and our journey. Shabbat is when we celebrate *shalom bayit* – the peace that comes from love and lives in the home blessed by the Shechinah, the presence of God you can almost feel in the candlelight, the wine, and the special bread. This is a beauty created not by Michelangelo or Leonardo but by each of us: a serene island of time in the midst of the often-raging sea of a restless world.

I once took part, together with the Dalai Lama, in a seminar (organised by the Elijah Institute) in Amritsar, Northern India, the sacred city of the Sikhs. In the course of the talks, delivered to an audience of two thousand Sikh students, one of the Sikh leaders turned to the students and said: “What we need is what the Jews have: Shabbat!” Just imagine, he said, a day dedicated every week to family and home and

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relationships. He could see its beauty. We can live its reality.

The ancient Greeks could not understand how a day of rest could be part of Creation. Yet it is so, for without rest for the body, peace for the mind, silence for the soul, and a renewal of our bonds of identity and love, the creative process eventually withers and dies. It suffers entropy, the principle that all systems lose energy over time.

The Jewish people did not lose energy over time, and remains as vital and creative as it ever was. The reason is Shabbat: humanity's greatest source of renewable energy, the day that gives us the strength to keep on creating.

[1] Megillah 9a.

[2] The word was coined in 1516 by Sir Thomas More, who used it as the title of his book.

[3] On the wrongness of slavery from a Torah perspective, see the important analysis in Rabbi N. L. Rabinovitch, *Mesilot BiLevavam* (Maaleh Adumim: Maalot, 2015), 38–45. The basis of the argument is the view, central to both the Written Torah and the Mishna, that all humans share the same ontological dignity as the image and likeness of God. This was in the sharpest possible contrast to the views, for instance, of Plato and Aristotle. Rabbi Rabinovitch analyses the views of the Sages, and of Maimonides and Me'iri, on the phrase "They shall be your slaves forever" (Lev. 25:46). Note also the quote he brings from Job 31:13–15, "If I have denied justice to any of my servants... when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One form us both within our mothers?"

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Joseph, the Teacher of Jewish Return and Universalism

"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 very opening of the Torah portion of Beshalach, just as we've reached the climax of the ten plagues and the Israelites have been sent forth out of their Egyptian bondage, we find a fascinating throwback to a former 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 narrative perspective, Joseph's name even evokes a jarring note at this moment of Israel's freedom. After all, Joseph may well be seen as the very antithesis of Moses: Joseph begins within the family of Jacob-Israel, and moves outside of it as he rises to great heights in Egypt, whereas Moses begins as a prince of Egypt and moves into the family of Israel when he smites the Egyptians. 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 (Genesis 47:19–23). So why bring up the remains of Joseph at this point in the story?

The fact is that Joseph is a most complex and amazing personality, who very much stands at the crossroads of and makes a vital connection between the Books of Genesis and Exodus. We have previously pointed out that 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 shepherdry, and the bowing sun, moon and stars smack of cosmic domination. While yet in the Land of Israel, Joseph had apparently set his sights on the then superpower, Egypt – and the second dream suggests that Egypt is only a stepping stone for universal majesty.

But then, does not the Torah picture the Almighty as the creator and master of the entire world, 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? And with his very last breaths, in the closing lines of the book of Genesis (Gen. 50:24–25), 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 as well? The full picture of Joseph seems to depict a great-grandson of Abraham, who fully grasps the importance of the Land of Israel for his nation, but who also recognizes the eventual necessity of their being a source of blessing for "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3), their mission of peace not just for the family but for the world.

The Midrash describes a fascinating scene: "At the exact time when all of the Jews were occupied in gathering the booty of Egypt, Moses was occupied in gathering the bones of Joseph. Who informed Moses as to where Joseph was buried? Serah, the daughter of Asher, who was still living in that generation [of the Exodus]. She went and told Moses that Joseph had been buried in the River Nile. Moses then stood at the foot of the Nile River and cried out: 'Joseph, Joseph, the time of redemption has come, but the Divine Presence is holding it back. If you will show yourself, good. If not, I shall be freed of the oath which you made me swear.' Immediately the coffin of Joseph rose to the surface of the Nile River..."

Hence, when the Israelites went forth from Egypt, two casks [aronot] accompanied them for forty years in the desert: the cask of the life of all worlds [the divine Torah which they had received as family tradition until that time] and the cask [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 eternal

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life?" But in truth the one who is buried in this [cask] fulfilled whatever is written in that [cask]. [Tanchuma, 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." 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 victory of the Israelites when the Reed Sea 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." [Exodus 15:14–15, 18]

Yes, at the supreme triumphant moment of the Exodus, Moses stops to fulfil a vow and take the bones of Joseph, the essence of Joseph (the Hebrew word "etzem" translates both as "bone" and as "essence") out of Egypt and into Israel with the Israelites. Moses wanted the faith of Joseph, the universality of Joseph, the majesty of Joseph, the grandeur of Joseph, to accompany the Israelites throughout their sojourn in the desert. After all, the casket of Joseph imparted a crucial lesson: God's rule of justice, compassion and peace must capture the entire world, all despots must be seized with fear and trembling, and all human beings must be free. May Joseph's eternal gravesite in Shechem be salvaged and re-sanctified as a beacon to Jewish faith in a world redeemed.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

"On Choosing the Right Weapons"

The battle of Israel against Amalek, described at the very end of today's Sidra, is of more than local significance as a minor detail in the ancient history of our people. The Torah itself refers to this engagement as a "war by the Lord against Amalek from generation to generation." Amalek throughout history has come to represent to us the very symbol of evil, of heartlessness and cruelty, of Godlessness and anti-Semitism. It is therefore of interest to note that in entering upon this crucial episode in the life of Israel, with so much meaning for future generations, Moses departed from his usual procedure. He, the great military chieftain and warrior of Israel

who had led the campaign against Egypt and just now completed the exodus from that house of slavery, did not personally lead his troops in battle against Amalek. He did not give the task over to any accomplished general. Instead, he turned to his disciple, Joshua, and asked him to undertake the leadership in this historic battle.

Why did not Moses himself lead his troops? Why Joshua? Our rabbis too were troubled by that question, and the answer they gave is of paramount significance for our lives and the lives of Jews of all generations. This is what they say: *Lamah li li'Yehoshua?--Amar leih: zekenehka amar "et ha-elokim ani yarei," u-vazeh ketiv "ve'lo yarei elokim"; yavo ben beno she-amar "et ha-elokim ani yarei" ve-yipara mi'mi she'ne'amar alav "ve'lo yarei elokim"* (Shem. Rab. 26). Joshua, unlike Moses, was descended from Joseph of whom the Bible says that before he revealed himself to his brothers, he declared to them: *Et ha'elokim ani yarei*—I fear God. Joshua, like his grandfather Joseph, was a deeply religious individual who openly proclaimed his religiousness: *Et ha'elokim ani yarei*. He was therefore particularly appropriate as the leader of Israel in its encounter with Amalek, for of Amalek it was said *ve'lo yarei elokim*—that this nation did not fear God. Precisely because the major strength for evil of Amalek was their Godlessness, was it necessary to pit against them the one man whose major strength of virtue was his—Godliness.

What our Rabbis meant to teach, then, was a principle as permanent as it is profound, and as pertinent today as it was then. They meant to tell us that the way to battle the way of life of Amalek is not by compromising your principles with his, not by meeting his ideology half-way, but, on the contrary, by sharpening the ideological encounter, by confronting his Godlessness with your Godliness, his vice with your virtue, his evil with your good. Do not conceal your ideals, or pare down your principles, or dilute your standards were challenged by Amalek. When Amalek declares arrogantly *ve'lo yarei elokim*—I do not fear God— you must proclaim proudly, with a voice loud and clear: *Et ha'elokim ani yarei*—I do fear God. It is the only way to triumph over the Amalekite forces in life. Only by being a Joshua, by inheriting the fearless Godliness of a Joseph, can you hope to establish victory over the Godlessness of Amalek.

When Judaism was first confronted with the Godliness and Torah-less Amalekim of the modern day, about one hundred and fifty years ago, at the beginning of that era called the Emancipation, it found itself largely incapable of effectively engaging the opponent in battle. The modern spirit, with it despite its many noble, progressive, and humane features, also brought cynicism, the rejection of the Jewish uniqueness, the assertion that the spirits of free inquiry must necessarily deny Torah and a personal God; this spirit made inroads into the

ghetto, it destroys its walls, and it threatened to capture the very fortress of Judaism.

Initially authentic Jews reacted in two ways—both of which were inadequate. The first way was to shy away from the battle. It was the way of isolation, of a desperate will to return to a physical and spiritual ghetto, oblivious to all modernity. This point of view represented those who thought that they could escape Amalek by ignoring him. But this was not in keeping with the tactics of a Josua or the ideas of a Moses who said clearly: *Behar lanu anashim, ve'tzei ve'hilahem im Amalek—choose for us men who will do war with Amalek*. The method of the Bible was to face up to Amalek, not to ignore his existence.

The second approach was diametrically opposed to the first. It held that the only way successfully to meet Amalek in battle was, so to speak, to bribe him: to yield the character of Jewishness and compromise it with the character of Amalekism; to whittle down the principles of Torah and accept some of the ways of Amalek. Thus many Jews forgot that *ve'lo yarei elokim* can be defeated only by presenting a stronger *et ha'elokim ani yarei*. They forgot that Godlessness can be met only with Godliness. And so they chose the wrong weapon with which to decide the great battle of modern history.

For this is indeed what happened. They tried to deal with the Amalekim of modernity by having less *yirat Elokim*, less prayer, less Torah, less enthusiasm. For instance, we were faced with a problem in education—Jewish students were regarded as immigrant baggage, as antiquated populism, so awkward in the American pragmatic atmosphere. Forget, we were told, about these outdated studies in a queer and unnecessary language. You are Americans now! And how did we respond? Was it with the proclamation of Moses and Joshua, *et ha'elokim ani yarei*? Was it by building bigger and better schools and acquainting both our people and the Gentiles with whom we come in contact, with the fact that our way of life was the divine way of life, that our Bible spoke a living and relevant judgment upon life? No! Instead we answered with Sunday schools—we reduced education to an hour a week and tried to convince ourselves that this farcical gesture, so devoid of *yirat Elokim*, was really Jewish education!

The synagogue was threatened by the Amalek kind of house of worship. The authentic Jewish character of a synagogue was somehow out of place in the scene of America with its pressure for uniformity—the melting pot psychology. And so we responded by a diminution of *yirat Elokim*: We de-Judaized the character of the synagogue, and adopted all the trappings of the Christian church. We compromised by making our synagogues less Jewish.

And so it was with the practical precepts of Judaism. Amalek laughed at our practical mitzvot, so we yielded—kosher becomes kosher-style, Shabbat just a day-off, and all the

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sacred commandments were reduced to pallid, petty and superficial “customs and ceremonies”—a kind of Jewish Elks rituals.

Foolishly, we tried to win over Amalek by reducing our own strength. We were like an army, threatened by a strong opponent, which, instead of building up its arsenal, panics—and throws its weapons away!

Has this posture of bending over backwards to Amalek proved successful? Has presenting less *yirat Elokim* in the face of an enemy who proclaims *ve'lo yarei elokim* been the right approach?

The answer is: absolutely not. I draw your attention to a phrase which we recite on the occasion of Selihot, some of us reciting it every Monday and Thursday: *Sarnu mi-mitzvotekha u-mi-mishpatekha ha-tovim, ve'lo shavah lanu*. We departed from God's commandment and his righteous ordinances—we imagined that only by watering down Judaism would we succeed in preserving in our midst the Jewish youth. We tried to convince ourselves that only by making life easier—which involved disposing of nine-tenths of Jewish law—would we succeed in stemming the tide of assimilation and in filling our synagogues with youth. But to our utter dismay we discovered that *sarnu mi-mitzvotekha ha-tovim, ve'lo shava lanu*. We departed from God's commandment and his righteous ordinances—we imagined that only by watering down Judaism would we succeed in preserving in our midst the Jewish youth. We tried to convince ourselves that only by making life easier—which involved disposing of nine-tenths of Jewish law—would we succeed in stemming the tide of assimilation and in filling our synagogues with youth. But to our utter dismay we discovered that *sarnu mi-mitzvotekha u-mi-mishpatekha ha-tovim*—the attempt to keep Jews alive by diluting Judaism resulted in *ve'lo shavah lanu*—it was not worth it! Despite all our attempts, we were frustrated. The weak schools we set up were *ve'lo shavah lanu*—worthless and meaningless caricatures that failed to impress growing young minds. The Christianized synagogues were also not worth the destruction we wrought in the body of Judaism—they were ineffective in making Jews and totally lacking in Jewish warmth and in true inspiration. Our non-observance and our excuses proved to be spiritually fraudulent and ineffective. *Ve'lo shavah lanu*—the results have been miserable. We have learned that when faced with an enemy whose standard is *ve'lo yarei elokim*, Godlessness, the only way to succeed against him is by increasing our own *yirat Elokim*, our own devotion to Torah and to God, and by proclaiming in proud opposition *et ha'elokim ani yarei*.

Orthodoxy today must return to the advice of Moses and the strategy of Joshua. We must not flee from the fight and we must not run from the encounter. The best of the modern world is not strange to us. We have abandoned the ghettos forever and have taken to heart the

words of Moses—Behar lanu anashim, ve’tzei hilahem im Amalek. We are living in the modern world—as businessmen and scientists, as physicians and novelists—and to a great extent we have helped to shape part of the modern world. We have engaged the forces of Godlessness with a doubly renewed effort of Godliness. We have decided to advance in the name of Torah and go forth proudly and confidently on behalf of yirat Elokim. We have learned to be tough without being rough, to be aggressive without being offensive, to disagree without being disagreeable. We have learned to proclaim et ha’elokim ani yarei.

This has been the lesson taught by Joseph, effected by Joshua, neglected by many generations, but one which we must now espouse and which we are now indeed using. Our answer to Amalek is et ha’elkhim ani yarei—more and better day schools, a resurgence of real kashruth, a new flickering of interest in Shabbat and in family purity. We must abide by the command of Moses: Bechar lanu anashim, we must be anashim—“menschen,” real men and real women, completely modern and yet utterly and thoroughly devoted to Torah and Judaism. These are the weapons with which American Orthodoxy has chosen to do battle with Amalek. We have weapons in our hand—but they are neither those of fear and coercion, nor those of submission and surrender. Ki yad al Keis kah—our hand is upon the throne of the Lord! Our strongest and best weapon is yirat Elokim—more religion, more devotion to Torah, more Jewishness. Milhamah la-shem ba’Amalek mi-dor dor—we are carrying on the war of God against Amalek and all that Amalek stands for from generation to generation.

