

Potomac Torah Study Center

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Tu B'Shevat is next Thursday, February 13

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the first phase of the agreement continue with the remaining hostages coming home, hostilities ending, and with a new era of security and rebuilding for both Israel and all who genuinely seek peace.

When B'Nai Yisrael leave Egypt, soon after they are out of sight of the Egyptians, God tells Moshe to have the people turn around and return to Egypt along the Sea of Reeds, at the edge of the desert. The Egyptians see B'Nai Yisrael returning and wish that Paro had not let their slaves leave town. Paro changes his mind, fears that they will join with Egypt's enemies and attack, and regrets letting the people leave. He takes his chariot, gathers his army, and chases after B'Nai Yisrael. Both camps must cross the Sea of Reeds to leave Egypt and continue toward Canaan.

God places His cloud between B'Nai Yisrael and the Egyptian army. Night falls, and neither side can see what is happening, except Hashem leaves light to guide B'Nai Yisrael. God produces strong winds that separate the sea once B'Nai Yisrael start to cross the sea. After the Jews cross the sea, Hashem raises His cloud so the Egyptians see the dry land path across the sea – but puts the cloud behind B'Nai Yisrael so they cannot watch what happens to the Egyptians. Once the Egyptians are in the dry sea bed, Hashem changes the wind, and the waters rush back to drown the Egyptians and their horses.

In the morning, B'Nai Yisrael see that all the Egyptians and their horses are dead and the chariots are broken. The people sing a joyous song, and Miriam then leads the women in a second song. The people are thirsty and complain to Moshe. He tells them to complain to God. They find bitter water, and Hashem tells Moshe to throw a certain tree into the water. He does, and the water becomes sweet. The people next complain about being hungry. God sends manna and quail. After the people see that Hashem is taking care of their needs, they reach Elim, an oasis with twelve springs and seventy date palms. Amalek encounters the people and attacks, focusing on killing the weakest members of the community. Yehoshua leads an army against Amalek while Moshe goes up a hill to encourage the people. When Moshe has his arms up toward heaven, B'Nai Yisrael gain in the war. When Moshe's arms droop, Amalek gains ground.

B'Nai Yisrael already believe that Hashem is powerful and can defeat any other army. The people, however, do not yet believe that God loves each Jew and wants each of us to develop a close relationship with Him. Hashem continues to test B'Nai Yisrael with water, food, specific orders regarding how and when to collect food and water, and threats from outside the camp to try to convince the people of his love for each of us. For example, Moshe and Hashem keep trying to train the people to complain to God rather than to Moshe or Aharon. Hashem also brings back symbols from before as reminders of His power and love for all the Jews. For example, Hashem tells Moshe to use the same staff that he used to bring plagues to the Egyptians – but now to protect B'Nai Yisrael (for example in bringing water out of a rock).

When B'Nai Yisrael stop at Elim, there are twelve springs and seventy date palms. Why twelve and seventy? Twelve represents a complete family, and seventy stands for all the nations. Esav and Yaakov both have twelve sons who become nations or tribes. Noach has seventy descendants (nations) at Shinar before the flood, and Yaakov has seventy family members when the family goes to Egypt. When Moshe asks Hashem for help leading the people, He tells Moshe to gather seventy elders to help him. During Sukkot, the seventy extra young bull Mincha offerings represent the seventy nations of the world that will eventually recognize Hashem.

One might consider the key lesson of Beshalach to be teaching B'Nai Yisrael to develop faith in Hashem. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander relates Devorah's song in the Haftorah to our journey today to rebuild Israel with faith and responsibility. Devorah's defeat of Sisera brought forty years of peace to our ancestors, and we hope that the costly wars with our enemies will bring even longer peace for our people in the current century.

Rabbi Marc Angel urges us to understand the truth about the Middle East. Israel is the only country that has given land to the Palestinians since 1948. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire controlled Israel for hundreds of years and never moved to establish a Moslem country in or anywhere near Israel. Jordan controlled Jerusalem from 1948 until June 1967 but never ceded any land to the Palestinians.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, raises the concept of hate. Our enemies hate us because we are their enemies. An enemy is willing to die to kill us. The Torah demands that we seek peace with the Egyptians but destroy Amalek. The difference is that Egypt invited our ancestors to live in Egypt to escape a drought and only turned to slavery once they feared that Israel might combine with an enemy nation to take over Egypt. Amalek, however, had a pathological hatred for B'Nai Yisrael and sought to kill all our people, starting with the weakest (those unable to defend themselves). Hamas and some of the other modern Arab nations fit the definition of hate – people with whom one cannot negotiate peace. Israel's treaty with Egypt from more than forty years ago and the more recent Abraham Accords show that Israel is able to negotiate and maintain peaceful relations with some Moslem and Arab countries. Hopefully over time, more countries will change from a hated enemy approach to a positive approach in which a negotiated peace is possible.

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 Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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

Haftarat Parshat Beshalach: From Fear to Song

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

Relieved and reassured, the Jewish people burst into song. Just hours before, they had faced their fate with panic, as Pharaoh and his legion of cavalry rushed towards their position on the banks of the Red Sea. With nowhere to flee between the oncoming army and the watery depths, they cried out to God in their moment of crisis.

Yet here they were, miraculously saved by the pathway God laid out for them through the sea. As they catch their breath, they sing a song, looking back on their fears, out upon the miracle, and onwards to the bright future of freedom ahead.

This emotional redemption at the splitting of Yam Suf is highlighted by the Baal Haturim in his commentary on Parshat Masei. In the recounting of the sojourns of the Jewish people, the Torah tells us that the Jews journeyed from 'Charada' to 'Makhelot')Bamidbar 33:25(.

Rather than reading these as two place names, the Baal Haturim sees in this verse a reference to the splitting of the sea, when the Jews transitioned from terror)'charada' to collective singing)'makhelot'. This shift in mindset is itself an element of redemption – the transition from the mode of panic and survivalism into one of recollection, reflection, and rejuvenation.

No less emotionally charged is the song of Devorah in our Haftarah, sung at the completion of the war with the Canaanites at Har Tavor. Years of hostilities finally draw to an end with this decisive victory, marking the start of forty years of geopolitical quiet in ancient Israel. Finally, Devorah can reflect upon what has taken place.

Like those who sang the Song of the Sea, Devorah too is now able to detect God's hand in the story, a perspective that couldn't be seen in the real-time thick of battle. She takes note of which tribes took part in the conflict and which failed to show up – offering praise and criticism, respectively, where they are due.

Devorah even closes her song with a reflection on the emotional cost felt across enemy lines, thinking of Sisera's mother awaiting his return home – a poignant vignette that lives on in our ritual practice through the one hundred blasts of the Shofar on Rosh Hashana)Tosafot s.v. "shiur teruah," Rosh Hashana, 33b(. All of this taking stock occurs not during the war, but after its conclusion, when the newfound quiet began to set in.

We, too, stand at a moment that offers the hope of quiet. With a fragile cessation of hostilities holding for now, we feel just about ready to lift our heads and hearts from the emotional drain of wartime. The murdered and fallen will not return, the wounded are still healing, devastated communities are still rebuilding, and the hostages have not yet all been returned home.

Yet, even with all the grief and fear we are still holding on to, glimpsing a possible end to this war allows us to begin reflecting – on how we got here, how we traversed this journey together, how we remember those who have fallen, how we help those who have been injured, and how we wish to move forward.

Our current relative quiet may not be the victorious relief felt by our ancestors at the Yam Suf or at Har Tavor. But it is nonetheless a moment to embrace, a moment to catch our breath, individually and collectively, and to regain our bearings on our national journey. A journey of faith, resilience and responsibility to build our national homeland. A journey that has carried us through the generations.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Blander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Beshalach: Split-Sea Soup

By Rabbi Label Lam © 2002 (5762)

Hashem saved on that day Israel from the hand of Egypt and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. And Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt and the people feared Hashem and they had faith in Hashem and Moshe His servant.)Shemos 14:30-31(

It's certainly great news to hear how inspired the Children of Israel were at having the seen the sea split before their eyes. The common complaint and/or question is "*How come Hashem doesn't split the sea for us?*" Then we can have the same degree of certainty and commitment that they had. We would also probably spontaneously erupt into an ecstatic song shouting "*this is my G-d and I will glorify him!*")Shemos 15:2(

There are two different things that the Talmud tells us are as "difficult")for G-d to do(as the splitting of the sea. One is the making of marriage partners and the other is the livelihood of a person. Is anything more or less difficult for The Almighty to do? In which ways are they similar? They are both profound human needs. In which way are they different? One is perhaps a once in a lifetime event while the other is a daily happening. Maybe the answer lies in their commonality as well as their distinctiveness.

Let's imagine the following scenario together. While drinking a coffee at 8:00 AM there's a brief knock and an envelope is seen appearing from underneath the door. A man is spotted running to his car. In the envelope is a hundred dollars cash for you. You wave thanks as the car speeds away. "*Who was that stranger?*" you wonder, "*I wanted to thank him!*" The next morning, at the exact time, the same thing happens, and continuously six days a week)on Friday, two hundred(for years.

Each of the first few times you can't stop waving and thanking till the car is well out of sight. After a while, though, you put a sign on the door not to knock and you remain annoyed when your order is ignored. You begin to wonder why you don't just get a lump sum. What's all this business with only the hundred bucks a day anyway, and the paper wasted on envelopes? One day the envelope is empty and you're ready to sue the man and forcefully demand your money the next time he has the nerve to show up on your doorstep. It sounds absurd! No?

No! One of my teachers once said very pithily, "*Our definition of nature is repeating miracles,*" pointing out that the numerical value of "nature")*ha-teva*(is the same as the name for G-d, *E-lokim*)86(. When something happens once we call it a miracle. When it happens daily we call it nature. If a baby would be born at the end of a tree limb his picture would fill all the papers. We'd all be completely consumed with the miracle of the "*tree-baby.*" However if kids started popping up on trees all over the world, people would become occupied with spraying and pruning the things to prevent crowding and inconvenience.

I'm afraid that if the sea would split every day and twice on Saturdays)matinee day(, many of us would postpone ever taking the trip to see it indefinitely until it would be too late. Those who will have seen the splitting multiple times will also probably become inured to the event in short order and grow weary of it. However if it only happens once, we feel excluded for having missed the big event. What do we do?

There are certain events that happen once in history, which send out great waves of inspiration like the splitting of the sea. There are other monumental happenings like a wedding whose memory echoes good cheer for an entire life long. Not

dissimilar are daily occurrences)like getting an orange in the middle of winter, or eating a slice of bread(which may have passed underneath our radar screen unnoticed, if the Talmud had not given us a clue.

The splitting of the sea is not more amazing than finding your soul mate, which is not less miraculous than a bowl of granola for breakfast. They each demonstrate an intense degree of personal catering to the nuances of our needs. The only difference may be in the magnitude of the celebration, which is in direct proportion to the frequency of the event, yet each gets a song!

The A-Imighty gives us what we need in the right amounts. Air is more abundant than water, which is more available than food. Our appetite for complaining about the infrequency of so called miraculous events would dissipate instantly if the menu called for breakfast only once in history and every day we'd be forced to endure again and again for lunch – **split-sea soup.**

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5762-beshalach/>

Leap of Action

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh HaYeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2019

]Update on February 6, 2025: Over the past five years, YCT has done transformative work in Israel. Today, we are thrilled to announce the establishment of YCT's new Israel office. This marks an exciting chapter in our service of Am Yisrael. For more information: yctorah.org.

At the moment of the exodus from Egypt, the Torah presents us with a picture of a strong, empowered and confident people ready to take on all comers: *“And the Children of Israel went out with an uplifted hand.”* 14:8(. And yet throughout our parasha the people demonstrate a very different character time and again: fearful, needy and dependent. It seems that this initial display of confidence and strength is somewhat illusory and that time was needed for it to become an internalized reality.

The Torah reflects this concern, telling us that they were led away from the land of Plishtim, *“lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt”* 13:17(. When faced with real war, the Torah is saying, it is likely that the image of the people as the *“Lord’s armies”* 12:41, 51(, who left Egypt *“girded with weapons”* 13:18(and *“with an outstretched arm,”* will fall away, and the people will revert to type. They will become dependent slaves who need the security and protection of their overlords.

Much of this will indeed happen when war with Pharaoh’s armies does come. But according to the Rabbis, God tells the people to go back to Egypt before they even have a chance to demand it themselves. For the people were told to return to Pi haChirot, identified by the Rabbis as Pitom, the city of their oppression and slavery. Here’s how Mechilta describes the events:

Moshe said to them: “Return backwards.” Once the horn was sounded to return, those who lacked faith began to tear their hair and rend their garments, until Moshe said to them, “From God it has been told to me that you are a free people.” Therefore it says, “They shall return and encamp by Pi haChirot)the opening of freedom(.)” Mechilta of Rabbi Yishmael, 14:1(

This act of returning is actually the beginning of Israel’s process to establish themselves as a free people. The first step in dealing with one’s fears is to confront them. As long as the people were running away, there would always be a fear that they could be dragged back to Egypt, either by the might of Pharaoh or by the weakness of their own will. The only way the people could free themselves was to stop running, to turn around and face their fears.

If the people turn back to Egypt because they have lost faith, then they will return as slaves, slaves to their weaknesses and to their lesser selves. They must learn how to turn toward Egypt through faith in God and in themselves, in their own inner strengths and resources. This will allow them to look without fear at those powerful forces that have controlled their lives, to look at those forces and to face them down.

Not all types of faith can achieve this. There is a faith of dependency and a faith of empowerment. With the Egyptians advancing, Moshe cries out to God. What is God's response? *"And God said to Moshe, mah tizak a'lie, why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel that they go forward"*)14:15(. Why, ask the commentators, is Moshe being criticized for praying to God? Isn't that what one is supposed to do at a time of distress?

Yes, one needs to cry out to God, but one cannot become stuck in this state of dependency. *Li'tzok li*, to cry out to, indicates a turning to God or someone in power from a state of distress and helplessness, beseeching salvation from above. A prime example of this is the case of one who oppresses the orphan and the widow. The Torah tells us that the orphan and the widow, having no protector and unable to defend themselves, will cry out *)tza'ok yitzak*(to God, and God will save them)22:22, 26(. In fact, the entire salvation from Egypt began like this. After the death of the first pharaoh, the Children of Israel cry out from the midst of their despair, and God hears their cries *)tza'akatam*(and comes to save them)2:23; 3:7,9.

Crying out, then, emerges from a state of helplessness, and reinforces a relationship of dependency. When this dependency is on God, then it is of great religious value, for we must recognize that all that we have comes from God. It is God that we turn to in thanks, and it is God that we turn to in times of need. But when this dependency exists on its own, it can cultivate a diminished sense of oneself, of one's potential and abilities. It can also lead to withdrawal from the world and a shirking of one's moral and religious responsibilities. When someone is sick, we don't just pray; we must do everything in our power to heal the person.

The people need more than a faith in God that mimics the dependency they had on their Egyptian masters, one that amounts to little more than waiting to be saved from above. This was their default state, the one to which they will return time and again throughout their travels in the Wilderness.

And so it was upon seeing the advancing armies of Pharaoh. The people's first response was to do what came naturally: they cried out to God)14:11(. But what followed was not strengthened faith; it was loss of faith. *"What is this that you have done to take us out of Egypt?... It is better for us to serve Egypt than to die in the desert."* Crying out to God, taken by itself and in the absence of any concrete solution, can breed fear and despondency. People need not only to pray, but also to do.

Moshe's response did not help: *"Do not fear. Stand still and see the salvation of God... God will fight for you, and you will be silent."*)14:13-14(. But telling people to have faith does not give them faith! And having the people stand and be silent – ordering them to do absolutely nothing – disempowers them, entrenches fear, and can even undermine the faith that one is trying to instill.

This is God's response to Moshe. Moshe, why are you crying out, and why are you, Moshe, reinforcing people's behavior of crying out? This is not the faith that is needed now. The people do not need a faith of prayer but one of action.

This point is made succinctly by Rav Nachman of Breslov: *"When one cries out to God, he is told to move forward, as it says: 'Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the Children of Israel that they move forward."*)Likutei Moharan, 198(. One does not cry out and stand still. One turns to God, expresses and internalizes his or her reliance on God, and then acts with faith in God and in oneself, faith in one's own abilities to meet challenges, to intuit a sense of God's will, and to translate this into action. One cries out not as a slave, but as someone who is free.

It is this type of faith that the Rabbis were illustrating in the famous midrash of Nachshon ben Aminadav's jump into the unsplit sea. Their point is clear: if God says something is going to happen, you don't stand quietly by and wait for it; you

take a leap. Not only a leap of faith, but also a leap of action. This is the faith of Yehudah, the forebearer of Nachshon ben Aminadav. It is a faith by which one says, “*it is up to me to make it happen.*” Or to paraphrase a saying attributed to Ghandi: “*Be the faith you want to see in the world.*”

Sefat Emet (Pesach, 5631) makes a similar point. He states that it was the Exodus from Egypt which came fully from God that laid the foundation for the Splitting of the Sea, which came through the merits and actions of the people. For a redemption that comes just from God takes one out of Egypt but does not result in true freedom. It is only a redemption that comes through one’s own actions, built on a faith in God, which can free a person from all oppression and enslavement. It is only this that can make a person truly free.