May God grant that we in our generation, with the Godly weapon in our hands, with the fear of God in our hearts, and with the knowledge of the Torah of God in our minds, be privileged to bear the standard of Israel to eternal victory over Amalek. Amen.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissacher Frand **A Three-twined Lesson About Shabbos and Parnassa**

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky makes the following observation in three different places in his *Emes L’Yaakov*, twice in this week’s parsha and once in *Parshas Ki Sisa*:

“And Moshe said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Shabbos for Hashem, you will not find it (the mann) in the field.’” (*Shemos* 16:25). Rashi elaborates: The Jews went out every morning to find and gather mann for their daily food-consumption needs. They woke up Shabbos morning and asked Moshe whether they should go out to the fields and look for mann as they had been doing every other day that week. Moshe told them not to go out, but rather to eat what they already had.

Rav Yaakov comments that the question posed to Moshe was whether they should go out to

the fields that day or not. The logical answer to that question was “No, don’t go out today. There is no mann in the fields today.” And yet, his answer was “Eat what you have.” Why did Moshe give that answer to the question ‘Should we or should we not go out to collect the mann?’

Rav Yaakov answers that they thought that if they would not go out and collect another day’s worth of mann, perhaps they would not have enough to eat, because if they ate the food that they had today, they might not have anything to eat tomorrow. Remember, the mann had not been falling for forty years at this point. This was the first week of the mann phenomenon. If mann fell on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and then on Shabbos there was no mann, what would they eat on Sunday? In their minds they were fearful. If we eat the mann from yesterday’s gathering, what will be on Sunday? They did not know.

If you do not know what you are going to eat on Sunday, you may hold back from eating what you have on Shabbos! Moshe Rabbeinu corrected them: “No. You DO eat today!” Today is Shabbos and the lesson of Shabbos is that the Ribono shel Olam provides parnassa (livelihood). Therefore, observe Shabbos and keep all of its halachos. Eat what you need to eat on Shabbos even if you do not know what is going to be with tomorrow’s meal.

This was a very real and difficult nissayon (test) for Jews living in America in the early part of the twentieth century. We are almost all too young to remember, and even our parents may be too young, but our grandparents most likely do recall that there was a time in America when if someone did not come to work on Saturday, he did not come to work on Monday (because he was fired for not showing up to work on Saturday).

Rav Yaakov was addressing that very classic situation. People fretted, “If I do not work on Saturday then how am I going to eat?” The lesson of Shabbos is that you keep Shabbos and do not worry if you will have what to eat tomorrow. That is what Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to emphasize to them.

The second place where Rav Yaakov shares this idea is earlier in the parsha, when the pasuk says “...there He gave them chok u’mishpat and there He tested them.” (*Shemos* 15:25). The Jews came to a place called Marah. They were unable to drink the waters there, for they were bitter. (*Shemos* 15:23). Moshe Rabbeinu threw a bitter stick into the water and the waters became sweet. The Gemara elaborates on the pasuk that at Marah they were given “chok u’mishpat” (laws that are illogical and laws that are logical) specifying that at Marah they were given the laws of Shabbos, the laws of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer), and dinim (civil laws).

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We are not going to analyze now why they were given the laws of Parah Adumah and dinim. But why were they given the laws of Shabbos at that point? The answer is the same idea. The people fretted: “What are we going to drink? The water is bitter!” Logically, the way to sweeten bitter water is to add sweeteners. The last thing we would think to put in the water to sweeten it is a stick that is also bitter. What is the lesson of that? The lesson is that Hashem provides us with bread and water. He provides sustenance. He can even take a bitter stick and use it to sweeten bitter water. That is why He gave us Hilchos Shabbos then. It is the same lesson as Shabbos. The Ribono shel Olam provides parnassa.

The third place where Rav Yaakov shares this idea in *Emes L’Yaakov* is in *Parshas Ki Sisa*. He asks the obvious question there: How could Klal Yisrael, within a short period of time of saying ‘Naaseh v’Nishma’ make a Egel Hazahav (Golden Calf)? Rav Yaakov answers that Klal Yisrael was in a wilderness. They were three million people who were dependent every day on the mann for sustenance. Moshe Rabbeinu suddenly disappears. He was supposed to come back by a certain time, and he apparently did not come back. The Satan even shows them Moshe Rabbeinu’s coffin.

They received the mann in Moshe’s zechus (merit). As far as they knew, Moshe Rabbeinu is dead. They wondered, “What is going to be with us? We are three million people with no supermarkets and no 7-Elevens.” Moshe Rabbeinu, the source of their sustenance, is seemingly gone. When people are fretting because they do not know what is going to be tomorrow, and they do not know what they are going to eat and their children are screaming, they panic. When people panic, they say “We need to do something!”

Rav Yaakov says a beautiful pshat in a pasuk in *Yechezkel*. “But the House of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They did not follow My decrees and they spurned My laws, through which, if a man fulfills them, he will live through them, and they desecrated My Sabbaths exceedingly. So I had thought to pour out My wrath upon them in the wilderness, to make an end of them. But I acted for the sake of My Name, that it should not be desecrated in the eyes of the nations before whose eyes I had taken them out.” (*Yechezkel* 20:13-14).

Rav Yaakov asks: After the aveira (sin) of the Egel Hazahav, Hashem wanted to wipe them out. After the aveira of the Meraglim (spies), Hashem wanted to wipe them out. However, where does it say that Klal Yisrael desecrated Shabbos and afterwards Hashem wanted to wipe them out? It is unlikely for the incident with the mekosheh eitzim (chopper of wood) to have generated Divine Wrath justifying wiping out all of Klal Yisrael.

Rav Yaakov explains pshat that once they lost faith in Hashem, they forgot about the lessons

of Shabbos—that the Ribono shel Olam will provide for them. When they panicked and built an egel, while it was not literally Chilul Shabbos, it was forgetting the yesod of Shabbos, which is that the Ribono shel Olam will provide.

I mentioned earlier in the shiur about people who lost their job on a weekly basis because they did not come into work on Saturday. It is common practice that when a person is fired from a job, he receives what is known as a “pink slip.” There were Jews who were fired from a different job every single Friday because of Shabbos. Every single Friday, they came home with a new pink slip.

One Jew kept a collection of all his pink slips and hung them up on his Succah wall as his Succah decorations. That was his “Noi Succah.” What is a Succah? A Succah is a temporary dwelling that demonstrates moving out from our permanent dwellings into temporary dwellings, and putting our faith in Hashem. His pink slips were his badges of courage. His pink slips showed that he had faith in the Ribono shel Olam. Thousands of people were not able to withstand that nissayon. We must not judge people until we face the same challenges they faced. But for those people who WERE able to withstand the nissayon, those pink slips were the most beautiful thing that a person could hang up in his Succah. They demonstrated the love and faith that the person who received those pink slips had in Hashem. That is the lesson of Shabbos and that is the lesson of the man.

The lesson of the man is that the Ribono shel Olam provides parnassa, and when we have bitachon in the Ribono shel Olam, He takes care of us.

How Can Pharaoh Speak to Bnei Yisroel After They Left Mitzraim?

The pasuk says in Parshas Beshalach: “Pharaoh said to the Children of Israel, they are confounded in the land, the Wilderness has closed in upon them.” (Shemos 14:3). Rashi is bothered by the expression “Vayomer Par’o l’Bnei Yisroel,” which seems to imply that Pharaoh was speaking to the Children of Israel. The problem is that there were no Jews left in Mitzraim (Egypt) at that time, so how could Pharaoh speak to Bnei Yisroel? Therefore, Rashi interprets the prefix lamed (which usually means ‘to’) as “al” (meaning about) Bnei Yisroel.

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel was bothered by the same point, but he offers an incredible interpretation. He says that Pharaoh was speaking to Dasan and Aviram, two members of Bnei Yisroel who remained in Mitzraim.

However, Dasan and Aviram are present later among Bnei Yisroel in Parshas Korach. We know for a fact that they did leave Mitzraim and traveled with Bnei Yisroel in the Midbar. We also know that there are interpretations of

the expression “Bnei Yisrael went up Chamushim from the land of Mitzraim” (Shemos 13:18) which claim that 80% of Bnei Yisrael died in Mitzraim (during Makas Choshech – the Plague of Darkness) and only one-fifth (‘Chamushim’) of the Jewish population merited to leave with Moshe. If all the wicked members of the nation died during Makas Choshech, how was it that Dasan and Aviram, who certainly qualify as reshaim (wicked people) managed to survive? Why were they still around in Sefer Bamidbar?

Last year, I shared the explanation of the Maharal Diskin that Dasan and Aviram survived despite the fact that they were wicked because they also had a tremendous source of merit. As shotrim (taskmasters) of Bnei Yisrael, they took it on their backs literally and figuratively during the years of Egyptian bondage. When the Jewish slaves did not meet their quota of bricks, the shotrim were whipped by the Egyptian supervisors. Suffering on behalf of another Jew, creates a certain immunity from the malach hamaves (Angel of Death) and hence they were able to survive the mass deaths that occurred among Bnei Yisrael during the Makas Choshech as a result of that great zchus.

The Medrash haChafetz gives another explanation. The Medrash says that when Hashem told Moshe that he was going to kill out all the wicked Jews during the Makas Choshech, Moshe Rabbeinu pleaded “Don’t kill them out. Let them come with us to the Promised Land.” Hashem told Moshe “I know better. You don’t want them.” Moshe still pleaded for mercy. Hashem finally ‘compromised’ with Moshe and left him these two individuals – Dasan and Aviram. The Ribono shel Olam proved his point because Moshe Rabbeinu suffered greatly in the midbar from Dasan and Aviram, culminating with the episode of Korach. This goes to show you – do not try to be holier than Hashem. He knows what is best. In fact, He told Moshe Rabbeinu “I told you so!”

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

We need to show more respect to parents and grandparents.

In Parshat Beshalach, the Torah presents us with the details of the redemption of the Israelites who had been fleeing from Egypt. Once they safely reached the other side of the Red Sea, together with Moses, they sang the Az Yashir, the Song of Moses and within it, they declared, “Zeh keili v’anveihu,” – this is my God and I will glorify Him. (Shemot 15:2.)

Each and every individual made that statement and our sages teach that from here we realise that all of the Israelites at that moment reached the greatest heights of prophecy – equal even to the prophecy of Ezekiel. They had exclaimed, “Zeh keili,” – as though they were pointing, as if to say, we can actually feel the

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presence of God right now Who is communicating directly with us.

But Rashi, bringing the midrash of the Mechilta, adds a further point. Rashi says that, what each individual was actually saying at that time was, “Lo ani techilat hakedusha,” – “This holiness did not start with me.” As great as I am at this moment, and as wonderful as my prophecy is, I’m not really the one who’s responsible for it. And we learn this from the continuation of the verse: “Elokei avi v’aromemehu,” – “God is the God of my father and I will exalt him.”

Respect was given to a previous generation who sowed the seeds for that great moment to happen.

I believe that the message here is of great relevance for us in our times. What I’m seeing, is that within our sophisticated, fast moving and highly creative society there is less respect today for parents and grandparents than what we saw in previous generations. But from Parshat Beshalach we learn that actually, just the opposite should be the case. The more we are achieving, the more indebted we should feel to those who preceded us. The greater our creativity and achievements, the more we need to look back and to thank parents, grandparents and great grandparents because from Parshat Beshalach we learn that if not for them, we wouldn’t be where we are today.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Holding on to Faith and Unity in Times of Crisis - Rabbi Noam and Daphna Hertig

In this week’s Parashah, the Exodus from Egypt reaches its climax with the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. We are all familiar with the happy ending of the story: the Children of Israel pass through the sea on dry land, while the Egyptian army chasing after them drowns in the receding waters. But let us attempt for a moment to put ourselves in the position of the Israelites before the miracle of the splitting of the sea occurred.

Only a few days after the joyful exodus from Egypt, the Israelites suddenly found themselves once again in a hopeless situation. Pharaoh and his Egyptian soldiers could be seen on the horizon of the Reed Sea and were quickly closing in on them. Cornered on all sides, they now stood – in the truest sense of the word – in Mitzrayim (from metzar – narrowness), with the choice between the “hammer and the anvil”; that is, either to surrender to the Egyptians, and let themselves be slaughtered by them, or to jump into the sea and commit mass suicide.

Deeply disappointed and frightened, Benei Yisrael cried out to Moshe (Shemot 14:11-12): “What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt?... For it is better for us to serve Egypt than to die in the wilderness!” To which Moshe replied, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which God will work

for you today; ...God will battle for you and you – be still!"

Rabbi Josef Zvi Hertz interpreted this statement of Moshe as follows: "This was no time for giving wild expression to fear, but to wait God's deliverance in quiet confidence." Only a few days earlier, after the tenth plague, Pharaoh finally agreed to let the people go – but shortly thereafter, when his mind had changed again, every Israelite was now faced with the dilemma: "Whom do I now obey and trust? My former Egyptian slaveholders, or this God who commands me to wait patiently?" In these moments, the Israelites were presented with a most difficult task: were they indeed prepared to completely free themselves mentally from the Egyptians and, despite the hardship, to overcome their fears and doubts in order to trust in God and Moshe?

Therefore, the greatest miracle in our parashah was neither the splitting of the sea nor the victory over the Egyptians, but rather the very fact that this humiliated slave nation of Israel, was now united in believing in God and in amassing the courage to follow Him. This faith was indeed the condition for the splitting of the sea that took place afterwards and formed the climax and turning point of the entire Exodus story.

Accordingly, the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (on Hoshea 519) concludes: – "Through the merit of emunah/faith alone were we redeemed from Egypt". Rabbi Shlomo of Radomsk (in Tiferet Shlomo, Sha'ar Tefila) added to this that likewise the future Messianic Redemption will occur – through the merit of emunah/faith together with achdut/unity – as it is written (in the singular and in the future tense): "Az Yashir Moshe Uvnei Yisrael" – "Then Moshe and the children of Israel will sing" (Shemot 15:1) – united and with one voice.

A big part of what it means to be a Shaliach/ Shlucha (emissary) is to empower the communities we serve, inspire them with purpose and fill them with inner strength and faith in themselves. Especially in times of crisis – as we have experienced in the past as well as in the present – holding on to faith and unity is vital. Once this step is achieved it will be much easier to create a sense of purpose and unity for achieving further milestones. May we all – with God's help – be successful in fulfilling this important task!

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Precision in Minhagim

Our practice is that when we read from the sefer Torah, both on Shabbos and on weekdays, we read the pessukim with a special tune, commonly referred to as the "trup". Rav Soloveitchik zt"l said in the name of his grandfather R' Chaim that his practice would be to correct the ba'al koreh even if he only made a mistake in the "trup". The Gemara in Nedarim presents a disagreement amongst the

Amoraim whether the requirement to read the Torah with a special tune is biblical in nature or only rabbinical.

This coming Shabbos is commonly referred to as "Shabbos Shira". Oz Yoshir is read with a tune which is different than the regular trup; the tune used is a cheerful one, and sounds like a victory march. Why don't we utilize the usual trup when we read Oz Yoshir?

In many shuls, the practice is that in addition to Oz Yoshir (which begins in perek 15) being sung in this unique way, an additional possuk (in perek 14) is also sung with this special marching tune. That possuk describes how when the waters of Yam Suf split and there was a dry path through it, the water was piled up to the right and to the left like tall walls. This description appears twice, once in 14:22 and a second time in 14:29. My impression is that the common practice is for the ba'al koreh to only read the second possuk, which appears almost immediately before Oz Yoshir, with the special marching tune. Rav Soloveitchik zt"l said that from where he came from in Europe, the practice was the opposite, and only the first possuk (14:22) was recited with the cheerful nign.

The reason for distinguishing between the two pessukim, despite their being nearly identical, is that the spelling of one of the words is different: in 14:29 the word "choma" is spelled without the letter vov, (i.e. it is spelled choser) while in 14:22 it is spelled with a vov (i.e. moleh). The Midrash comments that the reason for the change is to allude to the fact that at the time of Yetzias Mitzrayim, despite all of the nissim and niflaos, osos u'mofsim, andgilui Shechina that everyone had witnessed, there was a character by the name of Michah who brought an idol with him from Egypt. Later, in Sefer Shoftim, the story is told of Michah getting many Jewish people to worship this idol. The word "choma - wall", when spelled without a vov, can be read "cheima - anger". Hashem was angry that despite of all of the osos u'mofsim etc., Michah was taking an Egyptian avoda zara along with him. It would not make sense to use a cheerful tune when reading a possuk which is implying that Hashem was angry. That is why the custom in Eastern Europe where Rav Soloveitchik zt"l came from was that only when reading 14:22 does the ba'al koreh employ the cheerful, march-like tune to sing about the walls of water to the right and to the left of Bnai Yisroel. Rav Soloveitchik zt"l was very mapkid on observing minhagim, but only with precision and accuracy.

Because so many talmidei chachomim were killed by the Nazis, many minhagim or details of minhagim were lost. Rabbi Soroya Devilitzsky of Bnei Brak, who was a member of the inner circle of the Chazon Ish, published a luach many years ago where he quotes Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l saying that the haftorah for parshas Kedoshim which is printed in all

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Chumashim was never recited in certain parts of Lithuania. In the days of the Tanoim, the person who got maftir had the right to select any section of navi to be read as the haftorah, provided that it had a connection to the sedrah. The mishna quotes R' Eliezer saying that it is highly improper to choose the nevuah of Yechezkel haNavi where he was instructed by Hakodosh Baruch Hu to complain to the Jews of Yerushalayim about many of them violating laws of arayos. Despite the fact that R' Eliezer's opinion is outvoted by the majority of the other Tanoim, the minhag developed over the years that we never recite the haftorah of Kedoshim. When we read Acharei Mos and Kedoshim together, we only read the haftorah of Acharei Mos. And, when the two sedrah are read separately, the Shabbos of parshas Kedoshim is either Rosh Chodesh or erev Rosh Chodesh and the haftorah is therefore either "Hashomayim kisi" or "Mochor chodesh". When the two sedrah are read separately and the Shabbos of parshas Kedoshim is neither Rosh Chodesh nor erev Rosh Chodesh, the minhag in Lithuania was that they still would not read the haftorah for Kedoshim from Yechezkel. They would read the haftorah for Acharei Mos two weeks in a row. Again, Rav Soloveitchik zt"l was very mapkid on keeping minhagim, and transmitted the details of the minhagim with accuracy and precision.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

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They gathered it morning by morning, each one according to his eating capacity, and [when] the sun grew hot, it melted. It came to pass on the sixth day that they gathered a double portion of bread, two Omers for [each] one, and all the princes of the community came and reported [it] to Moshe. So, he said to them, "That is what HASHEM spoke, Tomorrow is a rest day, a holy Shabbos to HASHEM. Bake whatever you wish to bake, and cook whatever you wish to cook, and all the rest leave over to keep until morning" (Shemos 16:21-24)

The reception of MANN as a daily diet was not just a practical, albeit miraculous solution to sustaining a nation in the desert until they were ready to enter the land. It was part of an important training program. The Talmud tells us, "Ain HaTorah Nitna Ella L'Ochlei MANN" – "The Torah is only given to eaters of MANN". What does that mean?

Was it just the purifying quality of this heavenly bread that prepared their bodies to receive the Torah or is there more? How do we become recipients of the Torah?

The Chovos HaLevavos, in his introduction to the Gate of Trust in HASHEM, spells out a few basic principles that explain the dynamics of Bitachon and how "it works". Not only how Bitachon works but that Bitachon works. The first postulate is that it is impossible for a

person to be free from worry unless he relies on HASHEM. This bold statement is calling out for an explanation. Bitachon is not sitting back passively and watching things happen. It is a division of labor, a working relationship built on trust.

I need to stay focused on my job, whatever is in my sphere of influence, and my Partner, HASHEM, takes care of everything and everyone else in the world. I cannot do my job if I am constantly bombarded by concerns about how everything and everyone else will be managed or controlled. It's distracting at a minimum and ultimately maddening to bear the burden of a world over which you have no control. In the end, a person will not be able to do his primary job which is to first develop himself and then influence his family and friends.

He will be so busy being global that he will fail to be local, and it gets worse. The second postulate of the Chovos HaLevavos is that if one is not relying on HASHEM, then, by default, he is relying on something or someone else. It may be his good looks, his glib tongue, his rich uncle, Uncle Sam, a political connection, or public opinion. So, we see that a person has a natural trait, an instinct, a need to trust. The only question is, in what or whom he is trusting?!

The Chovos HaLevavos then states something that only he could say with certainty, and it explains a lot, and maybe everything. He states that HASHEM places the person into the limited capacity of whatever he believes in and trusts. Let's see how far a person can go with his good looks alone.

If one relies on his money or popularity then he is left vulnerable and insecure. Whatever he is placing his trust and hope in, whatever he is relying on becomes his boss, his god. This is what he is dedicated to working for and protect and to satisfy at all costs.

Can a person have all of these good things and still rely solidly on HASHEM? Yes! How so? There is a Hallacha that a person is not allowed to lean on a lectern, a Shtender when Davening, Shmona Esreh. What is the standard that defines leaning on? If the person estimates, if the Shtender would be suddenly removed, would he remain stable or would he fall?! What if I didn't have my money or friends anymore? Would I – could I still stand happily before HASHEM or would my world crumble?

Now, what was the purpose of this stuff called MANN? It was a training ground for the entire Jewish People to realize that we are absolutely reliant on HASHEM. We can have everything but if we don't have HASHEM then we have nothing. If we have nothing else but we have HASHEM then we have everything. Now we can each focus on our job, learning Torah and doing Mitzvos, and raising a next generation to

do the same, because while we are busily engaged in our job, everything else is reliably being catered and managed and perfectly ordered by our capable Partner.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Passive Bystander or Proactive Participant?

The people who make the biggest difference in the world are not necessarily the greatest people, but rather the people who take on the greatest amount of responsibility.

We learn this powerful principle of taking responsibility, being courageous, stepping forward and making a difference from the personality of Nachshon. The Gemara in Sotah 37 speaks about his towering personality.

Nobody wanted to step into the sea, with the sea in front of them and the Egyptians behind them. It was Nachshon, the head of the tribe of Judah, who would blaze a trail and go in first. Nachshon has become synonymous in Jewish history with those prepared to take risks – in the War of Independence in 1948, the effort to break the siege of Jerusalem was called Project Nachshon. Nobody was prepared to take a risk, except Nachshon, he risked his life and only when he was about to drown did the sea split.

When do people tend to stand by and do nothing? When they think others can do it. This is what social psychologists call "the bystander effect".

That was the greatness of Nachshon – everybody could have gone in, but nobody did. He was the opposite of the bystander. He said 'I'm going to be a proactive participant, I'm going to make history happen, I will sacrifice and I'm prepared to take risks.'

May we all be like 'Nachshonim' in our circumstances, wherever we can make a difference and ultimately realize that it is often in life the people who make the biggest difference are those who take upon themselves the greatest responsibility.



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Weekly Parsha BESHALACH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The centerpiece of this week's parsha is naturally the great song of Moses and of the Jewish people after their moment of deliverance from Pharaoh and the flooding sea. This song of Moses and of Israel is repeated daily throughout the centuries of Jewish life in our morning prayer service. The exultation of the moment is still retained and felt many generations later in the unmatched prose and poetry written in the Torah. What makes this song unique is that there is no reference to human bravery, to the courage of the Jewish people in plunging into the sea or to the leadership of Moses and Aaron in shepherding the Jewish people through this crisis. Rather, the entire poem/song is a paean of praise and appreciation dedicated to the God of Israel.

God operates, so to speak, through human beings and world events. Many times His presence is hidden from our sight. Sometimes it is even willfully ignored. In later victories and triumphs of the Jewish people and of Israel, it is the human element that helps fashion those victories and triumphs that is acknowledged and celebrated.

But here in the song of Moses and Israel we have an acknowledgement of God's great hand without ascribing any credit to human beings and natural and social forces. I think that this is perhaps the one facet that makes this song so unique. Compare it to the song of Deborah, which forms the haftora to this week's parsha. In that song the prophetess assigns a great deal of credit to the armed forces of Israel, to Barack its general, and even to Deborah herself, a fact that does not escape the notice of the rabbis of the Talmud. No such self-aggrandizement appears in the song of Moses and Israel at Yam Suf.

This is completely in line with the character of Moses who is described in the Torah as being the most humble and self-effacing of all human beings. There is no question that without Moses there would not have been an exodus from Egypt nor salvation of Israel on the shores of the Yam Suf. But it would be completely out of character for Moses to assign any of the credit for these enormous and miraculous achievements to himself or his actions and leadership.

Thus, the greatest of leaders and the most gifted of prophets attains that championship of leadership and prophecy by downplaying his role. Moses is well aware of his greatness and his unique relationship with the God of Israel. He is not naïve enough to think of himself as a plain ordinary human being. To do so would really be a form of ersatz humility. But he is wise enough to realize that this exalted status that he has attained is little more than a gift that God has bestowed upon him.

From the beginning of his leadership career, when he attempted to refuse becoming the leader of Israel till his last days on earth, he retains this innate humility, which allows him to be the strongest of leaders and most courageous of prophets. There is a lesson in this for all later generations and for all of us that aspire to positions of leadership and importance. That is why this song of Moses and Israel is repeated daily in Jewish life.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <info@rabbisacks.org>

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Power of Ruach

BESHALLACH

In September 2010, BBC, Reuters, and other news agencies reported on a sensational scientific discovery. Researchers at the US National Center for Atmospheric Research and the University of Colorado were able to show – through computer simulation – how the division of the Red Sea may have taken place.

Using sophisticated modelling, they demonstrated how a strong east wind, blowing overnight, could have pushed water back at a bend where an ancient river is believed to have merged with a coastal lagoon. The water would have been guided into the two waterways, and a land bridge would have opened at the bend, allowing people to walk across the exposed mudflats. As soon as the wind died down, the waters would have rushed back in. As the leader of the project said when the report was published, "The simulations match fairly closely with the account in Exodus."

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.

Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus*

To me, though, the real issue is what the biblical account actually is. Because it is right here that we have one of the most fascinating features of the way the Torah tells its stories. Here is the key passage:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind all night, turning it into dry land and dividing the water. So the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land. To their right and left, the water was like a wall.

Ex. 14:21-22

The passage can be read two ways. The first is that what happened was a suspension of the laws of nature. It was a supernatural event. The waters stood, literally, like two walls.

The second is that what happened was miraculous, but not because the laws of nature were suspended. To the contrary, as the computer simulation shows, the exposure of dry land at a particular point in the Red Sea was a

natural outcome of the strong east wind. What made it miraculous is that it happened just there, just then, when the Israelites seemed trapped, unable to go forward because of the sea, unable to turn back because of the Egyptian army pursuing them.

There is a significant difference between these two interpretations. The first appeals to our sense of wonder. How extraordinary that the laws of nature should be suspended to allow an escaping people to go free. It is a story to appeal to the imagination of a child.

But the naturalistic explanation is wondrous at another level entirely. Here the Torah is using the device of irony. What made the Egyptians of the time of Rameses so formidable was the fact that they possessed the latest and most powerful form of military technology, the horse-drawn chariot. It made them unbeatable in battle, and fearsome.

What happens at the sea is poetic justice of the most exquisite kind. There is only one circumstance in which a group of people travelling by foot can escape a highly trained army of charioteers, namely when the route passes through a muddy seabed. The people can walk across, but the chariot wheels get stuck in the mud. The Egyptian army can neither advance nor retreat. The wind drops. The water returns. The powerful are now powerless, while the powerless have made their way to freedom.

This second narrative has a moral depth that the first does not; and it resonates with the message of the book of Psalms:

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,
Nor His delight in the legs of the warrior;
The Lord delights in those who fear Him,
Who put their hope in His unfailing love.

Psalm 147:10-11

In Bereishit Rabbah, it is indicated that the division of the sea was, as it were, programmed into Creation from the outset. 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.

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.

Bereishit Rabbah 5:5

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.

The elegantly simple way in which the division of the Red Sea is described in the Torah so that it can be read at two quite different levels, one as a supernatural miracle, the other as a moral tale about the limits of technology when it comes to the real strength of nations: that to me is what is most striking. It is a text quite deliberately written so that our understanding of it can deepen as we mature, and we are no longer so interested in the mechanics of miracles, and more interested in how freedom is won or lost. To be clear, it's good to know how the division of the sea happened, but there remains a depth to the biblical story that can never be exhausted by computer simulations and other historical or scientific evidence and depends instead on being sensitive to its deliberate and delicate ambiguity.

Just as ruach, a physical wind, can part waters and expose land beneath, so too ruach, the human spirit, can expose, beneath the surface of a story, a deeper meaning beneath.

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date: Jan 24, 2024, 8:31 AM

subject: Rav Frand - "Thanks for the Suffering" – A Profound Teaching of the Beis HaLevi

Parshas Beshalach

"Thanks for the Suffering" – A Profound Teaching of the Beis HaLevi

The Medrash Rabbah in Parshas Beshalach comments on the pasuk "Then ('Az') Moshe sang..." (Shemos 15:1), saying that Moshe remarked: I sinned with the word "az" when I said "And from then (m'az) that I came to speak to Pharaoh in Your Name he made matters worse for the nation and You have not saved Your Nation" (Shemos 5:23), and so now I will recite shirah (song) with the word 'az'.

According to this Medrash, Moshe Rabbeinu had a special intent by starting his shirah with the word "az" (then). Moshe now looks back at the whole process of Yetzias Mitzraim (the Exodus) and recognizes that he previously sinned terribly by using that word. Moshe had been frustrated when his initial attempt to speak to Pharaoh in Hashem's name caused a deterioration of the status of the Jewish slaves. Previously, Pharaoh had at least provided them with straw to make bricks. After hearing Moshe's message from Hashem, Pharaoh stopped providing the straw, but still demanded the same quota of bricks be made every day.

At the beginning of Parshas Vaera, Chazal mention that Hashem had a complaint about Moshe. The Avos never complained to Him when things went bad. Moshe's strong words of protest to the Almighty were seen as disrespectful. Moshe Rabbeinu remarks: "Now I need to do Teshuva." What is his Teshuva? He takes the same word with which he complained, and now uses it in a song of praise to the Almighty!

This use of "az" – "az", once in a complaint and once in a song of praise seems like a strange "gezeirah shavah" (common Biblical word that teaches a lesson). There must be something deeper implicit in this Medrash. What does it mean?