This was the faith that the people showed in the war against Amalek. They did not do as initially feared; they did not turn about and head back to Egypt. For the first time in their journey, they did not lose faith and complain when they encountered hardship. There was no *tza’akah*, no crying out. For this time, they were not told to stand quietly by, but to act. Moshe lifted his hands and Yehoshua led the people into war. The people’s eyes were directed upward to God at the same that they were directed forward to meet the enemy. This was the faith not of fear, but of facing one’s fear. This was the faith of a free people.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rosh HaYeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

From my archives

Judaism: A Burden, or an Opportunity? A Tribute to Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l

By Rabbi Ari Sunshine*

In this morning’s parasha [Bo, from last Shabbas] we get a heavy dose of Pesach — would you believe it’s only 10 weeks away now? — including a description of the first Pesach in Egypt, as well as the instructions for an annual celebration in perpetuity. And, speaking of Pesach, we also find in this parasha three of the four questions that make their way into the Haggadah as the questions of the four sons, or four children, four different types of individuals and learners reacting in their own way to the Seder — and Exodus — experience. We’ll save a full exploration of these different passages and how the rabbis used them for a different time, but I will highlight the first of the four passages, found in Exodus 12:26, when we anticipate our children asking, “*Mah ha-avodah ha-zot lachem,*” “*What does this service mean to you?*” This question is later attributed to the rasha, the wicked son, and the wording of “*to you*” is interpreted to mean that the wicked son is excluding himself from the Jewish communal memory and experience, i.e., it’s not *MY* service, it’s *YOUR* service. In an interesting linguistic twist, it turns out the question that the rabbis use for the chacham, the wise son, also is posed with a second person formulation, “*etchem,*” which theoretically could be seen as taking that same exclusionary stance as the wicked son. In some versions of the Haggadah the word is emended in the question of the wise son to read “*otanu,*” us, but the truth is that we shouldn’t get too hung up on the idea of “*to you*” or “*for you*” as being problematic, as this kind of wording is used by many wise and worthy characters in the Bible, and it is not the subject of critique there.

So how else might we differentiate between these two children who both address their question to their elders in the second person plural? Perhaps we should focus on another word used by the wicked son — the word “*avodah.*” In modern Hebrew, *avodah* is translated as “*work*,” but in biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, it is understood to mean “*service*” — as in serving God. So the failing of the wicked son is what is highlighted by the Jerusalem Talmud, which reads his question as “*What is this burden which you impose on us year in and year out?*” Thus the wicked son regards the celebration of Pesach as a burden, not as an opportunity to serve the Divine, and that’s what sets him apart from his family and his people.

So how do we view the practice and perpetuation of our Jewish traditions and life? As a daily or annual burden, or as a precious opportunity in which we can serve the Divine and bring God's presence into our lives and into our world?

This week the Jewish community lost a leader who very much fell into the latter category, whose deeds testified to the importance of regarding Judaism as a precious gift to be treasured. This was my childhood Rabbi, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, of blessed memory, the Rabbi Emeritus at Congregation Har Shalom in Potomac, MD, where our mutual dear friend Rabbi Adam Raskin now serves as the rabbi.

Rabbi Leonard Cahan was a special kind of rabbi. He wasn't just a teacher of Torah or a pastor in a conventional sense. Yes, he gave thought-provoking and well-crafted sermons and led meaningful Torah discussions. And yes, he was there for us and for the entire community in times of joy and sorrow. But he was so much more than that. For one thing, he was a one-stop shop for Jewish books and even some Judaica. Over the years so many members of Har Shalom could tell you a story of how they remember going to his office to buy their first Gabrieli tallit, like we did for my Bar Mitzvah, or to browse through the Jewish books on his shelves looking for the right one to purchase, long before Amazon Prime was at our beck and call? Though I never directly asked him why he operated a veritable storefront out of his office, I would venture a strong guess that Rabbi Cahan wanted to open doors for all of us to access Jewish learning and practice and feel the same passion for it that he did. It wasn't just about sharing his knowledge and his love of Judaism with others; it was also about empowering them to connect with Jewish books, ritual objects, and practices.

Rabbi Cahan was also a great lover of Jewish music and tefillah, and his recent beautiful duet with his son Josh — my longtime friend and a rabbi as well — of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf melody for Zacharti Lach brought back memories of my first learning that melody at Har Shalom, the melody that, since that first moment, has been my favorite melody from the High Holiday liturgy. And speaking of his affinity for tefillah, my mother so enjoyed working together with him on behalf of the Rabbinical Assembly as he edited the Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, a Siddur that became a vital prayer resource in many Conservative Jewish congregations after its publication 20 years ago, the same siddur that we used here at Shearith Israel until very recently.

Rabbi Cahan was also a rabbi's Rabbi — that I am one of six rabbis of my generation to be produced by Har Shalom in the Rabbi Cahan era is a remarkable testament to the role model and inspiration that Rabbi Cahan was to all of us. He was a trusted advisor to me when I first contemplated Rabbinic school, during my training, and once we became colleagues and he gave us permission to call him "Leonard." He officiated at my installation at B'nai Shalom of Olney back in the fall of 2006 and helped make that moment incredibly special for me, my family, and the congregation.

But beyond all of that, I remember fondly hours upon hours spent with the Cahans at their home during my childhood years. I would come over after shul on Shabbat or Yom Tov, and his son Josh and I would play ping pong, baseball, and assorted other games until it was time for all of us to recite havdalah together. Those were some of the best days of my youth, spent in Leonard and Elizabeth's home, that they opened so warmly.

Yesterday I happened to go to my bookshelf and grab my personal copy of the Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, looking for a translation for a verse from *Pirkei Avot, Ethics of our Fathers*. I wasn't even thinking about it, I just grabbed the book off the shelf, and then in that moment remembered that both he and my Mom had inscribed and signed my copy. So I opened up the front cover, and read this: *"To Ari — May God grant you many opportunities to study and to learn, and to fulfill the teachings of Torah. Shalom, Leonard S Cahan"*. And there it was, once again right in front of my eyes, in his own words: Torah — and Judaism — is a joyous, precious, opportunity, a gift to be treasured, explored, cultivated, loved deeply, and lived. It may have been a burden to the wicked child in the Haggadah, but it wasn't to Rabbi Cahan, and, in large part due to his inspiration, it's never been one to me. It's the good kind of avodah, a deeply rewarding and enriching kind of service.

Rabbi Cahan — my Rabbi — our rabbi — was tall in physical stature, but his stature was not just physical: he cast a giant shadow as the spiritual leader of Har Shalom for so many years, and as a leading rabbinic figure in the Conservative Movement. I will miss him, as will so many others who were blessed to call him their Rabbi, teacher, and friend. Yehi Zichro Baruch — May his memory and legacy continue to inspire us to live learned and vibrant Jewish lives.

Truth, not Narratives: Op Ed by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

It seems to have become "politically correct" to speak of narratives rather than to focus on historical truth. This tendency is blatantly evident in discussions about Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. We are told that each group has its own narrative, implying that each group clings to its own version of truth and should be respected for its views. This approach – seemingly objective and non-judgmental – actually leads to the distortion of facts and undermining of historic truth. It simply is not true to say – as some Palestinian spokespeople say in their narrative – that the land of Israel is the historic homeland of Palestinian Arabs. It isn't a "*Jewish narrative*" that Israel is the Jewish homeland; it is historically true. It has been true since biblical times; it was true during Temple days in antiquity; it was true through the nearly 2000 years of exile in which Jews prayed facing Jerusalem and yearned for the return to their holy land; it is true based on the ongoing presence of Jews in the land of Israel throughout the ages, based on archaeological evidence, based on archives, documents, photographs etc.

For there to be peace between Israel and its neighbors, it is essential to seek truth, not "*narratives*." Here are a few historical facts that must be understood.

The Muslim Ottoman Empire controlled the land of Israel for hundreds of years. Relatively few Jews lived in the holy land during those centuries. The Ottoman Empire could very easily have established a Muslim country in the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital city. The thought never occurred to them! "*Palestine*" was a poor backwater of little significance; Jerusalem was an old, decrepit city that no one (except Jews) cared very much about. There was no call for a "*Palestinian State*," and no claim that Jerusalem should be a capitol of a Muslim country.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. Egypt controlled Gaza. Neither Jordan nor Egypt ceded one inch of territory to Palestinian Arab rule. Neither suggested the need for a Palestinian country, nor took any steps in the direction of creating a Palestinian State. Jordan did not declare Jerusalem as a capital city of Palestinians.

In June 1967, Israel defeated its implacable Arab enemies in the remarkable Six Days War. In the process, Israel took control of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. In making peace with Egypt, Israel ceded the Sinai to Egypt. In attempting to create conciliatory gestures to Palestinian Arabs, Israel ceded much of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. **Israel is the only country in the world to have given territory to the Palestinian Arabs.** Israel has a legitimate claim to much of this territory, but for the sake of peace decided to forego pressing its claims. [emphasis added]

Although no Muslim or Arab nation, when having control of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, created (or even suggested creating) a Palestinian State with a capital of Jerusalem, – the current propaganda in the "politically correct" world is: the Palestinian Arabs have a right to their own State with Jerusalem as capital. Don't they all know that Israel's claim to Jerusalem and the land of Israel goes back 3000 years? Don't both Christianity and Islam recognize the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible – a Bible that highlights the centrality of the land of Israel and Jerusalem in so many texts?

If we are to have peace between Israel and the Palestinians (and the rest of the Arab world), it would be most helpful if people understood the historic context of the conflict. Misguided individuals and countries who forget history, who ignore or deny Israel's rights, who look the other way when Israel is maligned and attacked – such people are part of the problem, not the solution.

As for us, we must heed the words of Isaiah (62:1-2): *“For the sake of Zion I will not hold my peace and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be still, until her righteousness goes forth like radiance and her salvation like a burning torch.”*

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. This essay appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, February 4, 2025.

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Spiritual and Intellectual Friction: Thoughts for Parashat Beshallah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When Albert Einstein was a little boy, his father showed him a compass. The needle pointed north no matter which way Einstein turned the compass around. This amazed the child. In his autobiography published in 1949, Einstein recalls his feelings on that occasion. *“The needle behaved in such a determined way and did not fit into the usual explanation of how the world works. That is that you must touch something to move it. I still remember now, or I believe that I remember, that this experience made a deep and lasting impression on me. There must be something deeply hidden behind everything.”*

But more than his amazement about the compass, Einstein gained another insight. *“Why do we come, sometimes spontaneously, to wonder about something? I think that wondering to one’s self occurs when an experience conflicts with our fixed ways of seeing the world.”*

When we are jarred from complacency, when we are challenged to think in new ways — we become open to new insights. Intellectual friction is fructifying. It makes us re-think old assumptions; it drives us to think along new pathways.

In this week's Torah reading, we read that the Israelites scurried to prepare for their exodus from Egypt. While they were busy gathering their goods, Moses took the bones of Joseph, since Joseph had asked that his remains be brought out of Egypt when the Israelites returned to their own land.

Joseph was raised as an Israelite but went on to live many years as a ruler in Egypt. Moses was raised as an Egyptian but went on to become the liberator of the Israelites. Joseph grew up as a shepherd but then lived much of his life in a royal palace. Moses grew up in a royal palace but then lived much of his life as a shepherd. Joseph brought the Israelites into Egypt; Moses brought them out of Egypt. In many ways, then, these two heroes lived complementary lives. How stirring is the Torah passage describing the Exodus, when Moses is carrying the bones of Joseph out of Egypt. Here we have the union of these two amazing leaders, symbolizing the redemption of the Israelites from their servitude and the beginning of their melding into a free nation heading to their own homeland.

In highlighting the greatness of Joseph and Moses, the Torah is conveying an important message. Neither of these men lived easy, straightforward lives, secure in their own traditions. Quite the contrary! They both spent many years in Egypt, in the midst of a civilization that was very much at odds with that of the people of Israel. They both spent considerable time in the courts of the Pharaohs, exposed to the highest leadership of the land. They were thoroughly imbued with Egyptian and Israelite values and ideals. The clash of cultures generated spiritual friction. This friction proved to strengthen them.

The leadership of Israel did not emerge among people who lived sheltered and insulated lives. Rather, it devolved specifically on those who faced deep challenges and who had to experience conflicts with their fixed ways of seeing the world. The challenges stimulated them to think creatively and courageously.

So it has been throughout the generations of Jewish history. Many of our greatest leaders and thinkers faced powerful spiritual and intellectual conflicts. They did not live sheltered lives, in ivory towers. They may have begun their lives in non-religious contexts, but then found their ways to Torah and mitzvoth. They may have been raised in a religious household, but then rebelled — but then found their way back to religious life. They may have been religious throughout their lifetimes, but faced immense challenges when they studied in universities or read the works of non-religious thinkers. They may have been converts to Judaism, who had spent their earlier years within another religious framework, but who then found their ways to Judaism.

Whatever the particular paths they followed, many of the best, most creative and most dynamic leaders and thinkers of the Jewish people have achieved greatness precisely because of spiritual and intellectual conflict. They have had to evaluate and re-evaluate their assumptions; this process has strengthened them and helped them to open new pathways of thought and spirit.

In the *Pirkei Avot* (2:19), we find the opinion of Rabbi Elazar: *“Be alert to learn Torah; know what to answer an unbeliever.”* Alertness implies having an agile mind not only mastering texts but demonstrating eagerness to explore new ideas and interpretation. When Rabbi Elazar advises that one must know what to answer an unbeliever, he is warning against obscurantism and authoritarianism. He is calling on us to be aware of the critiques of others in a serious way. Through the analysis of the critiques, we are forced to think through the issues more carefully, not simply to accept past assumptions blindly.

Many seem to think that being religious is exemplified by shutting out conflicts and challenges from the surrounding civilization. It seems, though, that the opposite is the case. It is precisely by facing the conflicts and challenges in a serious way that our religious life becomes stronger, more dynamic, and more creative. Our founding personalities like Abraham, Joseph and Moses demonstrate the truth of this approach. So do the many great leaders and thinkers over the generations who have courageously and honestly faced the intellectual and spiritual challenges of their times and places.

Albert Einstein thought that *“there must be something deeply hidden behind everything.”* This insight applies to religious worldview as well as to science. If we are alert and study “everything” with an open and eager mind, we may well discover the deep meanings hidden within.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/spiritual-and-intellectual-friction-thoughts-parashat-beshallah>

Bishalach -- Just Add Love

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

The Jewish people were finally free. After witnessing the ten plagues and experiencing the splitting of the sea, the redemption was complete. Now it was time for the Jewish people to become a nation, to become noble and to illuminate the world through Torah.

The Torah is a book of lessons. The first lesson after Krias Yam Suf (the splitting of the sea) describes how the Jewish people traveled for days without water. When they arrived at a pool of water, they found that the water was bitter and undrinkable. Moshe davened to Hashem for help, and Hashem guided Moshe to a piece of wood which He instructed Moshe to throw into the water. As the Torah records it, Moshe threw it into the water and “the water became sweet.”

We wonder: “Why did Hashem create water that was undrinkable, only to then sweeten it?” The Medrash (Ki Sisa) says that this is a question that Moshe himself wondered about. When he arrived at the water with the Jewish people and found that the water was undrinkable, Moshe thought, “It would have been better if this bitter water would not have been created than to create something that has no use.”

The Medrash writes that Hashem corrected Moshe. Hashem said, *“Do not say that it would be better if it were not created. Is it not My creation?! It was created for a purpose. Rather, turn the bitter; sweet.”*

The purpose of the bitter water was to stage an opportunity for Hashem to teach Moshe a lesson of Torah living. When we encounter something bitter, we should not just wish it didn’t exist. Hashem created it for a purpose. See the bitter as an opportunity. We can transform the bitter to something useful and sweet either by doing something or by shifting our attitude to accept the challenge that Hashem has given us. [emphasis added]

It is remarkable that the water became sweet in a transformational way. The typical way that we make something sweet is by adding a sweetener. For example, if coffee or medicine are bitter, we add sugar or a flavoring to make it taste sweet. The coffee and medicine still intrinsically have their original taste, but that bad taste is masked by the sweetener that was added. In the case of the bitter water though, the Torah records, once Moshe added the wood, “The water became sweet.” The actual water transformed and became drinkable and sweet.

In Shaarei Teshuva (2:5) Rabbeinu Yona explains this approach to life by saying that one who realizes that Hashem created everything and every situation for a purpose, will respond in an uplifting way when they encounter challenge. “The darkness should be seen as the cause of the light which will soon be apparent,” not just as something that we hope will go away soon, and can’t imagine why it was created in the first place. Instead of just hoping to survive and outlive the challenge, a person should live with the awareness that the challenge Hashem orchestrated is the very source of the success that is meant to follow. We might illustrate this by saying, “If life gives you lemons, your destiny just might be to become wealthy by making lemonade.”

When Moshe encountered the bitter water he thought, as people do, that it would be better not to have the useless water. Hashem instructed him not to speak like that. Instead, recognize everything that Hashem created as purposeful, just that sometimes we need to add an ingredient to make it sweet. Sometimes we need to add a physical ingredient, sometimes we need to add a new attitude. The goal is not just to mask the bitterness of what we encounter, but to actually transform it into something purposeful and sweet.

I once read a story of a woman who would dip her hand into a jar whenever she cooked for her family. It seemed that she had a secret ingredient there. When her family asked her about it, she said that indeed it was a secret.