The Beis HaLevi in this week's parsha says a very important principle: There are two types of shevach v'ho'da'ah (praise and thanksgiving) that we give to the Ribono shel Olam. The typical situation, lo olaynu, is for example if a person was very sick, perhaps even deathly ill, and then he gets better, so he gives shevach v'ho'da'ah to the Ribono shel Olam that he has been cured from the disease. However, had he been given the choice of not having had the disease in the first place and thus not needing to be cured from it, that would have been his clear preference.

Then there is the less typical type of situation, where a person not only thanks the Almighty for being healed, but he even thanks Hashem for the original makka (plague) which necessitated the refuah (healing). Moshe Rabbeinu now looks back at what happened when he went to Pharaoh, resulting in Pharaoh making it worse. The fact that Pharaoh made it worse, in the end, turned out to be good for Klal Yisrael. Because of the intensification of the enslavement, their decreed period of enslavement in Mitzraim was reduced from 400 years to 210 years.

Not only that, says the Beis HaLevi, but the fact is that now when we look back, we can see that we were not only saved from Egyptian slavery, but we were the conduit of an extraordinary Kiddush Hashem. The Shiras HaYam is all about the fact that through the events of the Krias Yam Suf (Splitting of the Reed Sea) and Yetzias Mitzraim, the Ribono shel Olam's name was glorified. "People heard – they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Phillistia" (Shemos 15:14) – look at what we have accomplished!

Moshe Rabbeinu says that now we are not only giving praise to Hashem for being saved, but we are also giving praise for the entire process – m'az – from the time that I first came to Pharaoh. I originally complained about the trials and tribulations, but now I am giving praise about those very trials and tribulations – because by virtue of the enslavement and all of its associated difficulties, the geulah (redemption) from that enslavement becomes all the greater Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of the Name of G-d), which is the mission statement of Klal Yisrael, namely, to be the vehicle of Kiddush Shem Shamayim in the world.

This was not merely a "Thanks for curing me of the illness" scenario. This was a case of "Thanks for the illness as well as for the cure."

It is very difficult for us to relate to this idea of “Thanks for the illness...”, but I will tell you a true story:

Rav Baruch Sorotzkin, zt”l, was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland until the mid-1970s. Unfortunately, he contracted cancer. He put up a valiant fight and went through a tremendous ordeal. He survived for some time, but he eventually succumbed to the disease. His Rebbeztzin said that her husband had commented, “If someone would have asked me to pay him a million dollars before I went through this whole illness and treatment ordeal to avoid the misery, I would have been willing to pay it. However, after having experienced it, if someone would offer me a million dollars to not have experienced it, I would be unwilling to accept his offer.

Why?! He said that he grew tremendously from the whole experience. He saw the Hand of Hashem and he grew as a person. He gained in patience, endurance and emunah. That was worth more than a million dollars to him. The truth is that sometimes I see this among ordinary people – who are not Roshei Yeshiva or great tzadikim. Sometimes people who experienced terrible sicknesses, at the end of the day, at the other side of those painful experiences, say that they would not trade the experience for anything, because of the personal growth they experienced along with the trauma and challenge of the ordeal. This is a lot easier said than done. I think it is far from a universal approach. But at times, people do talk like that and actually feel like that.

This is what Moshe Rabbeinu is saying over here: I complained with “az” because I thought “What is this about?” But now in hindsight, I am going to say shirah with the word “az”, giving praise and thanksgiving to the Ribono shel Olam for the entire ordeal.

In truth, we say this in Hallel: “I thank You for You have inflicted pain upon me...” (Tehillim 118:21) What do those words mean? I’m thanking Hashem because He tortured me?!?

We should not need to experience such nisyonos (Divine tests), but it is possible for even “regular human beings” to experience an ordeal and say it was a positive growth experience, despite all the challenges.

By Spirituality, the More You Put In, the More You Take Out

I saw the following Medrash (which I have never heard of before) brought down in a sefer called Ateres Dudaim by Rav Dovid Zucker of Chicago. He brings this Medrash from a sefer called Sefer Le’Hagid.

The pasuk says that the mann came down, each person gathered every morning what they needed for their daily consumption, and then the heat of the sun melted the (remaining) mann. (Shemos 16:21)

The Mechilta explains that the remaining mann turned into liquid, which flowed into the rivers. The deer would drink the water from those rivers. The gentile nations would hunt these deer, eat them, and thereby taste the mann. It was the best venison they ever tasted, and they thereby appreciated the elevated status of the Jews. That is what the Mechilta says.

The Sefer Le’Hagid brings down the following incredible Medrash:

There was a young fellow who was bored being cooped up in the Jewish encampment in the Wilderness and left the encampment. He hiked over to the area where children of Amon lived. He was very hungry and they fed him deer that had drunk the water from the rivers containing melted mann. He tasted the deer and was overwhelmed by its outstanding taste. He returned to the Jewish camp and told his friends, “There is no need to stay here the whole time. I left, I visited Amon, and I tasted deer like I never tasted in my entire life.”

Moshe Rabbeinu noticed that this young fellow had a crowd around him and investigated what was going on. Moshe asked him to explain what was so special about the taste of the deer’s meat. The young fellow answered that he could not explain it, but it was the best taste he ever experienced in his life. Moshe told him, “I will tell you what was so special about that deer’s meat.” Moshe explained that the deer tasted so special because it drank water that contained the melted mann. Moshe told the young man that he was a fool. “Why do you seek merely a facsimile of mann when you can have the real thing?” That is the end of this Medrash.

There are two questions that can be asked about this Medrashic story: First, why was this fellow so impressed with the taste of the deer? Why did he not have that same out-of-this-world sensation when he tasted the mann itself? Second, what is the point of this Medrash? What is it trying to teach us? Rav Zucker answered these questions by quoting a vort that Rav Shimon Schwab said over from the Chofetz Chaim. (Rav Schwab said this vort at the chanukas habayis (dedication) of the new Beis Medrash of Ner Israel in 1980.) Rav Schwab spent a single Shabbos in Radin with the Chofetz Chaim, from which he came away with a career’s worth of drashos (homiletic insights).

It was Parshas Beshalach. Rav Schwab asked the Chofetz Chaim about our Medrash, which said that the mann tasted like whatever the person who consumed it wanted it to taste. Rav Schwab asked the Chofetz Chaim, “What if a person is not thinking anything?” The Chofetz Chaim responded “Az mi tracht nisht; hut kin taam nisht.” (When you don’t think, it has no flavor.) The mann was a spiritual type of food. By spirituality, the more you put in, the more you get out. If a person puts nothing in, he gets nothing out. Az mi tracht nisht – if someone does not want to grow from the experience of eating the mann, hut kin taam nisht – you get nothing out of it.

This is the way it is with all spiritual matters. A person can learn a blatt Gemara by mumbling or racing through it, and not get such a geshmak (pleasurable experience) from it. But when someone sweats over a piece of Gemara and puts all of his effort into understanding it, his experience will be totally different. Since it is a spiritual matter, the more a person puts in, the more he takes out.

This fellow was not thinking about anything when he ate the mann. Therefore, he got nothing out of it. A person who is involved in a davar ruchni (spiritual endeavor) needs to invest. Shabbos is great. Oneg Shabbos is a taste of the World to Come. But what a person gets out of Shabbos depends on what a person puts into a Shabbos. If a person puts nothing into a Shabbos, he gets nothing out of a Shabbos. The more a person puts into Shabbos, the more he takes out. That is the way it is with every davar ruchni. When this fellow went to Amon and ate the deer, it was a davar gashmi (physical experience). It had a special flavor, but it was a gashmi flavor. By gashmiyus matters, it is easy come, easy go. It is instant gratification. Is it ‘fun’ to watch a football game? Is it ‘fun’ to play video games? Yes, it’s ‘fun’. You enjoy it, but how long does it last? It is ephemeral. A person can sit there for hours and watch the game, but what does he gain from the experience? However, in spiritual matters, there is no instant gratification. If we want to accomplish a davar ruchni, we must invest – thought and effort. Az mi tracht nisht; hut min gornish!

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiiyy@theyeshiva.net>

date: Jan 25, 2024, 3:26 PM

subject: Elkana Vizel's Last Letter - New Beshalach Essay by Rabbi YY Elkana Vizel's Last Letter

Jewish History Is a Study of the Future: “Moses and the Children of Israel Will Sing”

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Elkanah Vizel

Before heading into battle, Master Sgt. Elkana Vizel, 35, penned a letter for his loved ones. At his funeral this week, his widow read the letter.

The father of four young children, Rabbi Elkana Vizel was among 21 reservists killed last Monday night in Northern Gaza.

Despite sustaining injuries in Operation Protective Edge and having the choice to stay out of combat service, Elkana opted to enlist in the reserves, dedicating himself to defending his people. In his heartfelt letter to his loved ones, he expressed unwavering conviction in his decision to return to the frontlines. Here is what he wrote:

If you are reading these words, something must have happened to me. If I was kidnapped, I demand that no deal be made for the release of any terrorist to release me. Our overwhelming victory is more important than anything, so please continue to work with all your might so that the victory is as overwhelming as possible.

Maybe I fell in battle. When a soldier falls in battle, it is sad, but I ask you to be happy. Don't be sad when you part with me. Touch hearts, hold each other's hands, and strengthen each other. We have so much to be proud and happy about.

We are writing the most significant moments in the history of our nation and the entire world. So please, be happy, be optimistic, keep choosing life all the time. Spread love, light, and optimism. Look at your loved ones in the whites of their eyes and remind them that everything we go through in this life is worth it and we have something to live for.

Don't stop the power of life for a moment. I was already wounded in Operation Tzuk Eitan, but I do not regret that I returned to fight. This is the best decision I ever made.

We have no words to describe the nobility, love, purity and holiness of our soldiers and our brothers and sisters fighting for their life. Elkana's letter brought back a story and message that transpired 80 years ago, in one of the darkest moments of our history.

Future Tense

"That day, G-d saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians . . . The Israelites saw the great power G-d had displayed against the Egyptians, and the people were in awe of G-d. They believed in G-d and in his servant Moses. Moses and the Israelites then sang this song, saying..."[1]

The Song at the Sea was one of the great epiphanies of history. The sages said that even the humblest of Jews saw at that moment what even the greatest of prophets was not privileged to see. For the first time, they broke into a collective song—a song we recite every day during the morning prayers.

Yet, as is often the case, the English translation does not capture all of the nuances. In the original text, the Torah states:

Then Moses and the children of Israel will sing this song to the Lord, and they spoke, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for very exalted is He; a horse and its rider He cast into the sea.

בשלהו, א: אָז יִשְׁרָאֵל אֶת-הַשִׁירָה כִּזְאת לִי תָהַנֵּה וַיַּאֲמַר אֶל-אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי יִשְׁרָאֵל קְרֵבָה לְיִתְהָהָה
בְּיִרְאָה כִּזְאת כִּי-הַפּוֹת וְלֹכְבָּד כִּזְאת כִּמְנָם:

It speaks of Moses' and the Jews' singing, in the future tense. This is profoundly strange. The Torah is relating a story that occurred in the past, not one that will occur in the future. It seems like a "bad grammatical error." The sages, quoted by Rashi, offer a fascinating insight:

סנהדרין צ, ב: תניא אמר רב מאיר מניין לתחיית המתים מן התורה שנאמר (שמות טו, א) אָז שיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת לה', שר לא נאמר אלא שיר מכאן לתחיית המתים מן התורה.

One of the principles of the Jewish faith is the belief in Techiyas Hamesim, the resurrection of the dead, following the messianic era. Death is not the end of the story. The soul continues to live and exist, spiritually. What is more, the soul will return back to a body.

This is why the Torah chooses to describe the song in the future tense: Moses and his people will indeed sing in the future, after the resurrection. Their song was not only a story of the past; it will also occur in the future.

While this is a fascinating idea, it still begs the question: Why does the Torah specifically hint to the future resurrection here, as opposed to any other place in the Torah? And why will Moses and Israel sing in the future as well?

After the War

The following story happened on this very Shabbos, 80 years ago.[2] One of the great rabbis of Pre-war Europe was Rabbi Aharon Rokeach (1880 – 1957), the fourth Rebbe of the Belz Chasidic dynasty (Belz is a city in Galicia, Poland.) He led the movement from 1926 until his death in 1957. Known for his piety and saintliness, Reb Aharon of Belz was called the "Wonder Rabbi" by Jews and gentiles alike for the miracles he performed. He barely ate or slept. He was made of "spiritual stuff." (The Lubavitcher

Rebbe once visited him in Berlin, and described him as "tzurah bli chomer," energy without matter.)

His reign as Rebbe saw the devastation of the Belz community, along with most of European Jewry during the Holocaust. During the war, Reb Aharon was high on the list of Gestapo targets as a high-profile Rebbe. They murdered his wife and each of his children and grandchildren. He had no one left. With the support and financial assistance of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe in the US, and Belzer Chasidim in Israel, England, and the United States, he and his half-brother, Rabbi Mordechai of Bilgoray, managed to escape from Poland into Hungary, then into Turkey, Lebanon, and finally into Israel, in February 1944. He remarried but had no children.

Most thought that Belz was an item of history. Yet, the impossible occurred. His half-brother Rabbi Mordechai also remarried and had a son, then died suddenly a few months later. Reb Aharon raised his half-brother's year-old son, Yissachar Dov, and groomed him to succeed him as Belzer Rebbe. Today, it is one of the largest Chassidic groups in Israel, numbering more than 50,000, with hundreds of institutions, schools, synagogues, and yeshivos.

The Belzer Rebbe not once said any of the prescribed prayers like Yizkor or Kaddish for his wife and children, because he felt that those who had been slain by the Nazis for being Jews were of transcendent holiness; their spiritual stature was beyond our comprehension. Any words about them that we might utter were irrelevant and perhaps even a desecration of their memory.

For Reb Aharon, the only proper way to respond to the near-destruction of Belz and honor the memory of the dead was to build new institutions and slowly nurture a new generation of Chasidim. This is what he did for the remainder of his life. He settled in secular Zionist Tel Aviv, and not in the more religious Jerusalem because, he said, it is the only city without a Church or Mosque.

The First Shabbos

The first Shabbos after he arrived in Israel during the winter of 1944 was Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, and he spent it in Haifa. He was alone in the world, without a single relative (save his brother) alive.

During the Shabbos, he held a "tisch," a formal Chassidic gathering, in which Chassidim sing, dance, and share words of inspiration and Torah. The Belzer Rebbe quickly realized that the Holocaust survivors present, who had endured indescribable suffering and had lost virtually everything they had, were in no mood of singing. The Rebbe decided to address himself and his few broken Chassidim who had survived.

The Belzer Rebbe raised the above question of why the Torah specifically alludes to techiyas hameisim, the resurrection of the dead, in conjunction with the song that was sung celebrating the splitting of the Red Sea?

He gave this chilling answer. When the Jewish people sang the Song of the Sea, much of the nation was not present. How many people did not survive the enslavement of Egypt? How many Jewish children were drowned in the Nile? How many Jews never lived to see the day of the Exodus? How many refused to embark on a journey into the unknown?