One day she was hospitalized with an illness and was not home for days. Eventually, the husband realized that he would need to do some cooking for the family, so he examined her recipe cards and began to prepare the food accordingly. One thing he wondered about is that he knew that his wife always used the spice from that special jar. To his great surprise none of the recipes called for any ingredients out of the ordinary.

As his curiosity got the best of him, he opened the cover of the jar his wife would always go to and was surprised to find that it was empty. Well, almost empty. At the very bottom he saw there was a note written to his wife by her mother on their wedding day. It read, "Into all your cooking place a good dose of love."

In a similar vein there is a noteworthy observation from the world of psychology. A person might describe a task as something, "I need to do," such as, "I need to make supper" or "I need to do taxes." Or a person can describe the task as something that, "I would like to do," such as, "I would like to make supper," or "I want to do taxes." The difference seems subtle. Sometimes to say, "I want to..." might not even be true. But the way we talk to ourselves is a simple ingredient in our lives that can transform to sweetness the many tasks that we do.

Sometimes the daily chores or situations that we encounter in life will be overwhelming. Finding the secret ingredient or attitude is the key to transforming challenges into sweet and purposeful living.

With heartfelt blessings 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.

Parshas Beshalach – Sacrifices

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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

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

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

intended to be a life of sacrifice and abstention. On the contrary, service of G-d is intended to enhance and uplift our lives.

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

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

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

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

BeShalah – Understanding Rashi

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

1. Shemot 13:17 – Why does Rashi refrain from citing the Midrash?

Ex. 13:17: When Pharaoh let the people go, Elokim did not lead them through the land of Pelishtim, because it was close by – and it would be easy to return in that path to Egypt, and there are many Midrashic interpretations.

This commentary raises some questions:

Usually, Rashi does not hesitate to quote midrashim, and 85% of his commentary on Beresheet is Midrashic material, so why does he not quote one of those midrashim he mentions?

There aren't that many Midrashim, at least of those Rashi uses frequently, on the words "*Kee Kadoh Hu.*"

The answer is, I believe, that when Rashi states that there are many midrashim but does not quote them, he dodges a potential theological dispute with Christian scholars. When he says here that there are many midrashim, he is not referring to the "*Kee Kadoh Hu*" but rather to "*V'lo Nacham Elokim*," which are translated literally as "*Elokim did not lead them*" but are understood differently in the midrash. In Shemot Rabbah there are four interpretations for these words, and all of them derive Nacham not from the root נחם – to lead or guide, but rather from the root נחן – to be comforted. These four midrashim speak of the son, or sons of Elokim who was/were tortured or killed and for whom Elokim would not be comforted until he executes revenge. Here is one example:]Hebrew in original, omitted here because of software issues[

This]Hebrew example[is analogous to the son of a king who was captured by barbarians who tortured him exceedingly. Eventually the king saved his son from them. The king told his son, my son, I am glad I saved you from them, but I will not calm down until I torture them the way they tortured you...

In Christian theology Jesus became identified with Israel in Egypt, and Rashi was aware of that. He mentions the existence of midrashim by passing to say that he knows of them but does not consider them worthy commentaries, thus avoiding potential attacks.

2. Shemot 13:18 – Did 2.4 million Israelite men die just before the exodus?

One out of five left]Egypt[, and the other four fifths died during the three days of darkness.

It is important to analyze this commentary, because, for some obscure reason, this is the one that students recall when they think of that verse. Rashi introduces this midrashic interpretation with the words “*another option*,” and he does so after dedicating almost a hundred words to the literal meaning of the verse, which is that the Israelites were armed and carried provisions.

What is the argument for each interpretation? The root שָׁנָן appears 564 times in the bible, of which 559 have to do with the number five. Of the other five times, four refer to armed people)Ex. 13:18; Jos. 1:14; Ibid. 4:12; Jud. 7:11(The last one – שָׁנָן, appears in Gen. 41:34 and refers to the actions of Yosef in providing for Egypt. It is possible that the significance of שָׁנָן as “*armed*” stems from the verse in Genesis. Yosef collected from the Egyptians one fifth of the crops, and that one fifth became the provision for the years of famine. Later, the term שָׁנָן was borrowed to refer to someone who is well prepared, whether by having provisions or carrying weapons.

It is clear, however, that the word שָׁנָן in our verse cannot be interpreted as one fifth. Beside the grammatical problem, how can this make sense at all? When discussing the plague of darkness, Rashi writes)Ex. 10:22(:

Why did God bring the plague of darkness? Because the Israelites of that generation were wicked, and they did not want to leave Egypt, so they died j.e. killed by God[during the three days of darkness, so the Egyptians will not see their defeat and say: “they are plagued just like us.”

This Midrash suggests that not only 2,400,000 Israelites died in three days, it went unnoticed by the Egyptians. It means that the Israelites had to bury 800,000 people a day, 33,333 every hour, 555 per minute, 9 per second. And how were the Israelites able to rejoice shortly afterward when celebrating their first Pesah or after crossing the sea?

The answer lies in the part on the midrash that has been clipped, and in which two other opinions are mentioned. According to one, the number of wicked Israelites smitten by God was 24 million, and according to the other it was 240 million, meaning that only 0.02 percent of Israelites left Egypt. That last estimate would raise the rate of burial to 900 people a second and would make the exodus the greatest disaster in the history on mankind. It is obvious that the exaggeration was made in order to refute the first opinion which says that 2.4 M people died.

The question remains why Rashi quoted this Midrash and why is it still so popular today, despite its depiction of God as genocidal. Perhaps Rashi was trying to send a message to his generations, Jews who experienced persecutions, lived in the gloom of the Dark Ages, and were witnessing the beginning of the Crusades. He was telling them not to lose hope, because if they do, they will not be redeemed. Today we are, thank God, not in exile. We can visit Israel when we want, and we have, in most countries, freedom of religion. On this backdrop, I had more than once the feeling that teachers and rabbis derive pleasure from the theological power this midrash grants them. They interpret it to their students as saying, “*if you do not follow me, you shall perish.*”

If your children studied this midrash or Rashi’s commentary, maybe it is a good idea to have an informed discussion with them, using the arguments presented here.

3. Food for thought: Did the Israelites pray at the Red Sea?

In his commentary to Ex. 14:10, Rashi says that the words “*The Israelites cried out to God*” mean that they prayed, following in the footsteps of their forefathers Abraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov (according to Midrashic interpretation of Gen. 19:27; 24:63; 28:11).

My question is: when read in the context of the following verses, 11-12, do you think that the Israelites were praying, or was their outcry of a different nature? Also, can you find the sarcasm in verse 11?

Also, how many times does “Egypt” appear in verses 11-12? What does this repetition teach about the Israelites?

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/aim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Beshalach: When all B'Nai Yisrael Hear and Respond the Same to Great Music

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

]]Update on security situation for Jews in New Zealand: Statement by the New Zealand Jewish Council:

“There is one Jewish school, and only one school that has guards stationed outside, in Aotearoa New Zealand. Targeting that school and holding it responsible for the actions of a government on the other side of the world is reprehensible. As we have stated, we are seeing a rapid escalation and normalisation of antisemitism, which does not seem to have calmed, and in fact has only increased, since a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel came into effect. This graffiti, and actions such as John Minto’s incitement campaign against Israelis, are creating a dangerous environment for Jews. Where will this end?”[[

* * * * *

This week we celebrate Shabbat Shirah, the Shabbat when the Jews cross the Red Sea and burst into the ecstatic poetry of Az Yashir, the Song of the Sea.

As someone who has studied music, I still recognize its power to transform, imitate and emulate life and the Shabbat Torah portions. So please allow me to illustrate an insight for our oceanic parsha experience using the metaphors of harmony and counterpoint.

Harmony usually refers to the practice of putting backup notes and chords beneath one melody. It's what we usually listen to. But counterpoint represents a different beast, famously found in the works of Bach. Composing counterpoint means placing 2, 3, or 4 melodies together. They harmonize with each other but no melodic line rises above the other. Indeed, to listen to Bach requires us to shirk the idea of listening to a singular catchy melody in favor of swimming in the ocean of many undulating musical tapestries.

To write a melody means to emphasize one line above all else but in counterpoint, all the lines play an equal part.

Harmony has its place, but the counterpoint experience seems to be the proper metaphor for the Red Sea.

Our Sages say when the sea split, everyone in Israel received a prophecy on par with Ezekiel. Not just one special person received revelation; everyone did. We all became counterpoint melodies instead of backup harmonies.

Have not Jews always strived for this? No matter where we have been, we've always sought counterpoint education -- to spread as much Torah literacy to everyone and not restrict it to a few. Education remains a cornerstone of our Jewish culture. We have our places for singular melodies with backup harmony, but counterpoint serves as our main objective: to spread light and knowledge so everyone can have their own Red Sea Moment with their own melodic line.

Shabbat Shirah Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah BeShalach: Sanctity in Space

The Israelites, having miraculously escaped death at the hands of the Egyptian army, sang a beautiful song of praise and thanksgiving for their Divine rescue — Shirat HaYam. The song concludes with the national aspiration to be settled in the Land of Israel, experiencing God's Presence in the Temple on Mount Moriah:

“Bring [the people] and plant them on the Mount You possess. To the place of Your dwelling that You prepared, God — the Temple, God, that Your hands have founded.”)Ex. 15:17(

The Sages noted that the word Mikdash)Temple(is sandwiched in between God's Name. *“Great is the Temple, since it was placed between two Divine Names”)Berachot 33a(*. What is the significance of this fact?

In general, we need to examine how it is possible that a unique level of sanctity may be restricted to a particular location. What relationship can there be between holiness — a boundless, non-physical quality — and the boundaries of physical space? How can God's Presence be confined to a specific structure?

Spatial Sanctity

In truth, we cannot fathom the mystery of holiness limited to a particular place. However, we can recognize the logical benefit in designating a location as a focal point for people to gather together with the sacred aim of honoring God. Such a center serves to advance humanity's moral and spiritual progress.

Of course, the Creator of the human soul knows its inner workings. God knows that designating sanctity to a particular place is necessary for our spiritual growth.

This perhaps explains the significance of two Names of God surrounding the word Mikdash. God's Name indicates the way we call out to God and how we relate to Him. Our relationship to God, within the context of the Temple, has two aspects. The first is due to the intrinsic sanctity of the Temple, the pinnacle of holiness in the universe. We connect with this inner holiness on a deep emotional level. It inspires our imagination to spiritual greatness, instilling powerful yearnings for goodness and holiness. This is the first Divine Name associated with the Temple.

The second aspect of the Temple stems from its collective benefit for us as social beings. The Temple served as a central location for people to gather together for common spiritual goals, bolstering the moral resolve and aspirations of the entire nation. This aspect of the Temple's spiritual influence — one that is accessible to human logic — corresponds to the second Divine Name.

In fact, the text hints to both of these aspects. Regarding the intrinsic holiness of the Temple, it says, “*The place of Your dwelling that You prepared.*” God Himself prepared the Temple’s unfathomable sanctity, inspiring and uplifting those entering its gates.

Regarding the Temple’s function as a spiritual center for the nation, the verse continues, “*The Temple, that Your hands have founded.*” This is an indirect process, through “*God’s hands*”— the consequential benefit of the Temple as a center for our collective aspirations, a focal point to advance humanity’s true fulfillment.

)Adapted from *Olat Re’iyah* vol. I, p. 236; *Ein Eyah* vol. I, p. 157.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/BSHALAH260.htm>

Beshalach: The Face of Evil (5775, 5782)

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

After 9/11, when the horror and trauma had subsided, Americans found themselves asking what had happened and why. Was it a disaster? A tragedy? A crime? An act of war? It did not seem to fit the pre-existing paradigms. And why had it happened? The question most often asked about Al Qaeda was, “Why do they hate us?”

In the wake of those events an American thinker Lee Harris wrote two books, *Civilization and its Enemies* and *The Suicide of Reason*, that were among the most thought-provoking responses of the decade.]1[The reason for the questions and the failure to find answers, said Harris, was that we in the West had forgotten the concept of an enemy. Liberal democratic politics and market economics create a certain kind of society, a specific way of thinking and a characteristic type of personality. At their heart is the concept of the rational actor, the person who judges acts by their consequences and chooses the maximal option. Such a person believes that for every problem there is a solution, for every conflict a resolution. The way to achieve it is to sit down, negotiate, and do on balance what is best for all.

In such a world there are no enemies, merely conflicts of interest. An enemy, says Harris, is simply “*a friend we haven’t done enough for yet.*” In the real world, however, not everyone is a liberal democrat. An enemy is “*someone who is willing to die in order to kill you. And while it is true that the enemy always hates us for a reason, it is his reason, not ours.*” He sees a different world from ours, and in that world we are the enemy. Why do they hate us? Answers Harris:

“*They hate us because we are their enemy.*” Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*, New York: Free Press, 2004, p. xii–xiii.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Harris’s specifics, the general point is true and profound. We can become mind-blind, thinking that the way we – our society, our culture, our civilisation – see things is the only way, or at least that it is the way everyone would choose if given the chance. Only a complete failure to understand the history of ideas can explain this error, and it is a dangerous one. When Montezuma, ruler of the Aztecs, met Cortes, leader of the Spanish expedition in 1520, he assumed that he was meeting a civilised man from a civilised nation. That mistake cost him his life, and within a year there was no Aztec civilisation anymore. Not everyone sees the world the way we do, and, as Richard Weaver once said: “*The trouble with humanity is that it forgets to read the minutes of the last meeting.*”]2[

This explains the significance of the unusual command at the end of this week’s parsha. The Israelites had escaped the seemingly inexorable danger of the chariots of the Egyptian army, the military high-tech of its day. Miraculously the sea divided, the Israelites crossed, the Egyptians, their chariot wheels caught in the mud, were unable either to advance or retreat and were caught by the returning tide.

The Israelites sang a song and finally seemed to be free, when something untoward and unexpected happened. They

were attacked by a new enemy, the Amalekites, a nomadic group living in the desert. Moses instructed Joshua to lead the people in battle. They fought and won. But the Torah makes it clear that this was no ordinary battle:

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.' Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. He said, 'The hand is on the Lord's throne. The Lord will be at war with Amalek for all generations.' Ex. 17:14-16

This is a very strange statement, and it stands in marked contrast to the way the Torah speaks about the Egyptians. The Amalekites attacked Israel during the lifetime of Moses just once. The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites over an extended period, oppressing and enslaving them and starting a slow genocide by killing every male Israelite child. The whole thrust of the narrative would suggest that if any nation would become the symbol of evil, it would be Egypt.

But the opposite turns out to be true. In Deuteronomy the Torah states, *"Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land"*)Deut. 23:8(. Shortly thereafter, Moses repeats the command about the Amalekites, adding a significant detail:

Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God ... You shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! Deut. 25:17-19

We are commanded not to hate Egypt, but never to forget Amalek. Why the difference? The simplest answer is to recall the Rabbis' statement in *The Ethics of the Fathers*: *"If love depends on a specific cause, when the cause ends, so does the love. If love does not depend on a specific cause, then it never ends."*³[The same applies to hate. When hate depends on a specific cause, it ends once the cause disappears. Causeless, baseless hate lasts forever.

The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites because, in Pharaoh's words, *"The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us"*)Ex. 1:9(. Their hate, in other words, came from fear. It was not irrational. The Egyptians had been attacked and conquered before by a foreign group known as the Hyksos, and the memory of that period was still acute and painful. The Amalekites, however, were not being threatened by the Israelites. They attacked a people who were *"weary and worn out,"* specifically those who were *"lagging behind."* In short: The Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were strong. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites because they were weak.

In today's terminology, the Egyptians were rational actors, the Amalekites were not. With rational actors there can be negotiated peace. People engaged in conflict eventually realise that they are not only destroying their enemies: they are destroying themselves. That is what Pharaoh's advisers said to him after seven plagues: *"Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?"*)Ex. 10:7(. There comes a point at which rational actors understand that the pursuit of self-interest has become self-destructive, and they learn to co-operate.

It is not so, however, with non-rational actors. Emil Fackenheim, one of the great post-Holocaust theologians, noted that towards the end of the Second World War, the Germans diverted trains carrying supplies to their own army, in order to transport Jews to the extermination camps. So driven were they by hatred that they were prepared to put their own victory at risk in order to carry out the systematic murder of the Jews of Europe. This was, he said, evil for evil's sake.¹⁴[

The Amalekites function in Jewish memory as "the enemy" in Lee Harris' sense. Jewish law, however, specifies two completely different forms of action in relation to the Amalekites. First is the physical command to wage war against them. That is what Samuel told Saul to do, a command he failed fully to fulfil. Does this command still apply today?

The unequivocal answer given by Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch is 'No.'¹⁵[Maimonides ruled that the command to destroy the Amalekites only applied if they refused to make peace and accept the seven Noahide laws. He further stated that the command was no longer applicable since Sennacherib, the Assyrian, had transported and resettled the nations he

conquered so that it was no longer possible to identify the ethnicity of any of the original nations against whom the Israelites were commanded to fight. He also said, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that the command only applied to people of specific biological descent. It is not to be applied in general to enemies or haters of the Jewish people. So the command to wage war against the Amalekites no longer applies.

However, there is a quite different command, to “remember” and “not forget” Amalek, which we fulfil annually by the reading the passage containing the Amalekites command as it appears in Deuteronomy on the Shabbat before Purim, Shabbat Zachor)the connection with Purim is that Haman the “Agagite” is assumed to be a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites(. Here Amalek has become a symbol rather than a reality.