According to tradition, only a fifth of the Jewish people made it out.[3] 80% of the Jews died in Egypt. It is safe to say that everyone who did make it out of Egypt had lost relatives and could not fully rejoice in the miracles they were witnessing. Now, the sea split. The wonder of wonders. Moses says to them, "It is time to sing." But they responded, "Sing? How can we sing? Eighty percent of our people are missing!"

Hence, the Torah says, "Moses and the children of Israel will sing," in the future tense. Moses explained to his people, that the story is far from over. The Jews in Egypt have died, but their souls are alive, and they will return during the resurrection of the dead. We can sing now, said Moses, not because there is no pain, but because despite the pain, we do not believe we have seen the end of the story. We can celebrate the future.

Future and Past

This is what sets apart Jewish history. All of history is, by definition, a study of the past. Jewish history alone is unique. It is a story of the past based on

the future. For the Jewish people, history is defined not only by the past but also by the future. Since we know that redemption will come, we go back and redefine exile as the catalyst for redemption and healing.

For the Jewish people, the future defines and gives meaning to the past.

With this, the Belzer Rebbe inspired his students to begin singing yet again as they arrived at the soil of the Holy Land, on Shabbos Beshalach 1944, 80 years ago.

His disciples did sing. And if you visit the main Belz synagogue in Jerusalem, you can hear thousands of Jews, young and old, singing and celebrating Jewish life.

Sunrise

I once read an article by a survivor of Auschwitz. He related how every morning, as the sun rose over Auschwitz, his heart would swell with anger. How dare you?! How can the sun be so indifferent to the suffering of millions and just rise again to cast its warm glow on a world drenched in the blood of the purest and holiest? How can the sun be so cruel and apathetic? Where was the protest?

But, he continued his story, he survived. I came out of the hell. And the day after liberation, as I lay in a bed for the first time in years, I watched the sunrise. For the first time, I felt so grateful for the sun. I felt empowered that after the long night, which seemed to never end, light has at last arrived. This is the story of our people. Our sun has set. But our sun will also rise. Life, love, and hope will prevail. "Netzach Yisroel Lo Yishaker," the Eternal One of Israel does not lie. There will be an end to the night. "Moses and the children of Israel will sing."

And the singing can begin now. We will see Moshiach very very soon -- may it be NOW!

[1] Exodus 14:15. [2] The story is recorded in the book "B'kdushaso Shel Aaron," page 436. [3] Mechilta and Rashi Exodus 13:2

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/a-wise-heart/2024/01/25/a-wise-heart/>

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser - 15 Shevat 5784 – January 25, 2024 0

"Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him ..." (Shemos 13:19)

The Talmud (Sotah 13a) notes: How beloved were the mitzvos to Moshe Rabbeinu. At the time that all the Jewish people were involved in taking the spoils from Egypt, Moshe was involved in the performance of mitzvos, as it says (Mishlei 10:8), "The wise heart will take mitzvos."

Moshe Rabbeinu was occupied with bringing up the bones of Yosef from the Nile. He was only doing that one mitzvah. Why do we refer to Moshe performing many mitzvos?

R' Yosef of Salant explains that the words "chacham lev – a wise heart" imply a superior wisdom in being able to see the future, as the Talmud (Tamid 32a) states, "Who is wise? One who can foresee the consequences of his actions." What was Moshe Rabbeinu able to anticipate?

The Medrash tells us that when the sea saw the bier containing Yosef's bones "it fled." The Red Sea split allowing the Jewish nation to walk on dry land, which strengthened their emunah in Hashem. It also sanctified the Name of Hashem throughout the world. A wise heart perceives the domino effect from one good deed that leads to many mitzvos.

The Medrash Devarim Rabbah concludes that Hashem told Moshe that not only was his attention to the bones of Yosef a very meaningful kindness in and of itself, he had also performed a significant act of kindness with all of the Jewish people by virtue of all the good that followed, i.e. the sea split and the emunah of the Jewish people in Hashem and Moshe was reinforced.

The Be'er Yosef relates that for many years when Yerushalayim was not under the control of Israel, many of the burial sites and matzeivos on Har HaZeisim were destroyed by the enemies. Bones were disinterred and lay about on the ground, which the Chevra Kadisha of Yerushalayim tried valiantly to retrieve and properly re-inter. One erev Rosh Chodesh Adar in 5728, the Chevra Kadisha proclaimed an official day for gathering the bones. Thousands of people came to appropriately honor these bones that had been profaned by the enemy, which they collected and reburied.

Among the words of heshed that day, the Talmud in Makkos (23b) was introduced. R' Samlai taught that 613 mitzvos were stated to Moshe, consisting of 365 prohibitions corresponding to the number of days in the solar year, and 248 positive commandments corresponding to the number of limbs that a person has.

R' Chaim Vital writes in Shaarei Kedusha that the spiritual nourishment of the soul is derived through the fulfillment of the entire Torah. Each one of the 248 limbs draws its sustenance from the specific mitzvah that is relative to that limb. When an individual lacks in the performance of a distinct mitzvah, then the corresponding limb will be lacking its nourishment and can weaken.

We say in our tefillos "kadsheinu b'mitzvosecha – sanctify us with Your mitzvos," for with every mitzvah that a person does he adds holiness to himself, and particularly to that limb that corresponds to the mitzvah. The speaker expounded that although the bones that had been collected appear like lifeless dry bones, they were in fact filled with the essence of hundreds of thousands of mitzvos that had been performed in their lifetime. This is as it says in Tehillim (35:10), "All my limbs will declare: Hashem, who is like You?"

Thus, the words of Mishlei, "The wise heart will take mitzvos," can be understood that all of Bnei Yisrael were involved in taking the spoils of Mitzrayim but Moshe Rabbeinu, by ensuring the proper burial of Yosef's bones, was "taking the mitzvos" that Yosef HaTzaddik had accrued in his lifetime.

A poor couple came to the Belzer Rebbe. Their son had been declining spiritually for a long time, and now he wanted to marry the non-Jewish daughter of a wealthy man.

The Rebbe asked, "You have not thrown him out of the house, have you?" The couple said that, as the Rebbe had instructed, the boy remained in their home, and they still maintained a good relationship with him.

"I am glad to hear it," said the Belzer Rebbe. "Please convince him to come see me."

"He will never agree to come," they said, "because he knows you will try to dissuade him from marrying the girl."

"I will not do that," promised the Rebbe. "Please just get him to come in to see me."

When their son came home that night, the mother told him that they had gone to see the Belzer Rebbe.

The boy said, "He will not convince me not to marry this girl."

"We told him that," said the mother, "but he requested that he would still like to see you."

The young man was conflicted. Since he did not observe any of the mitzvos, he really didn't want to see the Rebbe. On the other hand, he did have some warm childhood feelings and respect for the Rebbe. After some thought, he agreed to see the Rebbe alone.

He put on a yarmulke before going into the Rebbe, and the Rebbe greeted him warmly. "I hear that you are planning to get married," he said.

The young man nodded.

"There are dangerous people in the world today," said the Rebbe, "and one day you may find yourself in a precarious situation. Can you do me a favor?" he asked.

"Perhaps," said the young man.

The Rebbe took out a pair of tzitzis from his drawer. He then requested the young man to wear them, and begged him not to remove the tzitzis under any circumstances.

The young man hesitated for a minute, and then stretched out his hand for the tzitzis. He promised to wear the tzitzis, and – as he left the room – the Belzer Rebbe closed his eyes and recited a heartfelt prayer.

The day of the wedding was a week later. The groom wore his tzitzis, and outwardly he looked like everyone else at the wedding, but within he was enveloped with the signet ring of Hashem. As the celebration continued, it became very warm in the hall. Many of the participants began to get drunk

and began to remove their jackets and shirts. Finally, the groom himself found himself perspiring heavily and removed his shirt as well. Suddenly everyone came to a standstill. The music stopped playing, and not a sound could be heard. Everyone was staring at the groom wearing tzitzis, until one by one the jeering started. "Those are the fringes the Jews wear." "He's a Jew." He's a demon!" The drunk men began roughing him up. Fearful for his life, the groom removed the tzitzis and ran home to his family. The door was unlocked; he had finally come home. Over the next months the young man slowly progressed in his return to Yiddishkeit. The precious mitzvah of tzitzis had saved him!

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, a prominent rav and Torah personality, is a daily radio commentator who has authored over a dozen books, and a renowned speaker recognized for his exceptional ability to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

<https://jewishlink.news/did-we-cross-the-yam-suf/>

Did We Cross the Yam Suf?

By Rabbi Dov Kramer

January 25, 2024

A simple understanding of the crossing of the Yam Suf would be that this body of water was in between Egypt and Eretz Yisroel (and/or Mt. Sinai), and had to be crossed — from one side to the other side — in order to get from one to the other. (That the Yam Suf is the Red Sea is indisputable, even if some try to suggest otherwise. Suffice it to say that the Yam Suf is given as an eastern boundary of Eretz Yisroel (Shemos 23:31; see Melachim I 9:26 and Rashi on Shemos 10:19), referring to the eastern fork of the Red Sea, i.e. the Gulf of Aqaba. We crossed the Gulf of Suez (the western fork), as evidenced by our coming out in מדבר שור (Shemos 15:22), which "faces Egypt" (Bereishis 25:18), southwest of Eretz Yisroel.) Several Rishonim (early commentators) are of the opinion that we never crossed the Yam Suf from end to end, but came out on the same side we entered, traveling in a semicircle (or three sides of a rectangle). And there were valid reasons why they thought so.

The Talmud (Arachin 15a) says that the Children of Israel were concerned that just as they had emerged from the sea on this side, the Egyptians had emerged (alive) on the other side, and could continue to chase them. Tosfos asks why they were concerned, since the Egyptians were stuck on the other side! Did they think God would perform a miracle for the Egyptians too, so that they could cross the sea? Additionally, several stops after crossing the sea, the Children of Israel were back at the Yam Suf (Bamidbar 33:10). Why did they go back to the sea they had just crossed?

To answer these questions, Tosfos suggests that the Yam Suf was south of both Eretz Yisroel and Egypt (and not between the two), and went from the west (near Egypt) to the east (south of Edom and Moav). The Children of Israel entered the sea on its northern side (near Egypt) and emerged on the same side farther east. They were concerned that the Egyptians had emerged elsewhere on the northern side of the sea, so could still chase them. As they traveled farther east — parallel to the sea on its northern side — they ended up on the coast once again. (Tosfos actually includes a map. However, the map is not the same in all editions of the Talmud; even the same publishers have "updated" the map over the years.)

Ibn Ezra (Shemos 14:17), Chizkuni (Shemos 14:22) and Radak (Tehillim 136:13, see also Shoftim 11:16), point out that we were in מדבר אמת before we crossed the sea (Shemos 13:20 and Bamidbar 33:6) and after we crossed it (Bamidbar 33:8; please note that מדבר שור and מדבר אמת are one and the same, see Ibn Ezra on Shemos 15:22). How could we have been in the same desert both before and after crossing the sea? Well, if we entered and exited on the same side, this is not an issue.

(We can add Rambam (Avos 5:4) to the list of Rishonim who say we crossed the Yam Suf in a semicircle rather than from end to end, but keep in mind that he wrote his commentary on the Mishna earlier in his life, before he moved to Israel and then Egypt, so might have changed his mind.)

Despite these strong arguments, because we now know that the Yam Suf surrounds the Sinai Peninsula, there's no need to say we didn't cross it. [Bear in mind that G-d instructed us to make an about face (Shemos 14:2), going back to where we had previously been, in order to trick Pharaoh (14:3).] Our route can now be explained very simply: we traveled east past the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez (between the gulf and the Great Bitter Lake) into מדבר אמת before turning around, traveling west back to the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez (or beyond it), where we became "trapped" between the Egyptians and the Yam Suf. After crossing the sea — back to the eastern bank of the Gulf of Suez — we were in מדבר אמת once again, but concerned that the Egyptians may have emerged where they had entered and could still chase us by traveling north of the gulf (as we had previously done). As far as why we were back at the Yam Suf a few stops later, we traveled south along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Suez to get to Mt. Sinai, which is in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, or — for those who think Mt. Sinai is in Saudi Arabia — traveled across the Sinai Peninsula to the Gulf of Aqaba before moving past it.

You may have noticed that I suggested we return to the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez, rather than to the western side of the gulf; allow me to explain why. We were camped by Pi Hachirots before entering the sea (Bamidbar 33:8), called "Pi Hachirots" because it was the gateway to freedom for those trying to escape from Egypt (Midrash Lekach Tov and Midrash Seichel Tov). It makes more sense for this "gateway to freedom" to be north of the gulf; if it was on its western bank, one would still need to go around the northern tip before being free. (It would also explain why the deity located there was called "Baal Tz'fon" — the Baal (deity) of the north — as it was near the northernmost part of the gulf.) Since we were camped "before Pi Hachirots," we would have been on the shore of the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez, and crossed the sea from the north to the east (diagonally, moving southeast), emerging back at מדבר אמת. Please note, though, that even if we went back to the western bank of the Gulf of Suez, the issues raised by the Rishonim have still been fully addressed, and we could have crossed the Yam Suf from one side to the other side.

Rabbi Dov Kramer is convinced that Midbar Shur is referred to as the desert of Eisam in order to highlight the fact that we were on the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez both before we crossed the Yam Suf and after we crossed it.

The Enduring Gifts of Our Fallen, Hy'd by Jonathan Rosenblum

Mishpacha Magazine

The pride I feel in being part of a very special people has only grown and grown since October 7

Two longtime chavrutas, Yakir Hexter and David Schwartz Hashem yinkom damam, learned together and died together

The loss of any Jewish life is a loss for all of us. That is not just a platitude to which we give lip service, but a feeling that we should live with. Indeed, part of the impetus for my recently published collection, Ordinary Greatness, was to bring that point home.

But if that is true for every Jewish life lost, how much more so when that life was lost defending us from threat. As the late Mirrer rosh yeshivah Rav Chaim Shmulevitz famously said in a shmuess during wartime, "Anyone who does not feel hakaras hatov to Israeli soldiers has no place in this beis medrash."

That is why for the last three months I have forced myself to begin the morning by looking at the photos of the IDF soldiers whose deaths were announced since the previous day. I think that every Jew in the world should be doing the same, not just those of us who live in Israel.

Admittedly, I have a strong bias for Jewish faces, and those killed in combat strike me as uniformly handsome. But what stands out more than the physical beauty is the seriousness and depth one sees in their faces — reminiscent of photos on the walls of Acco Prison of the young Irgun members executed by the British.

Nearly 50 percent of the casualties to date are religious soldiers, many of them reservists with wives and children. On a recent segment of the Halacha Headlines radio show, Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, rav of Gush Etzion, rosh yeshivah of Machon Lev, and the author of numerous halachic seforim, used the sheilos asked of him by soldiers in combat to convey his own awe at the quality of those serving in the IDF. One soldier asked whether he could charge his cell phone in a Palestinian home — i.e., whether the home's electricity is permitted shalal (booty). Another group of soldiers wondered about lighting Chanukah candles when doing so might alert Hamas forces to their location.