By dividing the response in this way, Judaism marks a clear distinction between an ancient enemy who no longer exists, and the evil that enemy embodied, which can break out again at any time in any place. It is easy at times of peace to forget the evil that lies just beneath the surface of the human heart. Never was this truer than in the past three centuries. The birth of Enlightenment, toleration, emancipation, liberalism and human rights persuaded many, Jews among them, that collective evil was as extinct as the Amalekites. Evil was then, not now. That age eventually begat nationalism, fascism, communism, two World Wars, some of the brutal tyrannies ever known, and the worst crime of man against man.

Today, the great danger is terror. Here the words of Princeton political philosopher Michael Walzer are particularly apt:

Wherever we see terrorism, we should look for tyranny and oppression ... The terrorists aim to rule, and murder is their method. They have their own internal police, death squads, disappearances. They begin by killing or intimidating those comrades who stand in their way, and they proceed :to do the same, if they can, among the people they claim to represent. If terrorists are successful, they rule tyrannically, and their people bear, without consent, the costs of the terrorists' rule. Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War*, Yale University Press, 2004, 64-65

Evil never dies and – like liberty – it demands constant vigilance. We are commanded to remember, not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the future, and not for revenge but the opposite: a world free of revenge and other forms of violence.

Lee Harris began *Civilization and its Enemies* with the words, “*The subject of this book is forgetfulness,*”⁶ and ends with a question: “*Can the West overcome the forgetfulness that is the nemesis of every successful civilisation?*”⁷ That is why are commanded to remember and never forget Amalek, not because the historic people still exists, but because a society of rational actors can sometimes believe that the world is full of rational actors with whom one can negotiate peace. It is not always so.

Rarely was a biblical message so relevant to the future of the West and of freedom itself. Peace is possible, implies Moses, even with an Egypt that enslaved and tried to destroy us. But peace is not possible with those who attack people they see as weak and who deny their own people the freedom for which they claim to be fighting. Freedom depends on our ability to remember and, whenever necessary, confront “*the eternal gang of ruthless men,*”⁸ the face of Amalek throughout history. Sometimes there may be no alternative but to fight evil and defeat it. This may be the only path to peace.

Footnotes:

[1] Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*, New York: Free Press, 2004. *The Suicide of Reason*, New York: Basic Books, 2008.

[2] Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences*)Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948(, p. 176.

[3] *Mishnah Avot* 5:16.

]4[Emil L. Fackenheim and Michael L. Morgan, *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987, p. 126.

]5[Rabbi N L Rabinovitch, *Shu"t Melumdei Milchama)Maale Adumim: Maaliyot*, 1993(, pp. 22-25.

]6[Harris, *Civilization*, p. xi.

]7[Ibid., p. 218.

]8[Ibid., p. 216.

Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[What is the difference between the way the Torah commands us to relate to Egypt and Amalek, and why?

]2[Does Amalek still exist today?

]3[What lessons can we apply to our own time from the biblical message to never forget Amalek?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshalach/the-face-of-evil/> 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.

Beshalach: Life Lessons From the Parshah -- Keep on Walking!

By Yehoshua B. Goldman, z"l * © Chabad 2025

The Torah portion of Beshalach features the famous Az Yashir, the poetic song that Moses and the Children of Israel sang to commemorate the miraculous splitting of the sea. For almost 3,500 years since then, and to this day, Jews recite Az Yashir each morning during the Shacharit prayer.

To briefly recap the narrative leading up to this point:

The people had spent 210 years in Egypt, with nearly 100 of those years marked by brutal oppression. Pharaoh, having forgotten Joseph and his contributions to Egypt's greatness, became obsessed with the "Jewish Problem," subjecting the people to cruel enslavement. Finally, God charged Moses with leading them out of Egypt. After Moses and Aaron spent nearly a year in negotiations with Pharaoh, including God bringing the 10 Plagues upon the Egyptians, the people miraculously left, embarking on their journey to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. Regretting letting the people out, Pharaoh led his special forces to pursue them. Encamped around the Red Sea, the people found themselves trapped.

A well-known Midrash elaborates on this part of the story, providing insight into the mindset of our ancestors at that crucial moment.

Caught between the sea ahead and the Egyptian army behind them, the people were divided into four camps, each with its own strongly held opinion on what to do next.

)Jews are always divided into many groups — as they say, "two Jews, three opinions" — it's what makes life interesting!(

The question at hand was, "What are we going to do? There's a sea in front of us, a fierce Egyptian army behind us, and a lot of bad memories within us."

The first group said, “*Let us all plunge into the sea — at least we’ll die by our own hands. We’ll die free people.*” Mass-suicide with dignity.

The second group said, “*Let us just surrender. Let’s raise a big white flag, give ourselves up, and go back to Egypt.*” Being enslaved, they reasoned, is better than dying.

The third group said, “*What have we got to lose? Let’s fight the Egyptians. We’ll fight to the last drop of blood. At least we’ll have our self-respect.*”

The fourth group said, “*Let us all pray. Let us turn to heaven and say, ‘G d, we can really use your help right about now.’*” As we used to say during the ‘60s, “*LSD*” – “*Let’s Start Davening.*”

But then, an interesting thing happened: Moses rejected all four options. “*Don’t be afraid!*” he reassured them. You have nothing to fear but fear itself:

*“Stand firm and see the L rd’s salvation that He will wreak for you today, for the way you have seen the Egyptians is [only] today, [but] you shall no longer continue to see them for eternity. The L rd will fight for you, but you shall remain silent.”*¹

The Midrash tells us that with those words, Moses addressed each of the four groups:

To those who said, “*Let us jump into the sea,*” Moses said, “*Stand firm and you will see G d’s salvation.*”

To those who said, “*Let us surrender and go back to Egypt,*” Moses said, “*As you have seen Egypt this day, you shall not see them again, forever. You’re not going back to Egypt.*”

To the group that suggested fighting the Egyptians, Moses said, “*G d shall fight for you, but you will not fight.*”

And to the fourth group, those who wanted to pray to G d, Moses said, “*You shall be silent.*” As we say in Yiddish: Shah shtil! Zog gornisht!

So there went all four ideas, all four philosophies. The correct answer was “*E, none of the above.*”

What, then, were the people supposed to do?

Move Forward!

The answer is found in the very next verse. “*Speak to the children of Israel,*” G d said to Moses, “*and let them travel.*”²

What should the Jews do? Move forward!

There was no need for a meeting of the minds to decide on a plan of action. The people had already been given their marching orders, and all that was required was to keep moving. When G d appeared to Moses at the Burning Bush, He said, “*When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G d on this mountain.*”³ So, whether there is a sea in front of you, a massive army behind you, or both, keep moving toward your goal. The goal from day one had been Mount Sinai. From the beginning, the mission had been to receive the Torah and to become a G dly people. Keep progressing toward your goal. And if there’s a sea before you, or an army behind you, that’s G d’s problem. G d will have to deal with it.

How does this differ from the philosophy of the group that advocated jumping into the sea in a Masada-style mass suicide? The distinction lies in whether your focus is on the threat or on the goal. The people wanted to jump into the sea rather than fall into the hands of the Egyptians. Moses was telling them to walk into the water because continuing on was how they’d get to Mount Sinai.

The Rebbe takes this a step further, explaining that this lesson applies to the mindset of the Jewish people throughout the ages, both collectively as a nation and in our individual circumstances. We constantly face challenges, threats, and problems, and we may not know where to turn because each option seems to have a deterrent. We always have these four voices within us. Go forward? There's a sea in front of you. Turn back? There's an army behind you. There seems to be nowhere to go.

The answer remains the same, "*Move forward!*" Don't get distracted. Don't try to combat negativity. Clearly define your goal: Mount Sinai. Move forward regardless of obstacles.

Sounds impossible? In G d's world, nothing is impossible. In the world of Torah and in the world of mitzvot, when it comes to the mission of the Jewish people, nothing is impossible.

Get to work — keep going! — and leave the rest to G d.

Improbable Jewish Revival

This parshah is often read in proximity to the auspicious day of the 10th of Shevat, marking the yahrtzeit of the Previous Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, of righteous memory. It's also the day the Rebbe — Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, of righteous memory — assumed the mantle of leadership of Chabad.

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok was Rebbe for three pivotal decades: the 1920s, which saw the rise of Communism in the Soviet Union; the 1930s, marking the ascent of Nazism and the onset of the Holocaust; and the 1940s, during which he miraculously escaped war-torn Europe and relocated to the United States. Once in the U.S., he continued to do all he could to support his brethren in the Soviet Union and Europe, and he threw himself into the fight to revive Judaism in America and globally.

The Previous Rebbe endured unimaginable adversity. Arrested in 1927 by the Soviet regime, he was subjected to brutal beatings in prison and ultimately sentenced to death. Although they had every intention of executing him, he miraculously survived. Forced to emigrate, he left the Soviet Union in 1928 for Latvia, later resettling in Poland, where he was living when Germany invaded in September 1939, marking the start of WWII. After spending the High Holidays of 1939 in bomb shelters in Warsaw, he embarked for the United States on the last passenger ship to leave Europe. Arriving on the shores of America in the spring of 1940, he was a physically broken man, confined to a wheelchair.

When he was wheeled off the ship at the pier in the New York Harbor, many likely thought, "*Thank G d this great man survived; now we'll find him a nice convalescent home, and he'll be able to retire.*"

It probably did not occur to anyone that he would want to continue his work on behalf of the Jewish People. After all, this was America, a sea of assimilation. To think that America could be the new land where Judaism would thrive was an impossible dream.

Yet, with war, persecution, and oppression behind him and the sea of assimilation before him, what was the wheelchair-bound Rebbe's first statement? The Rebbe proclaimed, "*I came to the shores of these United States to show that America is no different!*" The Rebbe asserted that Judaism could flourish in America and serve as a foundation for its resurgence throughout the world.

"*Move forward!*" said the Rebbe, echoing G d's instruction three millennia before. Despite whatever is going on around us, a Jew's goals, aspirations, and mission never change. Whether we find ourselves in Russia, Latvia, Poland, or America — we move forward towards Mount Sinai.

And he went right to work. After establishing a Chabad yeshiva in New York to train a fresh cohort of soldiers in his spiritual army (founded on his first day in the United States!), he immediately began sending shluchim (emissaries) to cities across America. And when the Seventh Rebbe succeeded his father-in-law, he expanded this effort, dispatching

shluchim all over the world.

We only need to look around today to see that so many years later, the shluchim are still fulfilling the Rebbe's mission. To paraphrase the "Ufaratzta" theme song adopted by the Rebbe from a verse in Genesis, they have spread forth to the east, to the west, to the north, and to the south. These emissaries are reaching out to Jews wherever they may be, bringing comfort and encouragement, education and wisdom, and a life of Torah and mitzvot.

A Family Affair

This is deeply personal for me because my parents, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon and Rebbetzin Miriam Gordon, of blessed memory, were present at that pier in 1940 when the Previous Rebbe disembarked. My father was 18 years old, and my mother was 15. Their families were both among the early Chabad Chassidic families to immigrate to New York.

My mother often shared with me that standing there on the pier, she resolved, *"I am in. I am going to become a soldier in the army of the Rebbe. I am going to devote my life to being an emissary of the Rebbe."*

And my father did the same. He was one of 10 students that enrolled in the Rebbe's new yeshiva that day. In fact, it was only two years later, in 1942, at the tender age of 20, when my father was sent by the Previous Rebbe to Newark, N.J., to establish a new yeshiva.

And how did that work out? My parents merited to be emissaries of the Previous Rebbe and later emissaries of the Rebbe for well over 50 years. They established Jewish institutions in various parts of N.J. and in Springfield, Mass. and produced many disciples, and disciples of disciples. Remarkably, my parents have descendants — children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren — who continue as emissaries of the Rebbe in diverse locations such as Huntsville, Alabama; Salem, Oregon; New Orleans, Louisiana; London, England; Munich, Germany; Tasmania, Australia; and more.

"America is no different!" Always move forward towards Mount Sinai!

If ever we are faced with challenges, feel overwhelmed, or are uncertain about the way forward, let us recall our mandate: don't jump into the sea in front of you, don't wave a white flag in surrender, don't start a fight, and don't even stop to pray! Instead, just move forward. Get to work. Move towards your goal: help a fellow Jew put on tefillin, ensure that a Jewish girl lights Shabbat candles, invite others into your home and into your heart.

May we merit to see the fulfillment of all of G d's promises with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, who will usher in the Ultimate Redemption, may it happen speedily in our days! Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 14:13-14.
2. Exodus 14:15.
3. Exodus 3:12.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6282904/jewish/Keep-on-Walking.htm

Beshalach: The Darkness of Light

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Beshalach:

G-d led the people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. As the Egyptians caught up with the people at nightfall, the pillar of cloud hid the light of the pillar of fire from the Egyptians, leaving them in darkness and the Jewish people in the light.

The Darkness of Light:

It came between the Egyptian camp and the Israelite camp. There was cloud and darkness but it lit up the night. Neither came near the other all through the night.)Ex. 14:20(

The words “*it lit up the night*” imply that the darkness itself became a source of illumination.

Spiritual darkness – the apparent absence of Divine revelation and clarity – exists only from our limited perspective. From G-d’s perspective, “*night is as bright as day, and darkness as light.*”

Darkness is a challenge we are meant to overcome and thereby reap the benefits that are gained by overcoming it.

One way we can approach this challenge is to ignore the darkness by focusing on the light. This will dispel the darkness, even if it is seemingly much greater than the little light we possess. This strategy will suffice to carry us through the dark periods of life. But the ultimate objective is not merely to dispel the darkness but to transform it into light, by turning its negativity into a positive force in our lives. When we succeed in this, the resultant light is infinitely brighter than the light that was shining all along.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va'eira from our *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Power of Ruach

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

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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

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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.

This year's series of essays and videos were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks zt"l in 5771 (2010-2011).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

When to Pray and When to Act

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out in prayer to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them start moving.'" (Exodus 14:15)

How does Judaism orchestrate action and prayer, which are actually two contradictory directives? It has often been said that when we act, we must act as if everything depends on us, and when we pray, we must pray as if everything depends on God. What does this mean in theological terms?

The portion of Beshalach presents a terrifying picture. After Pharaoh has supposedly freed the Israelite slaves, the Egyptian charioteers relentlessly pursue them. If the Israelites continue their flight, the Red Sea will drown them. If they stay put, the chariots will crush them. The Bible records: "Vayitzaku" – "they cried out in prayer" (Ex. 14:10). Rashi adds: "Tafsu omanut avotam" – "they grabbed onto the artistry of their ancestors," a poetic reference to the prayers established by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whose "art" is apparently the "art of prayer."

Moses then confronts God, apparently entreating for the safety of his people. Answers God: "Why do you cry out in prayer to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them start moving" (Exodus 14:15). Here, Rashi is even more explicit than in the previous verse. He comments:

"This teaches us that Moses too stood and prayed. God said to him, 'It is not the time now, when Israel is in danger, for you to engage in lengthy prayers [leha'arikh bat-tefila].'" (Rashi 14:15)

What else should Israel do when in danger but pray? Isn't prayer the most obvious and mandatory course for a religious society to take in time of trouble?

But perhaps Rashi is telling us that the Almighty is not chiding Moses and the Israelites for praying; rather, He is chiding them for their overly lengthy prayer, for their prayer without action in a situation which calls for both prayer and action. Indeed, all of life requires a combination of prayer and action, a realization that history is the unfolding of a

magnificent partnership between human action and divine intervention.

There is a fascinating Talmudic passage which may well be the source for Rashi's condemnation of lengthy prayer devoid of action.

"R. Yosi said, 'Once I was traveling on the road and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah appeared, and after I finished my prayer, he said to me, "My son, why did you go into this ruin?" I said, "To pray." He said, "You ought to have prayed on the road." I answered, "I feared that a passerby would interrupt me." He said, "You ought to have prayed a short prayer. "I learned three things from him: One must not go into a ruin, one must pray on the road, and when one recites a prayer on the road, one recites a short prayer."

In effect, Elijah, the herald of Israel's ultimate redemption, is teaching R. Yosi, a Talmudic sage who is suffering the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple, the true act of Jewish prayer. Do not merely pray in the place of destruction and wallow in misery. Start out on the road, on the path towards redemption. There will be attempts by passersby to stop you; they may even shout at you and make war with you, and you must certainly pray. But pray while you are in the process of achieving your goal. Pray while you are rebuilding your state. Of necessity, make it a short prayer so that there is adequate time and energy for human initiative.

The Talmudic passage continues, illuminating one of the most popular and poignant of our prayers, the Kaddish.

"I heard in the ruins a divine voice mourning like a dove and saying, 'Woe to My children, because of whose sins I have destroyed My house. 'And Elijah said to me, 'Not only that, but whenever Israel enters their synagogues and study houses, and responds "May His great name be blessed," the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head in assent and declares, "Happy is the King who is praised in such a manner."'"

The reference is to the Kaddish prayer, a central feature of our synagogue liturgy and recited by mourners at the gravesites of their loved ones. "May [God's] name become great and holy," it begins, referring to the prophetic words of Ezekiel and Zekhariah, who teach that as long as the world is not yet redeemed, as long as tragic suffering and death remain an integral part of the world's landscape, and as long as God's name and essence are diminished, God is not yet manifest in the fullness of His greatness and sanctity. God's name is yet to become great and holy, and the

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achievement of redemption depends in no small measure upon our actions and repentance. As long as Israel merely weeps in the ruins, God weeps as well and continues to mourn for the destruction of the Temple.