Not all the halachic queries came from the soldiers themselves. The wife of one of the fighters, who was still childless after a number of years of marriage, asked Rabbi Rimon whether she could inform her husband of a positive pregnancy test. Her question was based upon a Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 7:15) stating that a soldier in a commanded war should not distract himself with thoughts of his wife or children.

These soldiers were not just religious, but serious lomdei Torah. Rabbi Ari Wasserman, the host of the aforementioned Halacha Headlines show, read an email from one soldier in which he described how his unit was about to make a siyum on Megillah. Another asked whether he could be maavir sedra with Targum a week early, in case he was in combat the entire following week and had no opportunity.

Reb Ari, who is a close friend and once-a-week chavrusa, dedicated one week's show to two longtime chavruses from Yeshivat Har Tzion, Reb Yakir Hexter and Reb David Schwartz, who were killed together earlier in the week. They were friends from high school, through yeshivah, army, and officer training.

My friend Rabbi Moshe Taragin, a ram at the yeshivah, eulogized them in the Jerusalem Post last Friday. Yakir Hexter, he wrote, was at once immensely driven, holding himself to the extremely high standards of Mesillas Yesharim, and tolerant of those who couldn't or wouldn't meet his exacting standards. David Schwartz, despite being raised in the national-religious world and institutions, was drawn to chassidus, to rebbes and tishen, and prevailed upon Rabbi Taragin to give a weekly shiur in chassidus. Yakir was the son of Reb Ari's very-early-morning chavrusa of more than a decade. Just a few days earlier, Reb Ari had met Yakir at a chasunah and asked him whether he was nervous. He replied that he was not, as they were doing what had to be done.

At the Hexter family shivah house, which I went to together with Rabbi Wasserman, I listened as Yakir's father describe his son's eagerness to help others and his unusual sensitivity. Yakir always wore a suit and tie for Shabbos, a notable departure from the normal Shabbos attire at his yeshivah. The only exception was when his father — himself an alumnus of Yeshivat Har Tzion — came for a parents' shabbaton. Yakir knew that his father (and chavrusa for learning Mesillas Yesharim) would not be wearing a tie, so he did not either.

THE PRIDE I FEEL in being part of a very special people has only grown and grown since October 7, and I would guess that feeling is almost universal among identified Jews. Though I have focused until now primarily on religious Jews, that pride is not confined to them. Historian Michael Oren's description of Israeli society as the strongest and most resilient in the world, upon the hundredth day of the war, strikes me as true.

What other country could continue to function with hundreds of thousands of citizens uprooted from their homes on the northern and southern borders indefinitely, and hundreds of thousands more reservists away from their families and jobs for that entire time? One hundred percent of reservists answered their call-up notices, including tens of thousands who returned immediately from abroad. And in many units, 50 percent more than the number of those called up reported for duty, which they knew in advance would be dangerous and arduous.

The amount of private philanthropy and volunteerism needed to maintain some modicum of normalcy has been remarkable. One of my daughters-in-law shared with me yesterday the inspiration she had from preparing meals

together with Mrs. Devorah Ebbing and Mrs. Laiky Lehrfeld, her neighbors from Ramat Beit Shemesh. Since just after Simchas Torah, their Mazon Campaign has been sending approximately 300 gourmet meals a week, made from whatever ingredients are on sale, to soldiers stationed on the northern and southern borders. Recently, their meals added to the joy of a siyum held by a unit in Gaza itself.

For the numerous volunteers who do the shopping and make the meals (including special vegan ones upon request), for the neighborhood children who pack the special containers that ensure the meals arrive still piping hot, and for the senior citizen who drives to the furthest borders to deliver them three times a week, "doing something good is their means of retaining some equilibrium." Their reward is the excitement of the soldiers who feel the love and support in each meal that replaces their usual army rations.

And I am describing only one of thousands such private initiatives around Israel.

I keep coming back to the nearly unfathomable emunah of the fallen and their families. David Schwartz had three handwritten messages, based on the words of Chazal or pesukim, above his bed so they would be the last things he saw at night before going to sleep: 1) Hakol bidei Shamayim; 2) Haboteiach b'Hashem chesed yisovevnu — One who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him (Tehillim 32:10); and 3) Ani b'chasdecha batachi — But as for me, I trust in Your kindness (Tehillim 13:6).

That is typical of the way emunah and bitachon are constant subjects in the Hesder yeshivot. On an overnight stay in Mitzpeh Rimon last winter, I davened Shacharis in the local Hesder yeshivah. One thing that struck me was that the private bookshelves on each desk were uniformly filled with sifrei hashkafah, both contemporary and the classics.

By now, I presume most readers have viewed at least once the six-minute clip of Hadas Lowenstern speaking of her late husband, Rabbi Elisha Lowenstern, who was killed when his tank was hit while trying to rescue wounded soldiers. Not once in the video does a smile leave her face, as she talks about her 13 years together with "the love of my life" and their six children, ranging in age from ten months to 12. She chooses to speak more about her husband's learning sedorim, Rambam yomis, translating Gemara into English, Mishnayos, his morning run before the haneitz minyan, than about the circumstances of his death.

"To me, his death is beside the point," she says. "He only died once, but I can speak about his life. I'm alive. Our six kids are alive. And this is our plan. We plan on living such a wonderful life that our enemies could never imagine. We will live here in Eretz Yisrael; we will study Torah; we will perform mitzvos. We will be a happy Jewish family. And this is true victory, in my eyes at least."

She is filled with her consciousness of herself as part of the Jewish People, and relates how she is strengthened by her awareness "of all those davening for us, not speaking lashon hara for us," and how all Jews will rejoice together in Jerusalem with the coming of Mashiach.

Professor Joshua Berman describes, in a blog post at Times of Israel, a new Israeli ritual of reading at the shivah for fallen soldiers the letters they left behind only to be opened in case they did not return from combat. I first became aware of this phenomenon during the 2014 Operation Pillar of Fire. At the time, I was astounded how even seemingly secular soldiers wrote of their joy in having fallen while protecting the Jewish People, with the Jewish People preceding even loved ones and the homeland.

What takes away the breath from the letters quoted by Professor Berman is the calm, even happiness, with which the soldiers contemplate their own deaths, which are no abstraction as they head into battle. Some are only on the cusp of adulthood, not yet having been zocheh to marriage and children, and others already in their mid-forties and fathers of large families, like Rabbi Yossi Hershkovitz, a prominent national-religious educator in Jerusalem.

The best-known such letter for English-speakers is likely that of Binyamin Sussman, as there is a clip of his parents and grandmother reading the letter aloud. On the eve of his death, he wrote, "No one is more content right now

than I am. I am about to fulfill my life dream... to defend our beautiful land and the people of Israel." On multiple occasions, he adjured his parents that if he were to be captured, they should not permit him to be exchanged for a single terrorist.

"I don't regret for a second that I chose to serve in a combat unit," Itai Yehudah wrote his parents. "This is the best thing I ever did."

Captain Liron Snir's last words to his loved ones were, "I'm happy about the life I lived, what I did, what I was, on behalf of my people."

Shai Aroussi assured his parents that his life was "not a waste" and his death "entirely worth it," because he was doing what he had always wanted to do since he was a little boy: "saving people and protecting the country."

High school principal Rabbi Yossi Hershkovitz thanked his parents for "show[ing] me a path through life where the question is not 'what do I have coming to me,' but how at every moment I can give more for the people and for the country."

THE MORE THE JEWS of Israel have learned about themselves and each other over the past three months, the closer and more united they have become. I'm haunted by the clip of a soldier in a wheelchair, with his leg amputated, and after three months lying in hospital, nevertheless saying, "We sacrificed for one thing — to see Am Yisrael united and going on kiddush Hashem." If there is one lesson from the time of Moshe Rabbeinu, "it is that if we are not united, there is no hope." And if this war was the means of bringing about unity, he says, "it was worth losing my leg."

Eldad Yaniv, one of the leaders of the demonstrations against judicial reform, spoke for many: "I was in Tel Aviv, in my milieu, and I didn't know these people [the national-religious]. You listen to an interview with this amazing woman [perhaps Hadas Lowenstern]; you speak to the families of the fallen; you read the letters of the soldiers, and you think, 'Such a great part of our nation I didn't know.'

"And I'm happy to know them now. I'm moved by knowing them. And I'm klopping Al Cheit on the fact that I did not know them until now."

May none of us ever have to klop Al Cheit again over the fact that we did not know or appreciate the greatness or our fellow Jews.

<https://jewishlink.news/beshalach-united-by-action-not-words/>

Beshalach: United by Action, Not Words

By Rabbi Moshe Taragin

January 25, 2024

One word is on everyone's mind. During the past year, Israeli society was plagued by corrosive social rifts and vitriolic political disagreements.

October 7 changed everything, and the ensuing war left us little choice but to unite in defense of our lives. Unity has been involuntarily thrust upon us. The atmosphere of unity in Israel has suffused across the Jewish world. The entire Jewish nation, across many continents and across all denominations, has banded together to defend our people and its homeland. The word "achdut," or unity, has become a motto: yachad ninatzeiach (together we will triumph).

We have all considered the pressing question: what will the "day after" look like in Gaza? What political arrangement in Gaza can provide Palestinian stability without threatening Israel. A different, but equally important version of this question is: what will the "day after" look like within our society?

Will we revert back to division and discord or will we preserve our current condition of unity. We are all in search of a magic solution to preserve our resuscitated national solidarity.

Typically, we articulate unity in broad ideological terms. We envision ways to bridge the differences between ourselves and those who possess different religious or political views. By celebrating the common ideas or values which unite us, rather than accentuating the values which divide us, we coexist with people whose lifestyles differ from our own. We bridge ideological chasms by stressing shared values and common narratives.

Unlike ideological achdut which is achieved through common ideas, a more powerful version of unity, which can be termed "social achdut" is achieved by common experiences. We are deeply interconnected when we step outside

our social standings and professional titles and perform common ordinary tasks. Action is always more compelling than thinking. Acting together yields deeper solidarity than merely thinking about common values.

Moshe the Pallbearer

Parshat Beshalach portrays the triumphant liberation of our people from Egyptian persecution. After two centuries of humiliation and dehumanization, we victoriously marched out of Egypt with our eyes set upon the promised land. Leaving in breakneck speed, we furiously darted around Egypt, organizing our families and livestock for the journey. It was a chaotic scene, with little time to remember an ancient promise to a long-forgotten grandfather. Everyone was far too busy to extract Yosef's remains from his Egyptian crypt. On this day of mayhem, no one had the time or presence of mind for this chore. No one, except Moshe Rabbeinu, arguably, the busiest man on Earth. Preoccupied with an entire nation, Moshe still found the time to personally excavate Yosef's coffin from Egypt. More impressively, during the entire forty-year desert trek, Moshe never delegated this menial task to others, but instead, kept the coffin in his constant presence. He didn't view this assignment as beneath his dignity or unfit for his lofty station. This man, who humbled a tyrant, split the seas, and scaled the heavens, didn't regard towing a coffin as undignified.

Moshe Rabbeinu refused to erect social barriers between himself and the common people. By performing common and ordinary duties, he experienced social unity, not allowing himself to be locked into a specific profile based upon his professional standing. Unlike the bones of Yosef, Moshe refused to be put into a box.

War Is a Leveler

Over the past few months, the war in Israel has helped us step outside our own boxes and, through common experience, achieve social unity. Our soldiers are fighting side-by-side, regardless of socio-economic status or professional occupation. War is a great leveler as everyone, regardless of social status or rank, performs the exact same tasks and missions. Previous status in civilian life doesn't affect wartime assignments. Students are fighting alongside lawyers, while hi-tech entrepreneurs are sitting in tanks next to farmers and fishermen. IT specialists next to factory managers. New fathers next to grandfathers. Newly married husbands next to grizzled war veterans. In the battlefield, everyone is equal.

A middle-aged rabbinic colleague of mine (name withheld for privacy reasons) is a brilliant Talmudic scholar, as well as a revered community rabbi in Israel. He was drafted into a reserve tank unit and has spent the past 100 days in active combat. During this period, in his spare time, he published an advanced Torah essay in memory of a student who was killed in battle. During those 100 days he was an ordinary soldier, no different from the younger or less educated members of his unit.

This week, his entire platoon was released, and he received the award of "ot hitztaynut pelugatit" honoring him for being the most diligent and hardworking soldier of the entire 50-member platoon. I am inspired that someone of his caliber didn't allow his professional profile to stand in the way of working hard, alongside many younger soldiers. This is just one of many examples of how war has erased the social and professional boxes which often define us and limit us.

Taxi Drivers

This home front or the "oref" has also leveled us. We have been pressed into emergency service, stepping outside our typical comfort zones to perform tasks and errands which were never part of our normal routines. Over the past few months, in addition to being a rabbi and teacher, I have become a taxi driver, food deliverer, babysitter and stand-in parent for my grandchildren, whose own parents have been drafted. We have tried not to let our titles and social standing impede our wartime assistance. No tasks are too high or too low.

One vivid story perfectly captures this home front unity. During the war, out of security concerns, the yeshiva's Arab kitchen staff was barred entry.

Facing this manpower shortage, students volunteered for kitchen detail. A month ago, on a day that no students were available, our executive director

volunteered for kitchen duty. To everyone's astonishment, he was quickly joined by Rav Meidan, our 73-year-old rosh yeshiva, who himself was preoccupied both with yeshiva obligations, as well as with dealing with his own son's serious battlefield injuries. For Rav Meidan, washing dirty dishes was never viewed as beneath his dignity or unfit for his title.

True leadership does not mean influencing others through loud announcements or through popular social media posts. True leaders set quiet examples of self-sacrifice as they role-model core values of life. Watching the rosh yeshiva donning an apron, I immediately thought of Moshe hauling a coffin out of Egypt. Nobility has little to do with the wallet or with clothing. True nobility lies in our spirit, and can surface while performing any task, high or low, honorable or menial.

Life on the battlefield, as well as on the home front has helped us step out of our narrow profiles, allowing us to share common tasks and common experiences. I feel more unified with my people when we all perform the exact same tasks and chores, regardless of any professional profile or social standing. It is refreshing to be ordinary and to be common. I feel this unity more viscerally and more authentically than ideological unity, which is built upon common values and our ideals. Experience is always more powerful than ideas. Unity of experience will always be more powerful than unity of ideas.

Experiencing social unity, I don't just respect other people's opinions, but I act as they act. They act as I act. In this, we are one.

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<https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/wearing-a-smartwatch-on-shabbat/>

Wearing a Smartwatch on Shabbat

Rabbi Ike Sultan - January 20, 2019

A. The Question

One of the new gadgets that has become popular over the last few years is the smartwatch; a popular brand at the forefront of the industry is the Fitbit. At first, the Fitbit watch was a fancy pedometer designed to count a person's steps, number of floors climbed, heart rate, pulse, and sleep cycle. Nowadays, though, the newer smartwatches include features that replicate the smartphone, such as a phone, bluetooth, voice recognition, text messaging, email, internet, and more. What is the status of the Fitbit with regard to possible use on Shabbat? Modern poskim agree that using communication features such as phone calls, text messages, and email are forbidden.^[1] They also agree that using the ambient display feature, which uses a proximity sensor to turn on or brighten the dim screen when it is being looked at or used, is also forbidden, unless the display is set to stay on (which might drain the battery). But assuming the communication and notification features are turned off and the screen is set to remain on, may one wear a smartwatch on Shabbat and utilize its health monitoring features? This article will begin by introducing generally the prohibition of using electricity on Shabbat, addressing the question of modifying the amplitude of a current on Shabbat, and exploring the responsibility a person has for actions that unintentionally cause a violation of Shabbat. Building upon those principles, the article then discusses the permissibility of the smartwatch on Shabbat.

B. Electricity on Shabbat

Why is closing an electrical circuit forbidden on Shabbat in the first place? Famously, the Hazon Ish (O.H. 50:9) asserts that completing a circuit is a Biblical prohibition of boneh, constructing, and makeh be-patish, completing a vessel. Boneh is violated when one constructs a permanent structure, such as hammering a few boards of wood together to create a cabinet. Makeh be-patish is violated by performing the finishing step in the completion of a vessel or article; for example, smoothing the sides of a stone after it was chiseled out of the ground is makeh be-patish. The Hazon Ish holds that when one completes a circuit, in effect he/she is doing boneh by making a structure that could last forever; this act of completion can also be considered makeh be-patish. Most poskim^[2] disagree with the Hazon Ish and hold that electricity on Shabbat is only a rabbinic prohibition.

One notable contemporary posek who thinks that completing an electric circuit is a Biblical violation of makeh be-patish is Rav Asher Weiss (Minhat Asher 1:30). His explanation is not that closing a circuit fits the standard definition of makeh be-patish as laid out by the rishonim, but rather that makeh be-patish is the catch-all for any action which is clearly a melakhah, a prohibited act on Shabbat, despite not fitting any category.

On the other hand, many poskim hold that completing a circuit is only a rabbinic violation of makeh be-patish. Rav Hershel Schachter^[3] explains that completing a circuit is similar to the case of Ketubot 60a, which says that a clogged pipe can be fixed for the purposes of promoting kevod ha-beriyot, human dignity. A clogged pipe is not broken, but simply is not functioning and must be fixed. Fixing it is therefore an act which would only be rabbinically categorized as makeh be-patish, (which is why there is greater latitude for leniency in the case of kevod ha-beriyot). Similarly, rewinding a watch on Shabbat is characterized by the Tiferet Yisrael (Kalkel ha-Shabbat, no. 38) as rabbinic makeh be-patish, since the watch was always a utensil though it was temporarily nonfunctional.

Others explain the prohibition of closing an electrical circuit differently. In the late nineteenth century, Rabbi Yitzhak Shmelkes of Lemberg (Beit Yitzhak, Y.D. 2:31) wrote that completing an electric circuit is a violation of the rabbinic prohibition of molid. Molid is a rabbinic restriction on creating something that appears to be a new creation. For example, Hazal forbade infusing a nice smell in a garment by placing it over incense since doing so "creates" a new feature in the garment. Similarly, closing a circuit introduces a current into that circuit, thereby giving the impression of a new creation within that wire. Although Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minhat Shlomo 1:9) suggests that perhaps we cannot add to the category of molid as was established by Hazal, he takes the opinion of Rabbi Shmelkes into account and concludes that closing a circuit is a rabbinic prohibition.^[4]

In summary, all poskim agree that closing a circuit on Shabbat is forbidden, though opinions differ as to whether it is a Biblical or rabbinic prohibition. Rav Asher Weiss commented that since there is a unanimous conclusion of the gedolim, it is as though a heavenly voice declared in the beit midrash of the previous generation that using electricity on Shabbat is forbidden.

C. Changing a Current

According to the Hazon Ish, changing the amplitude of the current in a circuit is also forbidden, potentially even on a Biblical level (as understood by Rav Elyashiv; Kedushat ha-Shabbat 7:7, p. 23). Increasing or decreasing the current in a circuit makes the electric device useful and, so to speak, imbues it with life, therefore violating the Biblical prohibition of makeh be-patish. Rav Asher Weiss (Minhat Asher 1:31) seems to concur that it is a Biblical prohibition even to increase a current. However, according to Rav Shmelkes and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, there is no technical issue with changing the amount of energy in a circuit. Closing a circuit is forbidden only when it introduces a new feature in the wire; increasing what the wire previously had, however, is not molid. An analogous case in the Maharil (Dinei Etrog, no. 15) may serve as a precedent: He explained that if a person took an etrog out of a wool cloth on Yom Tov, he can return it to the wool on Yom Tov even though the wool will become scented because of its contact with the etrog, since the wool was already scented beforehand. It is only molid to introduce a smell, not to increase the potency of a preexisting one.^[5]

Nonetheless, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach cautions that altering an electric current could be forbidden if the ramifications of that change are inappropriate for Shabbat. For example, it is forbidden to speak into a telephone that is already off the hook or a microphone that was turned on before Shabbat, or to turn up a radio that is already on. These actions, despite not creating any new electrical current, are all forbidden since they are inappropriate for a Shabbat atmosphere. He compares it to the prohibition of leaving one's watermill running on Shabbat even though it was set up beforehand. Shabbat 18a forbids doing so since the mill's loud noise is in and of itself a zilzul Shabbat, a desecration of Shabbat.^[6] Yet, Rav Shlomo Zalman (cited by Sha'arim Metzuyim be-Halachah v. 2 p. 137 80:39:5) held that using and even adjusting a hearing aid on Shabbat is permitted and considered to be within the spirit of Shabbat since only the person who is wearing the hearing aid can hear the noises produced by the appliance. To clarify, according to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, from the perspective of melakhah there is no problem with using a microphone, phone, or radio that is already on; they are prohibited only because of zilzul Shabbat.

Interestingly, Rav Schachter—who holds that completing a circuit is a rabbinic violation of makeh be-patish—nonetheless agrees with Rav Shlomo Zalman that adjusting the voltage in a circuit is permitted, although for a different reason. Makeh be-patish is only violated when completing a utensil, whereas adjusting the voltage to make the appliance useful is considered using an already complete utensil.

To summarize, there are three approaches to electricity on Shabbat: one holds completing a circuit is a Biblical violation of boneh or makeh be-patish; another holds it is a rabbinic version of makeh be-patish; a third approach considers it to be the rabbinic prohibition of molid. The first approach would forbid changing the amplitude of an existent current, while the latter two approaches hold that the permissibility of a change in a current depends on the results it creates.

Turning to the smartwatch, although no circuits are noticeably being opened and closed, the inner workings of the silicon chip involve opening and closing circuits constantly. On the silicon chip inside the smartwatch, as is the case of a smartphone

and computer, are thousands or millions of tiny transistors and circuits that are constantly being changed in order to enable different processes and apps. Some of the activities in the smartwatch are purely pre-programmed—such as checking for pulse every five seconds—as was the case in older health trackers. In such a case, although the computer chip is opening and closing circuits, since they run automatically they are not an issue for Shabbat, just like it is permitted to pre-program a timer before Shabbat. However, most of the health monitoring is dynamically personalized and respond to the wearer's activity. For example, during workouts, the Fitbit Alta switches from checking heart rate every five seconds to checking every one second. Another example are the sleep cycle alarm apps which wake up the wearer within a half hour window based on the wearer's depth of sleep. The functionality to change modes dynamically exists in practically every smartwatch app. Therefore, wearing a smartwatch that monitors a person's health on Shabbat more than just alters a current; it closes and opens circuits in response to the wearer's actions.[7]

D. Triggering an Electronic Sensor

One smartwatch feature is automatic sensors that adjust their functionality according to the need. For example, as mentioned above, when the wearer exercises, he/she triggers sensors which cause the watch to increase how often it checks his/her pulse. Can these sensors be used on Shabbat? More broadly, in the digital age, the cutting-edge questions of electricity on Shabbat are no longer of changing a current but often revolve around inevitable non-observable reactions. To illustrate and to shed light on our question about smartwatches we will use the analogy of security cameras. Because of their ubiquity it is nearly impossible to walk the streets of New York City today and not trigger some electric device or sensor, whether it be a security camera or automatic door.[8] Using the example of security cameras we can examine the halakhah regarding a person's responsibility for the inevitable consequences of their actions. When a person walks in front of a house or store with surveillance cameras, their image appears on a digital screen and is recorded for a short period of time. According to many poskim,[9] having one's image appear on a screen is a violation of kotev, writing, since making the image appear is considered like drawing, which is a subcategory of writing. Nonetheless, most poskim, as will be outlined shortly, agree that it is still permitted to walk in an area that is monitored by security cameras, including the Kotel Plaza. There are two major approaches as to why this is permitted. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 9:35) explains that walking in front of a security camera is permitted because of the confluence of two factors: 1. Creating a temporary drawing is only rabbinic. 2. Since one does not intend to produce the drawing, it is considered a pesik reisha de-lo niha leih, where the prohibited consequence is unintended and non-beneficial. Generally, a case of pesik reisha occurs when one does a permitted act that is inevitably accompanied by a melakhah. The influential opinion of the Arukh, the Italian eleventh century lexicographer and Talmudist, is that pesik reisha is only forbidden if it is beneficial to a person; otherwise it is permitted. While Tosafot disagree with the opinion of Arukh, they do agree in certain cases where the gravity of the prohibition is only rabbinic. Therefore, Rav Yosef concludes that we can rely on those who permit a pesik reisha de-lo niha leih for a rabbinic prohibition to walk in front of a security camera on Shabbat. Many poskim, including Rav Elyashiv (Or haShabbat v. 25 p. 157) and Rav Mordechai Willig, accept this approach.

Fundamentally in line with this first approach, Rav Schachter adds a nuance to permit walking before a security camera if one does not intend to have one's picture drawn on the digital screen. Based on the Avnei Nezer O.C. 194, he explains that a pesik reisha is only forbidden if the result is physically connected to the actions one takes, but if the melakhah occurs in a disconnected, distant location it is permitted. For our discussion, both of the above explanations assume that a melakhah is taking place, but it is still permitted because it is unintentional and non-beneficial or distant.

In trailblazing a second approach, Rav Shmuel Wosner (Shevet ha-Levi 1:47, 3:41, 3:97, 9:68, and 9:69) holds that it is permitted to walk in front of a security camera since one is not adding any action or effort to cause the drawing on the camera. In fact, one is walking just as one would have walked had the camera been off or absent. When a person drags a heavy bench and the legs dig a furrow, part of his energy is spent transporting the bench, but some of his energy is expended upon digging the furrow with the bench. A pesik reisha is only forbidden if one does an action where some of his energy and efforts are spent on the forbidden melakhah. However, when a person walks and is simultaneously being videoed, he expends no energy for the videoing to occur. The fact that his walking was the basis for the actions of another being or device is irrelevant to his own actions, and thus the melakhah is not understood to have taken place at all.

An interesting precedent can be drawn from Rashba (Responsa, 4:74) which would challenge Rav Wosner's approach. The Rashba was asked whether it was permitted to carry a silkworm on one's body on Shabbat if due to one's body heat it will continue to create silk, which it would not have done had it been situated elsewhere. He answered that putting the silkworm on one's body with the intention that it will create silk is considered a melakhah. Seemingly if a person did this unintentionally it would

be considered a pesik reisha, even though the person wearing the silkworm did not expend any effort to have the worm function. Rav Wosner answered that the Rashba only said it was a melakhah since it was intentional, otherwise it would not be considered a melakhah or pesik reisha at all. In any event, it is noteworthy that a significant group of poskim do not follow Rav Wosner's approach.[10] Therefore, almost all poskim agree that it is permitted to walk in front of a security camera. Some permitted it based on the classical principles that focus on the fact that the melakhah was unintended and non-beneficial, and others based on the premise that it isn't considered melakhah at all. Both approaches agree that if a person's action cause a result that is not intentional and not beneficial it is permitted. They only disagree if it is not intentional but is slightly beneficial. The classical poskim are strict when it is beneficial since the leniency of pesik reisha de-lo niha leih is inapplicable. On the other hand, Rav Wosner is lenient even if there is a slight benefit because it is not considered a melakhah at all when one doesn't add any effort for the melakhah to occur.[11]

Now let's apply these principles to wearing a Fitbit which monitors one's health. According to the first approach there is no basis for leniency, since the Fitbit's monitoring is beneficial. As such, wearing it and thereby allowing it to compute and record bits of information is considered a pesik reisha and is forbidden. Based on the second approach, it is reasonable to argue that wearing a Fitbit which monitors one's health is permitted, since one did not have any specific intention for the sensors to monitor his actions, one did not expend any effort for that to occur, and the benefit is minimal and delayed.

E. Insignificant Digital Results:

The key part of the smartwatch is the digital chip on which computer operations are processed and results are recorded. If we are to answer the question whether one may wear a smartwatch on Shabbat, given that it will make digital recordings of his/her health, understanding the functionality of the digital chip is critical. To this effect, we will draw upon a parallel discussion about digital refrigerators.

Among the halakhically challenging and complex issues in contemporary technology is the digital refrigerator. These refrigerators have a computer chip that records the temperature, when and how long the door is open, and computes calculations regarding when a defrost is necessary. Although resolving the various questions involved with using such a refrigerator on Shabbat is beyond the scope of this article, there are two approaches with respect to the digital recordings of the computer chip that further our above analysis.

Many poskim, including Rav Shlomo Miller and Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky (cited by Or ha-Shabbat v. 27 p. 201), permit causing the computer chip to make these recordings. This is because one does not really care that they are recorded, as the refrigerator could just as well work on a periodic schedule of defrost (although with less energy efficiency). In technical terms, this adds up to a pesik reisha de-lo niha leih of a rabbinic restriction of using electricity, which results in it being permitted, as described in the previous section. This assumes that there is no prohibition of kotev in having the information recorded in a computer chip, since it is not considered writing in any intelligible language. Alternatively, if one assumes that the concern about recording is makeh be-patish, it could be permitted according to a position of the Maggid Mishnah (Hilkhot Shabbat 12:2) that it is only possible to violate makeh be-patish while intentionally trying to create a utensil. An unintentional creation of a "utensil," as in our case, is not considered the creation of a "utensil" at all. However, Rav Schachter takes issue with this approach and its consideration of these elements as unintentional or not to one's benefit. If the system is functioning properly one benefits from the efficient and intelligent design of its makers. Therefore, it is to be considered a pesik reisha de-niha leih, an unintended beneficial consequence, and is forbidden.

Yet, other poskim hold that this feature of the digital refrigerators is permitted since the results are unobservable and unintentional. Rav Heinemann (cited in Or ha-Shabbat ibid.) holds that a melakhah is defined by something which has a tangible result that can be perceived with one of the five senses. Since the results of the computer chip are unintentional and unobservable to any human being, they are completely insignificant halakhically and do not violate the prohibition of using electricity on Shabbat. Furthermore, if one assumes that the issue with electricity is makeh be-patish, it is permitted since the result of the actions is unobservable and thus halakhically inconsequential. In fact, that is also the opinion of Rav Asher Weiss (Minhat Asher 1:31). In a sense, this is reminiscent of Rav Wosner's approach to security cameras—that the electrical sensor reacting to one's actions is not considered one's halakhic responsibility at all.