When does God describe Himself as a happy king? When the Jews leave the ruins, when they set out on the path of rebuilding, when they enter their re-established synagogues and study houses in Israel and declare that it is His great name which is to be blessed. His name will be one and manifest to all only at the time of a more perfect society. Since the Jews recognize this truth, they also recognize their role in helping to bring it about. God rejoices when He realizes that He has partners in His great task of redemption, when He sees that Israel has started out on the road to renewal.

The road is also the road to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Let us explore the link between prayer, action and the settlement of Israel as it appears in the words of two giants of Jewish law and theology, Maimonides and Nahmanides.

In his opening halakha in his section on prayer, Maimonides sets down the biblical necessity of praying each day.

"To pray is a positive commandment, as it says, 'And you shall serve the Lord your God'" (Exodus 23:15). '(Laws of Prayer, 1:1)

Examining the section in the Torah cited by Maimonides, we discover that the verse appears in a sequence dealing with God's guarantee to Moses when Israel was on the path towards conquering Israel, the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizites the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites:

"Behold I send an angel before you, to guard over you on the road [baderekh] and to bring you into the place I have prepared [the Land of Israel]... Do not bow down to their gods... but you shall utterly overthrow them and break into pieces their pillars. And you shall serve the Lord, your God." (Exodus 23:20-25)

In effect, Maimonides is teaching us that prayer must be linked to the very concrete action of settling Israel and combating the evil of idolatry in the world.

Nahmanides disagrees with Maimonides ('Strictures on Maimonides' Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 5), insisting that the Bible commands prayer only when an individual feels endangered. His proof-text:

"And when you go to war in your land against the nation that is oppressing, then shall you sound the alarm with the trumpets and you shall be remembered before the Lord your

God, and you shall be saved from your enemies." (Numbers 10:9)

Clearly, prayer is seen as an adjunct to an obligatory war, which is legitimate only for self-defense.

We can see a striking example of this tension between prayer and action in the following vignette. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the city of St. Petersburg was blessed with a chief rabbi who was a saintly scholar named Isaac Blazer, affectionately called Reb Itzele Petersburger. He became an avid religious Zionist, and in response the community announced that he was to be fired for heresy. After all, the community leaders argued, do not our prayers recited thrice daily entreat the Almighty to return to Jerusalem, and do they not conclude "Blessed art Thou, O God, the builder of Jerusalem"? This declares quite explicitly that any return to Zion must depend solely on God! How dare Reb Itzele attempt to build Jerusalem with his own hands, and with the help of non-religious Jews at that!

Reb Itzele greeted his accusers with a smile, saying to them, "You are right." He then said to the judge (dayan) of the city, "But then, what about you, Reb Shmuel?" "Me?" the judge responded, aghast at the suggestion that he too was a heretic. "I am not a Zionist."

Countered Reb Itzele, "But when your daughter recently had an asthma attack, did I not see you take her to a doctor, a non-religious Jew at that! Yet we pray thrice daily, 'Heal us O God and we shall be healed... Blessed are you O God, who heals the sick among your people Israel.'" And then Reb Itzele turned to Reb Moshe, the president of the congregation. "You are also a heretic. Did I not see you keep your business open until ten o'clock last night? And yet you also pray three times a day: 'Blessed are you God who blesses the years with good sustenance.'"

Apparently, as in health and sustenance, prayer can only begin after we have done whatever it is possible for humans to do. And that must be the rule for all challenges of life!

A Practical Postscript

What is faith from the biblical perspective? Conventional wisdom would suggest that it means total and unremitting trust in God. Indeed, the Talmud records in the name of R. Aha:

"One who goes to a doctor for a blood-letting procedure is to say, 'May it be Thy will, Lord our God, that this enterprise heal me and that I be healed, because You God are a faithful healer and Your healing is true. It is not the way of human beings to heal; they merely play-act.'" (Berakhot 60a)

Rashi interprets these words to mean that human beings ought not be involved in medicine, but should merely seek divine mercy. Nahmanides, who was himself a doctor, also taught that people on the highest level of faith in God should never seek human medical help, but should rather place their exclusive trust in God.

However, a strange dialogue between Moses and the Almighty in this Torah portion would seem to contravene this commonly accepted definition of faith. Pharaoh decides to go after the Israelites, whom he now believes never should have been allowed to leave Egypt. The Israelites, smitten with fear at the advent of the marching Egyptian armies, cry out to God and rail at Moses: "It would be better to be slaves in Egypt than to die in the desert" (Exodus 14:12). Moses then comforts the people, urging them on to what we would imagine to be genuine faith: "Don't be afraid; stand firm... God will wage battle for you, and you can remain silent" (Exodus 14:13-14).

But God is not satisfied with Moses' lesson in faith. The biblical narrative continues: "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out in prayer to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them start moving'" (Exodus 14:15). Rashi has God say, in effect: "This is not the time for prolonged prayer." It is rather the time for action!

I would submit that the Bible is imparting a critical lesson to the Israelites in this passage, providing a dramatic transformation of the pagan concept of faith. It is not by accident that the entire account of this dialogue opens:

"God spoke to Moses, saying: 'Speak to the Israelites and tell them to turn back and camp before Pi Hahirot[1] facing the god of the North[2] near the sea.'" (Exodus 14:1-3)

The pagan gods demanded fealty, even to the point of child sacrifices; they expected absolute faith in their ultimate power. The only important act of human beings was to propitiate the gods through offerings and sacrifices. World events however were effectuated by the gods, and not by humans.

The first important message of the drama of the Egyptian experience was to demonstrate the supreme power of the one true God of Israel – the universal God – and not Pharaoh or the Nile. And the Israelites believed in God and in His promises with every fiber of their being. This was the faith of a Joseph, who made his brothers swear to bring his bones out of Egypt "for God will surely remember, yes, remember you" and bring you back to Israel. This was the faith of those parents from the tribe of Levi, who despite the unspeakably cruel Egyptian slavery and persecution of the children of Joseph, gave their baby boy the

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name Amram, Exalted Nation, and their baby girl the name Yocheved, Glory to God. They were nourished by the Abrahamic vision of the Covenant of the Pieces; they had perfect faith in ultimate redemption by God.

But they had yet to understand that Jewish faith expects not only faith in God but faith in self, faith in our ability to act meaningfully, in our power to begin the process of redemption, in our responsibilities to repair ourselves and our society. This is the fullness of the message of Torah and its recipe of commandments; this is the divine expectation that we function not as God's chattel but rather as His partners in perfecting the world under the kingship of God.

So stuck were the Israelites in their former primitive concept of faith that they were not even capable of responding to Pharaoh's armies. The Egyptians had suffered a severe physical and traumatic defeat as a result of the plagues. Yes, Pharaoh was advancing against them with an army, but he commanded only 600 chariots with chosen crews. Josephus suggests that there were an additional 50,000 horsemen and 200,000 foot soldiers (Antiquities 2:15, 3). Ramses II is said to have had a force of 2,400 cavalry (Hertz, Pentateuch ad loc.). But there were 600,000 Israelite men! Why did they not think of organizing an army and fighting back?

And so, when Moses confirms the Israelite concept by saying that they ought to be silent and watch God do battle, the Almighty must correct him. If indeed the Israelites are to be His partners, they dare not stand silently by and wait. Much to the contrary, they must begin the process and act. Biblical faith means to do what has to be done in the physical, spiritual and ethical realms. Only after we have done whatever we can do have we the right and duty to faithfully rely on God: "Those who begin by purifying will be aided from on high." (Shabbat 104a)

Hence, the Code of Jewish Law (Yoreh De'ah 336:1) does not accept the prayers suggested by R. Aha (See p. 104) when one enters a medical office. Rather, it agrees with Abaye, who stated: "Permission is granted by God to the doctors to do the healing." (Berakhot 60a)

God works through human actions in the process of redemption. We must believe in God, but we must also believe in ourselves. And the most meaningful prayer is one in which we ask the Almighty to help us garner our own inner strength, courage and wisdom so that we may be able to help ourselves.

[1] Pi Hahirot may be translated either as "Freedom Valley" – where the Israelites are to learn the message of true freedom – or as "the mouth of (the pagan god) Horus."

[2] Lit., *Ba'al Tzefon* – a huge idol, the only one who survived the ravages of the plagues. See *Rashi ad loc.*

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

"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 them (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.

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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!

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Where did all the musical instruments come from? The Israelites had just experienced an extraordinary miracle, the parting of the waters of the sea.

And upon reaching the other side, Moshe led the nation in the singing of Az Yashir, a jubilant song of thanks to Hashem.

And then Miriam, his sister, led all the women and she took 'atof beyadah' – a drum or a timbrel in her hand.

'Vattetzena chal-hannashim achareihu betuppim uvimcholot' and all the ladies followed her.

And they were holding drums or timbrels, and they were dancing.

But, when they were leaving Egypt, they were in such a hurry, under such intense duress, worrying for their very survival. Each person just had their two hands, to take their large families, and to shlep whatever they could of their prized possessions. Where did these instruments come from?

Rashi gives the answer. He tells us that the women of the people of Israel had such deeply rooted Emunah, such extraordinary faith in

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Hashem, that while they were leaving Egypt, they were already preparing themselves for the celebration after their redemption.

I remember some time ago, reading about a drought in Israel in the 1950s.

A fast day had been called and in Jerusalem thousands of people converged on a central square in order to recite Tehillim, Psalms, to pray for rain.

There was an elderly admor, a Chassidish Rebbe, who was pushed along by some of his Chassidim in a wheelchair.

Something amazing happened. During the course of the Tehillim, clouds gathered and by the end of the event it started to rain.

The admor then reached for an umbrella that he had put in a bag at the back of his wheelchair, and he opened it up. His Chassidim said "Rebbe, it is amazing, you are the only person here with an umbrella, how come you have got it?"

He said "what are you talking about? We came to pray for rain, so I brought my umbrella". That was the deep-rooted faith that the women of the people of Israel had.

In similar fashion, at this time right now we are so deeply concerned about the State of Israel and about Jewish people right around the globe.

We pray to the Almighty with every fibre of our faith that He will deliver us and transform our plight from darkness to light, so that we will enjoy comfort and consolation, and so that we will celebrate peace and security as soon as possible.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Pharaohs of Today **Rabbanit Sally Mayer**

In Parshat Beshalach, the Torah describes the splitting of the sea using an unusual word – וַיַּבְקֹשׁ הָמִים – the waters split. This word is used earlier in the Torah to describe when Avraham was preparing to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice at God's orders, and he split wood for the altar – וַיַּבְקֹעַ עַזְיָהוּ. The midrash connects these two stories, suggesting that it was because of Avraham's willingness to sacrifice for Hashem that his descendants merited the miracle of the splitting of the sea.

This comparison to Avraham continues a short time later in the parsha. The Torah describes that when Pharaoh understands that the Jewish people have fled, וַיַּאֲסֹר אֶת מֶרְכַּבָּתוֹ – he readied his chariot to chase them. The midrash compares this story to other stories in the Torah, and tells us that four people readied

their animals or chariots with joy – Avraham and Bilaam, Yosef and Pharaoh. Avraham and Bilaam are both described as getting their donkeys ready early in the morning to go on their respective missions – Avraham to akeidat Yitzchak, the story referenced above, and Bilaam to follow Balak, King of Moav, to viciously curse the Jews. Yosef readies his chariot to greet his dear father, from whom he had been separated for so long, while Pharaoh readies his own chariot to chase and recapture his Jewish slaves. The midrash argues that Hashem counteracts Bilaam's zeal to curse the Jews because of Avraham's eagerness to fulfill the Divine command; and Hashem frustrates Pharaoh's mission on his chariots because of Yosef's personal attention to his father.

What is the meaning of these comparisons, and how do they relate to us today?

The midrash here is implying that the Jews who left Egypt did not necessarily deserve a miraculous salvation on their own merits. Perhaps they were not worthy, complained too much, did not believe fully – as we see throughout their time in the desert. But God remembers His beloved Avraham, who would do anything Hashem asked him, even the most challenging request that can be made of a person – to sacrifice his child. In the merit of Avraham, Hashem splits the sea and protects us from our enemies.

A man who has fought in many of Israel's wars said to me recently, do you know why Hashem has wrought so many miracles in the modern State of Israel? Why do we succeed now after 2000 years to be autonomous in our land, thriving economically, powerful militarily, even in the current extremely challenging situation? He suggested that it is because today, in modern times, when our children reach 18 or 19 or 20, we bring them to the baku'm – the place where they enlist to be soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces. This is our Avraham Avinu moment. The moment that Avraham saddled up his donkey through the tears and split the wood holding back his sobs, praying there will be a salvation for his son, as we all pray every day for the safety of our precious soldiers – that's the moment Hashem remembers when we need protection from the modern-day Bilaams and Pharaohs who want to destroy us. We pray that Hashem will see the heartbreaking sacrifice of so many families, the children of Avraham Avinu, and bring a quick and victorious end to the war, the safe return of the hostages, protection for our soldiers, and healing of all of our wounds.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Daber el Benei Yisrael ve-Yisau: Prayer, Faith, and Initiative: The Ideal Response to Crisis

Upon encountering Pharaoh and his army as they approached Yam Suf in the aftermath of their triumphant (Shemot 14:8 - "uBenei Yisrael yozeim beyad ramah") and miracle-suffused exodus from Egypt, the Torah reports that Benei Yisrael panicked (14:10) - "vayiru meod" - and burst into "zeakah" - "vayizaku el Hashem". Surprisingly, Moshe was advised that this response was either inappropriate or inadequate (14:15) - "vayomer Hashem el Moshe ma titzak eilai" - and that a more active and pragmatic policy was demanded - "daber el Benei Yisrael ve-yisau". The apparent rejection of prayer is puzzling, particularly in a time of evident crisis. Even Ramban (Sefer Hamitzvot, aseh no. 5), who disputes Rambam's codification of a daily imperative of prayer (see also Hilchot Tefillah 1:1-2) acknowledges the obligation in times of crisis (based on Bamidbar 10:9). Moreover, given the preeminence of prayer in Jewish life and thought as a critical facet of avodat Hashem (Taanit 2b and Rambam, Ramban Sefer Hamitzvot op cit) any proposal to even curtail supplication-petition is unanticipated. Yet, the Torah evidently registers a critique of "zeakah" in an acutely challenging historic moment in the development of Am Yisrael. What are the implications of this unanticipated reaction?

According to some mefarshim, there is no implied limitation of prayer in this context. Unkelos renders "zeakah" as "uzeiku", not a reference to prayer, but simply a cry that is an expression of fear. Ibn Ezra even understood the term as a signifying a cynical complaint, connected with "hamibli ein kevarim be-Mitzrayim..." Ramban (14:10-12) posits that the term is intentionally ambiguous, reflecting a divided population (Mechilta - kitot, kitot), those who appropriately turned to prayer during this crisis, and those who improperly lashed out with accusations that Hashem summarily dismissed. [He develops this perspective by noting the different usages of "Benei Yisrael" - those engaged in real tefillah, and "Am" - the group that were terrified and accusatory. He notes that in the aftermath of "vayisau", the Torah (14:31) declares: "vayiru ha-am et Hashem, va-yaminu ba-Hashem u-ve-Moshe avdo", reflecting the spiritual progress it engendered!] [See, also, Seforno's view that Hashem was critical only of one dimension of Moshe's prayer that may have reflected criticism of Am Yisrael.] These views presumably further affirm the efficacy and propriety of authentic prayer, as they dismiss the more unvarnished meaning of the Torah's words as inconceivable. The difficulty persists, however, according to the Mechilta, Rashi, and

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other mefarshim who identify "zeakah" with actual prayer.

At the same time, Rashi's contribution illuminates the ideal crisis posture, refining the role of prayer. While Rashi, citing the Mechilta - "tafsu umanut avotam" - does identify "zeakah" with prayer, he explains that prayer alone may occasionally be inadequate ("lo eit atah leharich betefilah she-Yisrael nesunin ba-zarah"). This is true particularly when it is possible to take additional concrete steps to resolve or alleviate the calamity, or to address the spiritual challenge. In these circumstances, failure to augment tefillah with the appropriate hishtadlut (substantive effort) may constitute overindulging in prayer, possibly undercutting its authentic character and also jeopardizing the efficacy of prayer itself. Tefillah as a primary vehicle of avodat Hashem and an indispensable spiritual response and mechanism in times of crisis needs to be consistently integrated with broader halachic commitment and the concrete actions that reflect and facilitate it. Exclusive reliance on prayer may also project an excessive supernatural focus that detracts from the appropriate normative, philosophical, and theological facets that stand at its core. Ramban, in his introduction to parshat Vayishlach, discussing Yaakov's paradigmatic spiritual strategy confronting Esav, famously invokes the midrashic triple formula of tefillah (prayer), milchamah (warfare), and doron (gifts, also akin to diplomacy-political influence). This multifaceted approach certainly did not diminish the prayer motif. Likely, it enhanced it.

The integration of "ve-yisau" was additional to but possibly also the ideal culmination of Klal Yisrael's "zeakah" of tefillah. In this context, it may have been a prescription to deepen their profound faith in Hashem, well beyond the sense of dependence implied by simple petition. Meshech Chochmah (Shemot 14:15), interpreting the Mechilta, posits that this charge entailed that Am Yisrael would seize the initiative in this demonstrative act of emunah, that Moshe would specifically bring up the rear. Perhaps the projected "va-yisau" as a way of furthering and consolidating national faith in Hashem, culminating in "vayaminu ba-Hashem u-be-Moshe avdo" (14:31) further validated the promise of "Hashem yilachem lachem, ve-atem tacharishun" (14:14) understood by the Mechilta (parshah 2:6) as a broad future commitment, perhaps even when undeserved (see Meshech Chochmah 14:14): "lo be-shaah zu bilvad yilachem lachem, ela leolam yilachem keneged oyveichem."

Moreover, the ambiguity of the term "zeakah" may convey not only diverse populations as Ramban proposed, but also a complex prayer posture that reflected both an appropriate mix

of anxiety and dependence on Hashem's providence, as well as a problematic expression of panic and desperation bordering on yeush - helplessness. The latter may have been particularly inappropriate given the background of miracles reflected in the exodus and the specific Divine commitment unequivocally conveyed through Moshe (as noted by Ibn Ezra and others). R. Saadiah translates "vayizaaku" (14:10) in a manner that suggests that the Torah intentionally utilizes this term that equally communicates a loud cry of anguish and a sober prayer for salvation. Unkelos (14:15) interpolates into his rendering of Hashem's rejection of further "zeakah" the fact that their prayer had already been accepted. Confidence and faith in Hashem, alongside exclusive reliance on Divine providence and personal humility are elemental features of avodat Hashem, and particularly prominent in the structure and content of "avodah she-be-lev zu tefillah" (Taanit 2b).

The need to inculcate faith and confidence was particularly challenging but also acutely vital at this stage in Am Yisrael's national evolution. As Ibn Ezra notes (14:13), Am Yisrael's panic at Yam Suf ensued despite their numerical superiority at this juncture and notwithstanding the explicit Divine assistance that enabled them to extricate themselves from Egypt. Yet, when they encountered Egypt and Pharaoh, they were psychologically paralyzed as they confronted their longtime masters. This despite their apparently proud departure - "u-Benei Yisrael yotzim be-yad ramah" (14:8), a temporary assertion of confidence and dignity also depicted by Ibn Ezra (14:8): "lo yatzu kedemut borchim, ve-hayah imahem kol kelei milchamah". The prescription of "vayisau", in conjunction with appropriate prayer, was crucial to neutralizing this posture of obeisance and cultivating a measure of national strength, dignity, faith and confidence required at this critical historical moment (albeit that would only be fully achieved according to Ibn Ezra's analysis by the next generation that entered Eretz Yisrael). Thus, "vayosha Hashem bayom hahu et Yisrael mi-yad Mitzrayim" (14:30). Ibn Ezra (14:30), acutely sensitive to this theme, emphasizes that the authentic salvation and redemption from Egypt that transcended the physical freedom achieved days earlier occurred only in the aftermath of vayisau and the miracle of keriat Yam Suf that it engendered. It was this profound faith experience, initiated by "vayisau" in the aftermath and as a necessary augment to prayer that fostered national confidence and dignity, true salvation ("atah hayu Yisrael noshim miyad Mitzrayim ki ad atah hayah aleihem pachad hamelech").

We, too, are living in very challenging times, confronting dangers and disappointments that engender anxiety and uncertainty. The security

situation in Eretz Yisrael, the tragic losses that we have endured and continue to suffer, the venom of global antisemitism, the callous attitude of presumed friendly nations, the grotesque journalistic misrepresentations of facts and contexts have left us reeling. Thankfully, we have been able to find much solace, inspiration and guidance in intensified prayer. At the same time, the need for appropriate hishtadlut, "vayisau" as expressed by "lo eit atah le-haarith be-tefillah (exclusively), sheYisrael netunim ba-tzarah"- financial support, political activism, volunteerism- to augment intensified tefillah has never been more obvious. Even as we focus on these appropriate normative responses, we should be mindful of the other facet of "vayisau", the need to deepen our sense of faith in Hashem and confidence in the destiny of Klal Yisrael, never to descend into despair or panic. We need to fortify ourselves by further appreciating and immersing ourselves in the principles and values that define our national core essence. In that way, we will surely be deserving of the continued Divine providence and promise, encapsulated in the aforementioned Mechilta: "lo be-shaah zu bilvad yilachem lachem, ela leolam yilachem keneged oyveichem."

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

It's Dr.'s Orders

And He said, "If you hearken to the voice of HASHEM, your G-d, and you do what is proper in His eyes, and you listen closely to His commandments and observe all His statutes, all the sicknesses that I have visited upon Egypt I will not visit upon you, for I am HASHEM, your Doctor." (Shemos 15:26)

In these cautionary words HASHEM and the Torah are being presented as healing practitioners, as a supernal Doctor and His sublime medicine. Is this meant to supplant the need for medical intervention? Of course not! We have Torah permission to seek out medical help. So how is HASHEM and the Torah like our doctor?

The Maharal spells out a very important principle. When, let us call it "punishment", is it sent to the world, it is not a form of Divine retribution. It should be seen as rehabilitative and educational. When a doctor warns a type 2 diabetic that if they continue to consume sugary products it just might lead to terrible consequences like loss of limbs. The Doctor doesn't want this in the worst way. He wants the best for his patient and so he cautions him sternly. These are not threats or promises.

There is a cause and there is a "natural" consequence. So, the Rambam tells us that a negative prophecy need not come true. Yona warned the residents of Ninve 'and they did

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Teshuva and forestalled the Navi Yona's destructive forecast.

In the introduction to Shaar Bechina, the Chovos HaLevavos outlines three reasons why people might naturally tend to miss out on recognizing the incredible kindness of HASHEM. One has to do with our hyperfocus on and misinterpretation of the mishaps, setbacks, and problems we encounter in life. The entire chapter is based on the premise of two verses. "HASHEM is good to all..." (Tehillim 145)

The other verse is from Koheles (3:14) "And G-d has so made that man should fear before Him". The Chovos HaLevavos understands these words to mean that the reason why HASHEM made everything in the world is that we should learn to fear HASHEM, and live with an awareness of His presence and awesomeness. We are here to learn to see HASHEM. That is exactly why every-thing and every-body is here in the world.

The Chovos HaLevavos employs an analogy of an eye hospital to help us understand much of the unfortunate aspects of the human condition: "In this regard, they are like blinded people who were admitted into an institution specially built for them and furnished with everything needed for their comfort. Every single thing was in its right place and arranged for their advantage in the way that might best serve the specific purpose of improving their condition. Useful healing potions had also been provided and a skilled physician appointed to heal them by the application of these potions so that their sight may be restored. They however neglected to toil in the healing of their eyes and did not heed the directions of the physicians who sought to cure them. They wandered about aimlessly in the institution, miserable because of their blindness. Often as they were walking, they would stumble over objects that had been placed there for their benefit, and fall down on their faces. Some were bruised, others suffered broken limbs. Their pains and injuries increased and multiplied. Then they burst forth in complaints against the owner and the builder of the home, condemned his work, charged him with falling short in the fulfillment of his duty and condemned him as a bad manager. They persuaded themselves that his aim and purpose had not been to do them good and show them kindness, but to cause them pain and injury. This attitude of mind caused them at last to deny his goodness and kindness..."

A wise man was asked this question: "How do we know if it's a decree from HASHEM or a self-inflicted wound?" He said that the Ramban gives comfort (pardon me if I do not know the source) and says that most of the time it's a case of, "Iveles Adam Tisalef

Darcho v'al HASHEM yizaf libo" – "The foolishness of a man perverts his way: and his heart rages against HASHEM." (Mishlei 19:3) Now, how is that a comfort? We should know that HASHEM is not hunting us down. Our fate remains more in our hands than we would like to believe. It may be uncomfortable for many of us because it means change is required. It might seem easier imagining that we are victims of heavenly retribution, but having to nullify heavenly decrees that are likely untrue is even harder! There are so many micro improvements we can all make, not just for our good. It's Dr.'s orders!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez: Keep Calm and Carry On

What do when we face impossible challenges, challenges that seem insurmountable?

Moshe and the Jewish people had left Egypt but reached the Red Sea – the sea was in front of us, to the left and right was desert and behind us was the entire Egyptian army. What was Moshe supposed to do? He wasn't told about the sea splitting at this point, so what did he do? He davened, prayed to G-d. Hashem responds: "Why are you calling Me? Go ahead!"

G-d says this is not a time for prayer, you have to go forward – keep calm and carry on. The impossible became possible. We often face challenges that seem insurmountable – we have to daven and keep going with faith in G-d.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

What Makes A Jewish Song Jewish

In discussing the theme of this sermon, "What Makes a Jewish Song Jewish?", I speak as a rabbi, not as a musician or connoisseur of the arts. I believe that in addition to the artistic qualities of a song, or any work of art, there are also certain ethical or moral or religious matters which contribute to its greatness and Jewishness. This week, Shabbat Shira – the Sabbath on which the Song of Moses is read – is an opportune time to delve into those other-than-technical matters which make songs like Az Yashir great and Jewish.

There are three prerequisites for, or pragmatic tests of, a great Jewish song. The first two of these are universal; that is, they are the marks of greatness which distinguish any truly superior song or chant. The third is the particularly Jewish aspect. And it is the three of these, taken together, which make for a song such as Az Yashir, which is both great from a universal point of view, and invaluable holy from a Jewish point of view.

The first requirement is that it have meaning for all times. It must be as appropriate for any future generation as it is for the one in which it was written. It must outgrow local character and provincial significance and overflow into the stream of time, the stream of eternity. For a truly great song to be immortal, it must be eternal. The phrase "az yashir," "Then they sang" (Exodus 15:1) is interpreted by the Midrash Tanhuma (Beshalah 13) as meaning that they sang so that future generations would sing "–le'atid" – a song for all time to come. It is a song which will be as valid for this century as it was for 3,000 years before this century. Do we not repeat the Az Yashir daily? Do we not read it from the Torah twice every year? You see, this song was not restricted to particular events and was not circumscribed by definite personalities – in essence it transcends all these. For, as the song of liberation, sung after the Exodus from Egypt, it is the hymn of freedom for all time, the eternal anthem of the Jew which commemorates and references the beginning of his history. And even more than historical or political motifs were here detected by the Jewish mystics. They saw in it, too, a song of the liberation of the soul from the Egyptian qualities of man which drag it down. Every man must leave his own Egypt and must sing of this Exodus proudly and sweetly. If a man be dragged down to misery because he is by nature vindictive, then vindictiveness is his Egypt in which his soul is in exile. If he can overpower that banal quality, then he has personally experienced the Exodus from Egypt, and though he lives in the year 5712, he must sing an Az Yashir, the song of liberation from an Egypt all his own. So then, Az Yashir from the historical point of view and from the personal aspect, is a song with as much meaning for our day and every day as it was when it was first composed. Its overtones have not been silenced, and it is, in this way, indicative of the first important quality of a great song – value for all time, the power to survive the vicissitudes of ages in which values and ideas change ever so severely.

The second important characteristic of a great Jewish song is that, more than being repeated by future generations, it must also be able to inspire them. It is sometimes possible to read an ancient text and find meaning in it, without necessarily being inspired by it. A great song, however, is more than a curiosity lifted out of the musical notes of an age gone by. The musical overtones of a great song must not only be heard by some future generation, it must drive it and fire it and detonate it. It must contain the power to awaken men from their spiritual slumber. "Song" in a Jewish sense is more than a melodious combination of sounds. It is a song that can stir a person to create a response. It is that song which can, even centuries later, cause people to change themselves. It must be eternal and effective. Furthermore, a great song can inspire only by

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getting those who hear it to finish it. Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony" has challenged men for many years – challenged them to finish it and complete it and perfect it. In a similar vein, every great song is an unfinished song. The listener must finish it by a soul-stirring response. After listening passively, he must digest actively and create a noble reaction of his soul. Emotionally and intellectually, he must complete a great song by changing himself. A great song, any great work of art, is great because it elicits a reaction – and that is the secret of its powers of inspiration. The crescendo or climax is internal.

Our Rabbis (Sanhedrin 91b) saw the kernel of this idea, this second standard for a great Jewish song, in the first two words of Moses' lofty song by the Sea. "Amar Rabbi Meir, minayin letehiyat hameitim min haTorah? Shene'emar 'az yashir. 'Shar 'lo ne'emar, ela 'yashir.'" Idiomatic or poetic Hebrew, in its biblical construction, writes "az yashir," "then [Moses and Israel] will sing," not, as it should be, "az shar," "they did sing." From this unusual grammatical construction, Rabbi Meir deduces a principle of faith – the Resurrection of the Dead. Since Moses will sing in the future, that must mean he will first be resurrected. Of course, what Rabbi Meir meant was more than proof of resurrection from the Song of Moses. He meant, too, proof of the quality of the song from the fact of resurrection. Where from does Az Yashir derive its sublime and ethereal powers? From tehiyat hameitim, from the resurrection of the dead – because it has the power to breathe the breath of life into dead souls. A great song must be able to penetrate the heart of man, get within the dead tinder wood and driftwood piled up about his heart and set them afire. The dead souls and slumbering spirits must be resurrected, revivified. Only that song is worthy of Moses and Israel, who can, millennia later, kindle the flame of faith in men and women to the point where they rise unanimously and proclaim for a lifetime "mi khamokha baEilim Hashem, mi kamokha ne'edar bakodesh," "who is like You among the mighty, Hashem, who is like You, glorious in Holiness" (Exodus 15:11). Only such a song is deserving of the epithet "great" – that which can galvanize an apathetic people to resurrect its homeland and proclaim "tevi'eimo vetita'emo behar naḥalatkhah," that the time has come when Jews, slumbering in resignation, will arise to rebuild the Promised Land. The song of the Exodus of Egypt has been re-sung, finished, in our own day, by those who participated in the exodus of Europe. Certainly, a great song must be able to effect tehiyat hameitim – the resurrection of the indolent, slothful, languid souls. Our Rabbis (Sanhedrin 92b) even say that the dead who were resurrected in Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones (ch. 37) also "amru shira," sang a song

in that same vision. For their resurrection was proof of the quality of the Song of Hope of all Jews for all time.

Take, for instance, a modern song which has gained prominence among Jews in recent years. It is a song of the ghetto, the Song of Hope of those doomed to crematoria and gas chambers “—Ani Ma’amin” — I believe, in perfect faith, in the coming of the Messiah, in the imminent redemption of Israel. Do you remember how that song gained its fame? It was reported in the press during the war — emaciated Jews, while being led to a crematorium in a cattle truck, were singing a haunting melody, whose words, strangely, expressed an irrational hope in the Messiah, in a better life and a fresh hope. Was that a new song? Indeed not. The melody, perhaps, was new. The words are ancient. They were written eight centuries ago by Moses Maimonides, who himself had to travel over the entire Near and Middle East as an exile from his home. So, on this count, then, “Ani Ma’amin” is a great song. For, more than lasting into the future, it quickened the spirits of men. And even more than becoming an instrument which infused life into desperate, dying souls, it gave them the courage to defy death to its teeth.

But there is yet a third requirement for a Jewish song, and this is the critically Jewish element; it is this which makes a Jewish song Jewish. And that is, that this song, which has meaning for the future, and which can inspire men in the future, must be able to inspire them toward specific goals. Specifically, it must be able to shock them into an awareness of God, it must be able to electrify them into the sort of introspection which leads to great religious achievement. In a word, it must lead to teshuva, repentance. If a song has moved people to repent and towards a new understanding and new practice of Jewishness, then it has proved its basic Jewishness. After all, what is Az Yashir if not a tribute to the omnipotence of the Almighty God, and hence an imperative to do immediate penance?

The Hasidim used to picture the spiritual world as a great divine palace someplace in heaven and in this symbolic structure all concepts were represented as different rooms or gates. By placing one room or gate next to another, the Hasidim were able to present their view of the relation of different ideas. And these Hasidim, who, as you no doubt know, were great believers in singing and happiness and sanguineness, assigned the Sha’ar HaNegina, the Gate of Song, right next to one of the most important gates in the entire palace, the Sha’ar HaTeshuva (quoted in the name of Rabbi Israel of Modzitz). Now, what did they mean by that? They meant, simply, that the function of song is that it must open for you the Gates of Penitence. No song is a divine song unless its vibrations can cause a little explosion in the

inner chambers of teshuva. From the Gate of True Song, you must be able to walk right in through the Gates of Penitence.

The shofar is the oldest and most venerated of Jewish musical instruments. It is as ancient as the Jewish people. Yet it has survived the test of time, and is sounded faithfully every year. It thus fulfills the first requirement. It inspires people — let each of you testify to that yourself. That meets the second test. And it fulfills the third requirement by urging people on to teshuva. Listen to Maimonides as he describes the meaning of the song of the shofar (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:4): “uru yesheinim mishinatkhem,” “Wake up, ye who sleep, from your sleep; and arise, ye who slumber, from your slumber. Search your ways, return in penitence and remember your Creator. Ye who forget the truth in the vanities of time, and waste their years in nonsense which is of no avail, look deep into your souls and do good henceforth.” So, then, the song of the shofar is a great Jewish song.