To recap our analysis, for both the case of walking in front of a security camera and the case of the computer chip in digital refrigerators, we had two approaches as to why it is permitted; in each case, one position argued that triggering electronic sensors on Shabbat could be permitted if it is unintentional and one didn't do anything for the

results to occur or they are unobservable and insignificant. This approach is important to consider for wearing a Fitbit on Shabbat.

F. Kinetic Watches

Before returning to smartwatches, let us consider the interesting halakhic query of self-charging kinetic watches. While the classic automatic watch winds itself by capturing the energy of the wearer's movements using a system of mechanical springs and gears, the newer kinetic watch uses the wearer's movements to recharge its electric battery. An automatic quartz also charges itself by movements but stores the energy in crystal oscillations. Can a person wear such a self-winding watch on Shabbat?

Regarding wearing automatic mechanical watches, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 6:35) outlines numerous reasons to be lenient. Firstly, he points out that it is a dispute whether winding a watch that completely stopped on Shabbat is considered makeh be-patish Biblically or only rabbinically. The Hayyei Adam holds that winding it would be a Biblical violation of makeh be-patish, since that is the finishing touch which makes the watch functional. Many poskim including the Tiferet Yisrael disagree, since a stopped watch is only temporarily unusable, but is still a complete utensil. Winding it is considered its regular use rather than its completion.

Nonetheless, the Tiferet Yisrael concedes that there is a rabbinic prohibition to wind a stopped watch. Yet, if the watch is still running, winding it to prevent it from breaking would be permitted. Accordingly, wearing a self-winding watch on Shabbat is permitted.

A final consideration upon which to base a lenient ruling is that winding the watch happens simultaneously with wearing it normally. The Ben Ish Hai claims that it is permitted to fix the permanent folds of one's turban while wearing it and it is not considered makeh be-patish. It is comparable to the permitted separating good from bad food immediately prior to eating. Rav Ovadia Yosef extrapolates based on this permissive position to allow wearing a self-winding watch, since the improvement of the watch is immediate. Although a similar argument is made by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited by Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah ch. 28 n. 57), this factor as well is subject to debate (c.f. Taz 340:2 and Hazon Ish O.C. 61). In any event, most poskim, including Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah, Rav Heinemann, and Rav Schachter, agree that it is permitted to wear a self-winding watch on Shabbat.

If we move from a mechanical to an electrical kinetic watch, other factors for leniency still apply: it is a pesik reisha of a rabbinic prohibition (if we assume using electricity is only a rabbinic concern), it might be abnormal, and it is winding while one is wearing it. Rabbi Yisrael Rozen and Rav Schachter take the position that it is permitted.

Based on the opinion of Rav Wosner regarding walking in front of security cameras and that of Rav Heinemann regarding the computer recordings in the digital refrigerators, we can suggest yet another reason to permit wearing an electrical kinetic watch. Just like a person walks without thinking about whether a security camera is observing him, so too a person walks without considering the swaying of his hand. As such, he is adding no effort to cause the charging of the watch and, according to Rav Wosner, the resultant charging is not his halakhic responsibility at all.

G. Smartwatches

Based on the above opinions outlined in our various modern day applications, we can suggest two main approaches for wearing a smartwatch that tracks a person's health on Shabbat. As mentioned, smartwatches today have sensors that alter their functionality based on the wearer's actions. The question is whether just having a device respond to one's activity is considered his/her halakhic responsibility. According to those poskim who look at a lack of intention and lack of benefit, the question would hinge on whether the results of the tracking are beneficial. According to those who look at the lack of intention and lack of effort expended on the melakhah, the question would hinge on whether one is intentionally triggering the sensors.

Those poskim who applied the classic rules of pesik reisha de-lo niha leih for the security cameras, digital refrigerators, and kinetic watches consider whether the health tracking on a smartwatch is also unintentional and non-beneficial. Rav Hershel Schachter and Rav Mordechai Willig (oral communication, Jan 25, 2018) hold that the smartwatch monitoring is considered beneficial. Even if one will only look at the statistics after some time and out of curiosity, it is still considered beneficial that the information was recorded. If a person did not actually care about the information being picked up, they would simply wear another watch for Shabbat. Those who wear these watches often prefer them precisely because of their useful health monitors. Therefore, according to that approach, wearing such a watch is tantamount to plugging in an electrical device on Shabbat because the results are beneficial, an attitude which renders the action intentional. Additionally, they explain that by wearing the watch one is causing it to monitor one's health and record data in a computer chip which, in their opinion, is categorized under the melakhah of writing, erasing, or constructing. On the other hand, according to those poskim who discuss not being responsible for an inconsequential melakhah, there is more to analyze. According to Rav Wosner's approach, we can suggest that the recordings are a passive result of wearing the watch,

not based on expending any extra effort to cause the monitoring to occur. Therefore, in a technical sense there is no violation of Shabbat since one isn't doing any action to cause the watch to take one's pulse or track one's steps and the benefit of the recordings is minimal. One is simply living normally, breathing, sleeping, and walking, and the watch is simply doing its job by monitoring that activity. While not all poskim accept Rav Wosner's novel position, as mentioned earlier, Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon extended his opinion to permit wearing a Fitbit that would track a person's health or sleep. It was unclear which watches he would not practically allow. Similarly, Rabbi Rozen[12] argues that since the health tracking is an unobservable result that isn't immediately retrievable for someone observing Shabbat, the digital recordings are considered not one's action at all. Therefore, in his opinion, it is technically permitted to wear a Fitbit on Shabbat; however, in practice it is highly discouraged since it isn't in the spirit of Shabbat.

H. Conclusion

Being that Halakhah is a vibrant and advanced system built upon principles of Torah and Hazal, it is always equipped to address and offer religious insights into the newest innovations of the world. In general, closing an electric circuit on Shabbat is forbidden either Biblically or rabbinically. Changing the current in a circuit, which is relevant for speaking into a microphone that is already on or adjusting the volume on a hearing aid, is subject to a dispute. Even those who are lenient about altering a current would not permit it in cases where it would desecrate the sanctity of Shabbat.

We discussed three scenarios where the unintentional and insignificant consequences of electrical appliances on Shabbat apply. All rabbis permit walking in front of a security camera on Shabbat, but they differ as to the reason; some are lenient since the writing caused on the screen is unintentional and non-beneficial to the walker, while others say that it is permitted, as the walker didn't expend any effort to cause that result. There was a similar discussion regarding the permissibility of causing computer chip recordings of digital refrigerators. The question hinged on whether unintentional and unobservable results were a person's responsibility at all. Then we discussed wearing an electrical self-winding watch on Shabbat. Some consider this permissible because it is unintentional and not considered fixing since it is a normal use of the watch; others say that the violation of Shabbat entailed is not attributable to the wearer, either because he didn't expend any effort for the results or because the results were unintentional and unobservable.

Based on these principles, we focused on the health tracking capabilities of the smartwatch, including tracking calories burnt, heart rate, pulse, and sleep cycle. Communication, notifications, and even having the screen display vary its brightness as per the proximity sensor are certainly not permitted on Shabbat. Regarding the health tracking, some poskim including Rav Schachter and Rav Willig think that wearing the smartwatch is rabbinically forbidden because one's actions cause the smartwatch to open and close circuits on Shabbat. In their opinion, the health monitoring is considered beneficial and therefore the Shabbat-violating action is attributed to the wearer. However, Rabbi Rozen held that technically it is permitted since the results of the tracking are unobservable and not immediately beneficial. Nonetheless, Rabbi Rozen agreed that one should not wear a smartwatch that has health monitoring since it is not appropriate for Shabbat. As evidenced above, the Halakhah carefully discerns between technology that threatens the sanctity of Shabbat, from those that enhance it. As the world continues to evolve we strive to continue to embrace modernity through the lens of Torah.

[1] For citation of poskim on the subject, see my Halachipedia article, "Communication on Shabbat."

[2] Beit Yitzhak, hashmatot to Y.D. 2:31; Yabia Omer 1:16; Menuhat Ahavah 24:2; Rav Hershel Schachter; Rabbi Michael Broyde's & Rabbi Howard Jacob's article "The Use of Electricity on Shabbat," n. 41.

[3] All pesakim from Rav Schachter are based on his shiur at YUTorah on Electricity on Shabbat, as well as on oral communication (January 23, 2018).

[4] This was also the opinion of Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 1:19).

[5] This extrapolation is quoted by the Magen Avraham 511:11 and clarified further by the Shulhan Arukh ha-Rav 511:7.

[6] This is codified and generalized by the Rama 252:5 and Mishnah Berurah 252:48.

[7] See Be-Mareh ha-Bazak, v. 9, p. 44, which concludes that if the health tracker wristband does not react to a person's actions at all it is permitted to wear on Shabbat if one was already wearing it before Shabbat. However, those conclusions are outdated, since they were written in 2011, before the 2014 release of updated smartwatches which have sensors that do react to a person's actions.

[8] The opinion of Rabbi Nahum Rabinovich is that electricity is only considered inappropriate for Shabbat (uvda de-hol), while tripping an electrical sensor is permitted. However, his opinion is rejected and disregarded by the vast majority of Orthodox poskim (Emunat Itkha, v. 104, p. 70).

[9] This is the opinion of many of the poskim that discuss this topic including: Orhot Shabbat v. 1 ch. 15 n. 55 citing Rav Elyashiv, Rav Nissim Karelitz, Rav Shlomo Zalman, Rav Wosner; Yabia Omer O.C. 9:35; Rav Elyashiv cited in Or ha-Shabbat, v. 25 p. 157; Shevet ha-Levi 9:68; and Rav Schachter. See however, Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah, ch. 23 n. 175, who only considers it writing if the video is saved temporarily or permanently but not if it is simply projected on a screen.

[10] Besides the poskim cited in the above discussion who explicitly suggest alternatives to the Shevet ha-Levi, the Orhot Shabbat v. 3 p. 79 comments that the Shevet ha-Levi's approach is very

nuanced and should not be extended without the approval of the gedolim. See Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah, ch. 23 n. 176 who echoes the idea of the Shevet ha-Levi.

[11] Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon (presentation at Yeshiva University, November 7, 2018) explicitly clarified that Rav Wosner would permit, when one adds no personal effort, even if it is beneficial. This seems to be supported from Rav Wosner's treatment of the automatic security lights outside people's houses. He permits walking in a street at night when one's walking would turn on a security light in front of someone's house. He writes that it is not considered beneficial since it is possible to walk anyway. It is plausible that this too is slightly beneficial especially if the street is dark. Additionally, in discussing the automatic self-winding watch, even though having the watch wound with one's movements on Shabbat is slightly beneficial he is lenient. With respect to wearing it for a three-day Yom Tov or a case where without one's movements it would stop working he leaves the question unresolved. This last point implies, contra Rav Rimon, that Rav Wosner would agree if the result is completely beneficial he is strict and he is only lenient if it is only slightly beneficial. See the article by Rabbi Rif and Rabbi Dr. Fixler in Emunat Itkha v. 104 p. 63 who make similar inferences.

[12] The details were clarified by Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman (written communication, Jan. 19, 2018) who worked with Rabbi Rozen at Zomet.

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date: Jan 25, 2024, 7:00 PM

Tidbits - Klal Gavoah in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz Z'L

Shabbos Parashas Beshalach is often referred to as Shabbos Shirah, as the Parashah contains the Shiras HaYam (Az Yashir etc.). In many shuls, the pesukim of the Shirah that contain Hashem's name are read with a special tune. Some have the custom to stand during this leining. In some congregations, the Shiras HaYam at the end of Pesukei d'Zimra is read aloud verse by verse.

There is a minhag to put out food for birds (according to many Poskim this may not be done on Shabbos itself). One reason for this is based on a tradition that birds sang Shiras HaYam along with the B'nei Yisrael. Another explanation is that the birds consumed the mahn that Dasan and Aviram left to be found on Shabbos in their attempt to embarrass Moshe.

This is the fourth week of Shovavim (TaT).

As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim or performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael 'in travail and captivity'.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Kamma 85 • Yerushalmi: Terumos 24 • Mishnah Yomis: Kesubos 7:4-5 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 56b-58b.

"*קָדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא*" "This is my G-d and I will exalt Him" (Shemos 15:2)

Rashi states that during Kieras Yam Suf there was a remarkable revelation of Hashem, and every Jew was able to sense His presence, point a finger and say "this is my G-d." Rashi continues that at this moment even a simple maid servant saw what Yechezkel Hanavi, one of the greatest nevi'im, did not merit to witness in his spiritual revelation of the Maaseh Merkava. One may question that the revelation at the Maaseh Merkava was an indescribable event in a spiritual realm. How can this be compared to the physical phenomenon of the Splitting of the Sea?

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l (Daas Torah) explains that miracles do not occur merely to facilitate salvation but are a revelation of Hashem in this world. The revelation to Yechezkel of the Maaseh HaMerkava was an actual revelation of Hashem's Presence and His spiritual omnipresence. Nevertheless, the revelation at the splitting of the sea was so strong that Hashem's presence was just as obvious.

It is perhaps for this reason that during Kieras Hatorah of the Shiras HaYam, only the verses containing the name of Hashem are sung with a special niggun, as the recognition of Hashem is the ultimate purpose of this event. Often, stories and instances of hashgacha pratis (divine providence) engender feelings of amazement and awe. These instances should be recognized as a revelation of Hashem giving us a glimpse of His Presence in our lives, to further enhance our emunah and bitachon.

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’amses 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 - 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 'teshuva' [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 Sefer Shmot's introduction to Sefer Shmot; see also Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban and Sefer Shmot 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; the water is bitter;
2) Mara (15:24)	there is no food to eat;
3) Midbar Sin (15:2)	there is no water to drink;
4) Refidim I (17:3)	Am Yisrael is attacked by Amalek.
5) Refidim II (17:8)	[Note the chiastic structure: war-water-food-war-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 'teshuva' 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, mi-kotzer **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** li'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 li'otam" does not appear to be the simple 'pshat' 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 li'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 **shama' 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 'eitz' 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-aroach - 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 Benei 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. Yetziyat 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 yetziyat 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 yetziyat 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 Oznayim 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 Besalach 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 descendant 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 30:1-31), 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 Efraim 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 Phlishtim (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

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; Zechariah 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)

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 Mitzrayim (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 Cana'an.

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 Cana'an, 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 Mitzrayim. 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 [Mitzrayim] 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 Mitzrayim 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; Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim, with officers over all of them.

We hear about the chariots again when the Egyptians catch up with Bnei Yisrael:

SHEMOT 14:9 --

Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim, and they will come after them; I will 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 --

Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim, 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 Canaan 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 Mitzrayim 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 --

Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim dead on the shore of the sea. Yisrael saw the mighty hand which Hashem had used against Mitzrayim; 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 Mitzrayim 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 Mitzrayim."

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 Cana'an.

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 Cana'an.

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