And according to these three standards, my friends, if we will but forget the technical element of music and permit ourselves the privilege of subtraction, then even a word can qualify as a great Jewish song. Even a hand placed encouragingly on the shoulder of a faltering friend can be a great Jewish song. An exemplary life can be a great Jewish song. Anything beautiful, in short, that can fulfill these three requirements, is a great Jewish song.

A rebuke, for instance, can qualify. The Torah records as a special commandment, “hokhei’ah tokhiah et amitekha,” “thou shalt rebuke thy fellow” (*Leviticus* 19:17). That is, if your friend errs and veers from the right path, you must reproach him. Now, reproach can be administered in many ways — some very crude and vulgar. But that great ethical thinker, Rabbenu Yonah, gives us the prescription for the correct type of rebuke (*Commentary on Avot* 4:12). “Don’t tell the wrongdoer,” says Rabbenu Yonah, “how look, you are a horrible sinner and will pay for your sins,” but rather say, “now I think that you are a wonderful fellow, you are a pious man but you don’t know it. Of course you have weaknesses, but a man of your stature will certainly overcome them.” Here is a rebuke which is a Jewish song! It will live with that wrong-doer for many a year. It will inspire him — he will himself finish that rebuke and, while mulling over your words, tell himself what you dared not tell him. And those words will most certainly be as effective as can be in directing him to teshuva, a new and fresh outlook upon life.

The great Jewish songs of all ages, those which conform to the standards and criteria we outlined, shall never be silenced. And the first

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Jewish song, the Song of Moses and the Israelites by the shores of the Red Sea, the song concluding with “Hashem yimlokh le’olam va’ed,” the eternal reign of God, shall itself be eternally re-sung by all Jews. The echoes of the Song of Moses resound in the chambers of the Jewish soul and pluck its heartstrings forever. All Jews, themselves finishing that song, must rise to new heights, and gain entry into the coveted and lofty Gates of Penitence. [February 9, 1952]

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[CS Late-breaking dvar torah:

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Are Our Leaders Scared to Empower their Students?

Do You Know How to Make Your Disciple Shine? How Chabad Keeps It Together

By Rabbi YY Jacobson

Picture: A young YY Jacobson with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. To the left is his father, Gershon Jacobson

Three Versions of a Song

One of the first things we did together as a people was sing.

The nation of Israel was born on the 15th of Nissan in the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE). Seven days later, the Israelites witnessed the Red Sea split, to allow them passage and to drown the pursuing Egyptians. The Torah relates how upon beholding the great miracle, Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to G-d, saying:

I shall sing to G-d for He is most exalted;

Horse and rider He cast in the sea.

G-d is my strength and song; He is my salvation

This is my G-d, and I shall glorify Him

The G-d of my fathers, and I shall exalt Him...

This song, known as Shiras HaYam—Song at the Sea—goes on to describe the great miracles that G-d performed for His people, G-d's promise to bring them to the Holy Land and reveal His presence among them in the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, and Israel's goal to implement G-d's eternal sovereignty in the world. Its forty-four verses express the gist of our relationship with G-d and our mission in life, and thus occupy a most important place in the Torah and in Jewish life.

Our sages focus on the prefatory line to the Song at the Sea. The Torah introduces it as a song sung by "Moses and the children of Israel." Moses was obviously one of the "children of Israel," so the fact that the Torah singles him out implies that Moses took a leading role in the composition and delivery of this song. But the exact nature of Moses' role is a point of much discussion by our sages. How exactly did three million people sing the same song?

The Talmud (Sotah 30b) relates no fewer than three different opinions. According to Rabbi Akiva, it was Moses who composed and sang the song, while the people of Israel merely responded to each verse with the refrain "I shall sing to G-d" (Ashirah L'Hashem). Moses sang, "For He is most exalted," and the nation answered, "I shall sing to G-d"; Moses sang, "Horse and rider He cast in the sea," and the people answered, "I shall sing to G-d"; and so on with all forty-four verses of the song. After each stanza, they declared "Ashirah LeHashem."

Rabbi Eliezer, however, is of the opinion that the people repeated each verse after Moses: Moses sang, "I shall sing to G-d for He is most exalted," and they repeated "I shall sing to G-d for He is most exalted;" Moses sang "Horse and rider He cast in the sea," and they repeated, "Horse and rider He cast in the sea," and so on.

A third opinion is that of Rabbi Nechemiah: according to him, Moses simply pronounced the opening words of the song, following which the people of Israel all sang the entire song together. Each of them, on their own, composed the entire, and very same, forty-four verses!

Three Forms of Leadership

It is a strange debate. Do we have to argue about everything?

What is the logic behind these three opinions? What is the difference if Moses sang the entire song himself and the nation merely shouted out the chorus, or if the people repeated each stanza after Moses; or if Moses merely began the song and the people sang the rest of it on their own?

What is more, this is a story that occurred more than 3,330 years ago. Why argue about something that seems irrelevant today?

The truth is that what seems to be a merely technical argument is a profound meditation on the nature of leadership, and on the ability of a leader to inspire a sense of unity and purpose within a fragmented people.

What is the role of a leader? To inspire loyalty and submission, to create pupils, or to mold leaders? The three versions of how Moses led Israel in song express these three different perspectives on leadership.

Rabbi Akiva describes a situation in which Moses inspires an entire generation to surrender their egos, to transcend their differences, to submit their individuality to the collective identity embodied by the leader. Rabbi Akiva sees Moses as the embodiment of the collective consciousness of Israel, the one in whom each Jew finds their truest and deepest identity as a fragment of the Divine. Moses alone sang the nation's gratitude to G-d. The people had nothing further to say as individuals, except to affirm their unanimous assent to what Moses was expressing.

Moses marched, and the nation declared: "Yes, we are in!" It was a moment of absolute loyalty and unity, as the Torah states right before the song, "and they believed in G-d and in Moses His servant."

Note the critical words: "Moses his servant." Throughout history, many a dictator inspired radical submission and loyalty, through fear, charisma, or genius, but the objective was the worship of an individual. In contrast, Moses, "the humblest man on earth" was completely dedicated to G-d; he could unite and embody the zeitgeist of the nation because of his ego-lessness, seeing himself as nothing but a conduit for an infinite G-d. Thus, he could inspire a few million hearts to melt away in the ecstasy of "we."

Rabbi Eliezer, however, argues that the phenomenon of two million hearts and minds inspired to yield to a single vision and a single leader will not endure. It is electrifying and transformative, but it is short-lived, and not very meaningful in the long run. Have you ever been at a concert or a speech in which thousands congealed into one entity, embodied by a singular figure inspiring magnetic electricity? It is deeply powerful, but short-lived. Sooner or later their intrinsic differences and counter-aims will assert themselves, and the unity will fade. Moments of radical transcendence, when the individual "I" melts into the collective "I," are powerful, but not enduring. When the "I" resurfaces, the unity remains but a memory.

Rabbi Eliezer thus argued that the model employed was very different: Moses inspired students rather than loyalists. The people of Israel repeated each verse after Moses. They did not suffice with an affirmation of his articulation of Israel's song. Rather, they repeated it after him, running it through the sieve of their own understanding and feelings, finding the roots for an identical declaration in their own personality and experience. The very same words assumed two million nuances of meaning, as they were absorbed by two million minds and articulated by two million mouths.

Moses created a generation of pupils and students who listened to his song, and then integrated it into their own lives. His vision became theirs. They did not submit their selves to Moses; they made his vision theirs. For Reb Eliezer, Moses is more like the conductor of a symphony, inspiring each musician to use his or her own instrument to produce the music. They are playing the same song, but each person is using his or her own instrument,

Rabbi Nechemiah, however, felt that this vision of leadership was still lacking. This type of leadership is meaningful as long as the teacher is there to teach and to inspire his or her disciples. When the leader is communicating his passion and song, his students can "repeat it," absorb it and follow it. But what occurs when the captain disappears, when the teacher is silenced, when the conductor is no longer directing the symphony? Now that there is nothing to repeat, and nobody to direct, does the symphony die?

No, argues Rabbi Nechmyah. If Moses truly captured and embodied the quintessence of Israel, rather than his own ego, they would be able to find his song within themselves and would not need to hear their song from his lips before they could sing it themselves. The real leader, argues Reb Nechmyah, creates not followers but leaders. He shows people how to discover the leader within themselves—how to find within their own heart the infinite light and the song of Moses.

The way it happened, argues Rabbi Nechmyah, was that Moses pronounced the opening words of the song, commencing the play, identifying the goal, marking the destination, beginning the march. But following that each and every Jew sang the entire song by himself (or herself). Moses inspired not submission, nor did he create disciples; Moses knew how to kindle the spark within each and every one of his people so that they on their own can continue his song.

This view is suitable for Rabbi "Nechmyah" whose name means comfort and solace (similar to the names Menachem, Tanchuma, or Noach.) For a generation that would not see and hear Moses sing, Rabbi Nechmyah taught that the greatest leaders of Israel lead their people in their absence sometimes even more than during their presence. Their greatest gift is that the people touched by them become ambassadors of love, light, and hope.

To be sure, all three opinions are valid and vital, depending on the circumstances. There are times when leaders inspire the surrender of the individual "I" to the collective "we." Yet the true leader must learn how to mold real disciples, and the greatest of leaders learn how to empower leaders.

The Rebbe's Influence

The above marvelous explanation I heard myself from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, during an address on Shabbat Parshas Beshalach, Shevat 11, 5748, January 30, 1988. (It was a few days before the sudden passing of his wife, Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka, and a few short years before the Rebbe's own passing in 1994.[1])

The above insight of the Rebbe taught me much about the role of a genuine parent, an authentic pedagogue, and a great leader. It also helped me understand the Rebbe himself.

This coming Shabbos, 10 Shevat 5785 (Feb 8, 2025), the Jewish world celebrates 75 years of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's leadership. People often ask me: In the absence of the Rebbe's physical presence, what inspires Chabad? What holds it together? What motivates it? What keeps it focused and united? How long can it continue?

But the Rebbe's name was "Menachem," and he embodied the vision of Rabbi Nechmyah. The Rebbe did not seek people who will submit to him—even as a person dedicated completely to G-d and His Torah. The Rebbe did not even want to mold followers. The Rebbe aspired to create leaders, persons who will identify within themselves the power and confidence to change the world.

Chabad has sometimes been accused of being a cult. I always find this humorous, because I know of no other Jewish figure who urged his students to be more independent, ambitious, individualistic, creative, revolutionary, and innovative than the Rebbe. He loathed when people squandered their talents and gifts, and truly believed in the infinite power of each individual to compose his or her unique song that will set the world on fire. I still recall a public address of the Rebbe, in the summer of 1988,[2] when he expressed frustration that some of his followers feel they are inept to become the authors of their own biography and are always waiting for orders.

And I know of no other leader who urged all of his students to go live amongst people who will challenge their beliefs on a daily basis, in order to build bridges between all Jews and to introduce every soul to the depth and love of Judaism. This is not how cults operate.

The Rebbe keenly understood that you can't transform a world with followers, only with leaders.

The Match

The late Yehudah Avner, a veteran Israeli diplomat, served as an adviser to four Israeli prime ministers: Golda Meir, Yitzchak Rabin, Menachem Begin, and Shimon Peres. He was also Israel's ambassador to Ireland

and Australia. Once, he related, during a conversation with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Rebbe spoke of his own work.

"Let me tell you what I try to do. Imagine you're looking at a candle. What you are really seeing is a mere lump of wax with a thread down its middle. When do the thread and wax become a candle? Or, in other words, when do they fulfill the purpose for which they were created? When you put a flame to the thread, then the candle becomes a candle." "The wax is the body, and the wick the soul. Ignite the soul with the fire of Torah and a person will then fulfill the purpose for which he or she was created. And that is what I try to do – to ignite the soul of our people with the fire of Torah."

"My candle – has the Rebbe lit it?", Yehuda Avner asked.

"No," the Rebbe said, clasping Avner's hand. "I have given you the match. Only you can light your candle."^[3]

[1] A few days later, at the farbreng of 15 Shevat, the Rebbe spoke at length about the fact that he will henceforth minimize giving direct answers to people because after decades of teaching Torah people are empowered to find their own way.

[2] Shabbos Parshas Shlach 5748, June 1988.

[3] My thanks to Rabbi Yanki Tauber for his rendition of the above address by the Rebbe, published on www.meaningfullife.com]

[CS Another late-breaking dvar torah

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Point of No Return

As the waters of the Yam Suf are about to split, Moshe assures the Jewish People they will never see Mitzrayim again. Chazal interpret this pasuk not only as a promise but also as a commandment; this is one of the three pesukim that prohibit us from returning to Mitzrayim. In Parshas Shoftim, and again in Parshas Ki Savo, the Torah reiterates that we are not permitted to live in Mitzrayim. For many centuries there were thriving Jewish communities in Mitzrayim and as such many Rishonim dealt with the obvious halachic dilemma in justifying the existence of the communities. One of the approaches taken by some Rishonim, quoted by the Mordechai in Maseches Yevamos, states that the prohibition to reside in Mitzrayim does not refer to mere geographic location but rather to that area which is inhabited by the ancient people of Mitzrayim. Chazal speak about the historical event of the wars of Sanheriv that radically changed the borders of the nations of antiquity. For the purpose of other areas of halacha, Chazal observe that the original inhabitants of the lands of Amon and Moav no longer reside there. Similarly, notes the Mordechai, the people who live in Mitzrayim today are not the biological descendants of the Mitzrim of Yetzias Mitzrayim. As such the prohibition of living in Mitzrayim no longer is relevant.

This particular halachic argument has ramifications in the world of machshava as well. According to this understanding, the Torah wants to distance us from the culture of the ancient Mitzrim, not the physical geography of Mitzrayim. What was the essence of the world view of the ancient Mitzrim that was so alien to the life of Torah that would become the legacy of Klal Yisrael after Yetzias Mitzrayim?

There are three dimensions of the world that Klal Yisrael encountered during their interaction with Mitzrayim that had to be eradicated. Mitzrayim was a society engulfed in idolatry. The Rambam in his introduction to the laws that governs idolatrous practice highlights the degree to which the Jewish People, during their years as slaves in Mitzrayim, had become entrenched in the religious beliefs and practices of their neighbors. If not for Yetzias Mitzrayim occurring when it did, the monotheistic truth that Avraham Avinu had discovered would have been forever lost. The mitzva of taking a sheep and slaughtering it as a korban Pesach symbolized the total nullification of the religious symbol of the sheep that was so prominent in the world of Mitzrayim. The celebration of the first Pesach was the beginning of the transformation of a people that had become almost indistinguishable from its pagan neighbors to becoming the heirs to the monotheism of the Avos.

Along with idolatry, immorality was rampant in the society of Mitzrayim. In the introduction to the mitzvos that govern prohibited relations in Parshas Acharei Mos, the Torah draws our attention to the world of Mitzrayim as the antithesis of everything holy and pure. The sanctity of marriage and family could only be attained by distancing ourselves from the world of impurity that permeated the society of Mitzrayim. Perhaps for this reason there is such emphasis on the celebrating of the first Pesach in family units. The korban Pesach was eaten as a family, thereby symbolizing that it is the kedusha of family that will become the hallmark of the new nation of Klal Yisrael.

The society of Mitzrayim was able to commit murder on a grand scale. Jewish boys could be decreed to death at birth or be subsequently thrown into the river. A world permeated by violence and oppression that accompanied the slavery of the Jewish people is described in detail in the beginning of Sefer Shemos. In such a culture of lack of empathy and compassion, it is not surprising that government edicts were issued requiring murder. Many mitzvos were given to Klal Yisrael to instill in them the traits of kindness and compassion. We are reminded constantly how we suffered from oppression and are therefore obligated to show care and concern specifically for those who need it most.

There are halachos that govern pikuach nefesh when life is in danger. Shabbos, Yom Kippur, and almost all prohibitions are suspended when there is a risk to life. Yet, there are three areas in which one must give up one's life rather than transgress. Idolatry, immorality, and murder can never be violated. To do so undermines the very legacy of the Jewish People. As we stood at the banks of the Yam Suf and were told we will never return to Mitzrayim, we were being charged to never return to the values of Mitzrayim. We would build a society predicated on the belief in Hashem, the sanctity of the family, and kindness and compassion rather than oppression and violence. As we left Mitzrayim, we began the journey to Har Sinai where we would be taught how to live our personal and national lives based on these three eternal truths.

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[CS – Adding this old dvar torah as well:

Chafetz Chaim on the Torah

Compiled by Rav Shmuel Greineman

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יְהִי בָשָׁלָה פְּרֻעָה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־יְהִי כִּי־קָרְבָּה הָאָרֶץ דָּרְךָ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי־אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פְּרִיְנָהּ הָעָם בְּרוֹאָתֶם מְלֹחָמָה וְשָׁבּוּ מִצְרָיָם:

When Pharaoh sent the people away, the L-rd did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines... (Shemos 13:17)

When the Jews left Egypt, Hakadosh Baruch Hu weighed two possibilities as to which way to lead them towards Eretz Yisrael - by way of the desert or by way of the land of the Philistines. In a manner of speaking, it was a "toss-up," for each possibility had an advantage and a drawback.

The advantage of their going through the land of the Philistines, a settled area, was that food would be readily available. On the other hand, there was a great danger that while among the Philistines, they would become spiritually sullied by them. After having just emerged from the "forty-ninth level of impurity," did it make sense to have them re-enter a domain of impurity? Who could guarantee that they would not mix with the gentiles and decide against going on to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah?

The advantage of going by way of the desert was the absence of spiritual impurity. The Jews would not be exposed to idols or to those who worshipped them. On the other hand, when they would find enough food? the impurity present in the land of the Philistines because the danger that they might become sullied was too great. They had, after all, just been rescued from descending to the "fiftieth level of impurity" in Egypt. Now the only question was, "What would they eat?" Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "I have no choice. I must provide them manna in the desert - bread from Heaven, against the laws of nature. The only solution is to perform this miracle for them, because I must prevent, at all costs, their descent again to level after level of impurity."

In Hashem's approach here, we see a rebuttal to all who [feel they must] compromise themselves by doing the kind of work that is foreign to Torah and the Jewish way of life in order to make a living. If it was possible for the Al-mighty to send down bread from Heaven - lechem abirim (Tehillim 78:25) - for over 600,000 people, then it is certainly within His power to

send sustenance to all who are faithful to His Torah and His mitzvos, [lest they contaminate themselves with the world's tumah.]

Home Weekly Parsha BESHALACH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The miracle of the manna that fell from heaven and nurtured millions of people for forty years is one of the focal points of this week's parsha. The obvious reason for the miracle's occurrence is that the Jewish people had to have daily nourishment simply to survive. However, the rabbis of the Talmud injected another factor into the miracle of the falling manna. They stated that "the Torah could only have been granted to those that ate manna daily." Thus, the necessity for the manna was directly associated with the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. No manna, no Torah. Why is this so?

Most commentators are of the opinion that only a people freed from the daily concerns of earning a living and feeding a family could devote themselves solely to Torah study and acceptance of the life values that acceptance of the Torah mandates.

The Torah is a demanding discipline. It requires time and effort, concentration and focus to appreciate and understand it. Cursory glances and even inspiring sermons will not yield much to those who are unwilling to invest time and effort into its study and analysis. This was certainly true in this first generation of Jewish life, newly freed from Egyptian bondage and lacking heritage, tradition and life mores that would, in later generations, help Jews remain Jewish and appreciate the Torah.

The isolation of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai coupled with the heavenly provision of daily manna and the miraculous well of Miriam all together created a certain think-tank atmosphere. This atmosphere enabled Torah to take root in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people.

In his final oration to the Jewish people, recorded for us in the book of Devarim, Moshe reviews the story of the manna falling from heaven. But there Moshe places a different emphasis on the matter. He states there that the manna came to teach, "... that humans do not live by bread alone but rather on the utterances of God's mouth,"

To appreciate Torah, to truly fathom its depths and understand its values system, one has to accept its Divine origin. Denying that basic premise of Judaism compromises all deeper understanding and analysis of Torah. The manna, the presence of God, so to speak, in the daily life of the Jew, allowed the Torah to sink into the depths of the Jewish soul and become part of the matrix of our very DNA.

The Torah could only find a permanent and respected home within those who tasted God's presence, so to speak, every day within their very beings and bodies. The rabbis also taught us that the manna produced no waste materials within the human body.

When dealing with holiness and holy endeavors there is nothing that goes to waste. No effort is ignored and no thought and attempt is left unrecorded in the heavenly court of judgment. Even good intent is counted meritoriously. Let us feel that we too have tasted the manna.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Music, Language of the Soul

Beshallach

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

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

"Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the Lord."

Exodus 15:1

Rashi, explaining the view of Rabbi Nehemiah in the Talmud[1] 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 (I Sam. 2). When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored (I Sam. 16). David himself was known as the “sweet singer of Israel” (II Sam. 23:1). Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him (II 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 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[2] 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 Haftara 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 Gemara. 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.

For many years I was privileged to be part of a mission of song (together with the Shabbaton Choir and singers Rabbi Lionel Rosenfeld and chazzanim Shimon Craimer and Jonny Turgel) We journeyed to Israel to sing to victims of terror, as well as to people in hospitals, community centres, and food kitchens. We sang for - and with - the injured, the bereaved, the sick and the broken hearted. We danced with people in wheelchairs. One boy who had been blinded and lost half of his family 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 can 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.” United in song, 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 ability to hold onto his memories at all. He lost his past. In a moment of self-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, Oliver 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 analyses, 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.

[1] Sotah 30b

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

The Exodus from Egypt And Redemption through Natural Means Revivim Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

God created the world in a way that it operates according to laws known as the laws of nature * Miracles were intended to reveal and publicize that God is the leader of the entire world * The two great miracles through which God revealed Himself to the world, and through which the world exists, are: the Exodus from Egypt, and the Giving of the Torah * From the time the Israelites entered the Land, miracles ceased * The conquest of the Land was done according to natural laws * When Israel chooses good, blessing flows through natural means * Redemption

depends on the fulfillment of the commandment of Settling the Land, which is carried out through natural means

Nature and Miracle

Q: Is the world's functioning according to the laws of nature a fallback, but ideally, the world should be sustained through miracles, like the Exodus from Egypt?

A: Initially, God created the world with wisdom, meaning that it operates according to laws called the laws of nature. Through this, a person understands the rules by which the world operates, and knows that every action he takes has an effect on what will happen to him, and those around him. If he chooses to do good, he will bring good to himself and those around him, and if he chooses evil, he will harm himself, and those around him. If he learns a profession, he can find work. If he works honestly and diligently, he will earn a good livelihood. If a man honors, loves, and makes his wife happy, and the woman does likewise with her husband, they will have good and happy lives, and will be able to raise and educate their children properly. If a person is good and loyal to his friends, he will have good and supportive companionship. Moreover, if he learns Torah and observes its commandments, he will best express the image of God within him, and be a partner with God in advancing the world toward its rectification and redemption. Thus, God created nature as the best framework for revealing the power and talents of humanity.

The Flaw in the Governance of Nature, and the Need for a Miracle

However, there is a flaw in the governance of nature: it may cause people to forget God's name, and miracles were intended to correct this flaw. The flaw in nature's governance can be described in three ways:

The laws of nature by which the world operates seem solid and unchanging, as if their power is inherent, and there is no one who created them. When these systems collapse, either through miracles that break the laws of nature, or through the eruption of natural forces, such as lightning and thunder, earthquakes, floods, and fires (see Berakhot 59b), the belief that there is someone who created the world returns to people's awareness.

Even when a person remembers that there is a Creator of the world, the wisdom and power within the laws of nature may cause him to think that since creation, nature operates on its own, without God continuing to sustain it, and watch over it. In this case, a person must struggle for survival, trapped within the laws of nature and the coarse instincts that govern him, without the ability to change himself, or the world, for the better. Therefore, God sometimes breaks the boundaries of nature, performs miracles, and teaches humanity that He is the one who sustains the laws of nature, so that through them, He can influence the world with His light and goodness. Through this, a person can understand that his role is to walk in God's ways, reveal the hidden aspects of the laws of nature, and use them for good. The more he reveals them, the more he will be able to transform the world for the better.

Even righteous people who always remember that God created the world and is its leader, and who constantly engage in charity and justice, may forget that the nature in which they live is not perfect. They become accustomed to the fact that God's leadership is hidden from the world, and that often it is bad for the righteous, and good for the wicked. Within this framework, they strive to do the best they can according to the guidance of the Torah. Through the miracles performed by those with prophetic powers, which come from a higher world, we are reminded of our longing for rectification, refusing to accept the flaws and corruption, and striving more intensely for the redemption of the world.

The Purpose of Miracles: To Publicize that God Governs the World

It turns out that miracles are meant to reveal and publicize that God is the leader of the entire world, and all human beings should walk in His ways. The meaning of the Hebrew word 'nes' (miracle) is both 'wonder' and also 'a flag raised high'. The miraculous nes, or sign, is like a flag that rises and soars to great heights, so that it can be seen from afar, and by it, people will know that God is the leader of the world, and that all power is in His hands. As it is written: "You gave a banner (nes) to those who fear You, to be displayed because of the truth" (Psalms 60:5),

meaning that God gave a banner to His faithful to affirm and beautify His words. Similarly, the Hebrew word 'ot' (sign) also means a miraculous token, as it is written: "And you shall take this rod in your hand, with which you shall perform the signs (otot)" (Exodus 4:17). The sign is a symbol of God's overall leadership of the world.

The Miracles of the Exodus from Egypt, and the Giving of the Torah

Above and beyond all miracles, there are two great miracles by which God revealed Himself to the world, and through which the world exists: the Exodus from Egypt, and the Giving of the Torah. Even if a person tried with all his might to contemplate the divine light hidden in the laws of nature, without the miraculous revelation of the Giving of the Torah, he would not receive clear divine guidance on faith and the way to rectify humanity and the world, and would lose his way in the maze of his troubles and aspirations. Similarly, God's choice of the People of Israel to reveal His word to the world is the foundation for the acceptance of the Torah, and in the Exodus from Egypt, this choice was revealed.

Therefore, the choice of Israel and the Giving of the Torah were accompanied by signs and wonders, so that all would know that their matter takes precedence over all the matters of the world governed by the laws of nature, and through them, God's power and leadership are revealed in the world. This is what our Sages meant when they said that God could have brought Israel out with one stroke, or even through natural means, but to reveal to the world His greatness and might, which no power can withstand, He struck the Egyptians with ten plagues, until they surrendered, and sent Israel out to freedom. As it is written: "And I will multiply My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 7:3), and it is written: "And in order that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your son's son, how I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs which I placed among them, and you shall know that I am the Lord" (Exodus 10:2). Therefore, we were commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt every day, during the holidays, and on the mezuzot and tefillin, so that we would recall all the foundational aspects of faith revealed through the miracles God performed in the Exodus from Egypt (Ramban, Exodus 13:16).

Similarly, the Giving of the Torah took place with an extraordinary, miraculous revelation before all of Israel, so that they would believe in God, and accept the Torah, as it is written: "Ask now concerning the days that are past... Did anything so great ever happen, or was anything like it ever heard of? Did a people ever hear the voice of God speaking out of the fire, as you have heard, and live?" (Deuteronomy 4:32-33).

Transition to Governance through Natural Means

In general, from the time Israel entered the Land, miracles ceased for Israel. The manna stopped falling from the heavens, and Israel was required to obtain their sustenance through natural means: plowing and sowing, planting and pruning, in order to grow the sacred fruits of the Land by their own hands and separate tithes and offerings, and to designate years for the Sabbatical and Jubilee cycles. Through this, they were able to fulfill the commandment of Yishuv Ha'aretz (settling the Land), which is equivalent to all the other commandments in the Torah. Also, the conquest of the Land was, in general, carried out through natural means. At the start of the campaign, God performed great miracles for Israel, to reveal to them, and to all the world, that Israel was entering the Land and conquering it in accordance with God's command. Therefore, He split the Jordan River before them, brought down the walls of Jericho, and made the sun stand still at Gibeon, until Israel had defeated the five kings of the Amorites. However, after this, they were required to strengthen themselves in the commandment, and conquer the Land through natural means. Where they faltered, God did not help them.

Like a Person Growing from Childhood to Maturity

Just like a person, who, in his childhood, is cared for by his parents for all his needs, and as he grows, becomes responsible for his own life and needs to take care of his own livelihood, so it is with the People of Israel. In the first stage, God took care of all their needs as a mother cares for her nursing child, and as they grew and matured, the responsibility passed to them, so that they themselves would reveal

God's word to the world, through the course of their lives (Ein Ayah, Berakhot 1:147).

The great miracles were performed to teach God's governance, but the ultimate purpose was that Israel would live in the Land of Israel, and through observing the Torah and commandments, reveal God's word within nature, making it overflow with God's blessing. This was where the Spies sinned, fearing to accept responsibility for conquering the Land through natural means.

Miracles in Times of Crisis

When Israel chooses good, blessing flows naturally, as we learn in the Torah that when we walk in God's laws, we receive natural blessings. However, when Israel sins and their strength wanes, they need miracles to remind them that God is the leader of the world, and to give them a respite to return to repentance. This occurred in the Kingdom of Israel when, on the brink of its destruction, the prophets Elijah and Elisha performed great miracles, and gave Israel time to return to repentance. But since they did not repent, the Kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and the Ten Tribes were exiled. Still, there was value in the appearance of miracles, because even though they did not prevent the destruction, they taught Israel for generations that God governs the world, and out of His love for them, He sent His prophets to try to save them, and when they return in repentance, they will be redeemed.

Redemption Depends on Fulfilling the Commandment of Settling the Land

Understanding the value of working through natural means is important for our time, as redemption depends on fulfilling the commandment of *Yishuv Ha'aretz* (settling the Land), which is carried out through natural means, by Jews who ascend to the Land, settle it, establish a state and an army to protect the people and the Land, and rebuild the Holy Temple. However, our Sages hinted (Sanhedrin 97b) that if Israel does not return to repentance, then, contrary to the natural course, God will raise up a king for us whose decrees will be as harsh as Haman's, so that through the suffering, we will return to repentance, ascend to the Land, and settle it through natural means. The stronger we become in the commandment through natural means, the more successful we will be, and if we do not strengthen ourselves, we will continue to progress through suffering.

Objection to Prayer on the Temple Mount

Q: I heard from a certain rabbi... who is an esteemed rabbi, that he opposed those who ascend the Temple Mount to pray there, claiming, among other things, that they are violating the words of the Sages: "Rav Kahana said: It is brazen for someone to pray in an open space" (Berakhot 34b). That is, someone who prays in an open place is considered brazen, because prayer should take place in private.

A: It is surprising that this rabbi did not examine the Tosafot there (ad loc., "chatzif"), which ask why Isaac prayed in the field, and they answer in the first explanation that he prayed on Mount Moriah, which is a holy place. That is, in the holy and special place where there is a connection between Israel and God, one can pray in the open. The words of the Tosafot have been cited in many books.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

[CS - adding recent dvar torah:

From: Alan Fisher <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 12 #16, February 7-8, 2025; 10 Shevat 5785; Beshalach 5785

Tu B'Shevat is next Thursday, February 13

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the first phase of the agreement continue with the remaining hostages coming home, hostilities ending, and with a new era of security and rebuilding for both Israel and all who genuinely seek peace.

When B'Nai Yisrael leave Egypt, soon after they are out of sight of the Egyptians, God tells Moshe to have the people turn around and return to Egypt along the Sea of Reeds, at the edge of the desert. The Egyptians see B'Nai Yisrael returning and wish that Paro had not let their slaves leave town. Paro changes his mind, fears that they will join with

Egypt's enemies and attack, and regrets letting the people leave. He takes his chariot, gathers his army, and chases after B'Nai Yisrael. Both camps must cross the Sea of Reeds to leave Egypt and continue toward Canaan.

God places His cloud between B'Nai Yisrael and the Egyptian army. Night falls, and neither side can see what is happening, except Hashem leaves light to guide B'Nai Yisrael. God produces strong winds that separate the sea once B'Nai Yisrael start to cross the sea. After the Jews cross the sea, Hashem raises His cloud so the Egyptians see the dry land path across the sea – but puts the cloud behind B'Nai Yisrael so they cannot watch what happens to the Egyptians. Once the Egyptians are in the dry sea bed, Hashem changes the wind, and the waters rush back to drown the Egyptians and their horses.

In the morning, B'Nai Yisrael see that all the Egyptians and their horses are dead and the chariots are broken. The people sing a joyous song, and Miriam then leads the women in a second song. The people are thirsty and complain to Moshe. He tells them to complain to God. They find bitter water, and Hashem tells Moshe to throw a certain tree into the water. He does, and the water becomes sweet. The people next complain about being hungry. God sends manna and quail. After the people see that Hashem is taking care of their needs, they reach Elim, an oasis with twelve springs and seventy date palms. Amalek encounters the people and attacks, focusing on killing the weakest members of the community. Yehoshua leads an army against Amalek while Moshe goes up a hill to encourage the people. When Moshe has his arms up toward heaven, B'Nai Yisrael gain in the war. When Moshe's arms droop, Amalek gains ground.

B'Nai Yisrael already believe that Hashem is powerful and can defeat any other army. The people, however, do not yet believe that God loves each Jew and wants each of us to develop a close relationship with Him. Hashem continues to test B'Nai Yisrael with water, food, specific orders regarding how and when to collect food and water, and threats from outside the camp to try to convince the people of his love for each of us. For example, Moshe and Hashem keep trying to train the people to complain to God rather than to Moshe or Aharon. Hashem also brings back symbols from before as reminders of His power and love for all the Jews. For example, Hashem tells Moshe to use the same staff that he used to bring plagues to the Egyptians – but now to protect B'Nai Yisrael (for example in bringing water out of a rock).

When B'Nai Yisrael stop at Elim, there are twelve springs and seventy date palms. Why twelve and seventy? Twelve represents a complete family, and seventy stands for all the nations. Esav and Yaakov both have twelve sons who become nations or tribes. Noach has seventy descendants (nations) at Shinar before the flood, and Yaakov has seventy family members when the family goes to Egypt. When Moshe asks Hashem for help leading the people, He tells Moshe to gather seventy elders to help him. During Sukkot, the seventy extra young bull Mincha offerings represent the seventy nations of the world that will eventually recognize Hashem.

One might consider the key lesson of Beshalach to be teaching B'Nai Yisrael to develop faith in Hashem. Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander relates Devorah's song in the Haftorah to our journey today to rebuild Israel with faith and responsibility. Devorah's defeat of Sisera brought forty years of peace to our ancestors, and we hope that the costly wars with our enemies will bring even longer peace for our people in the current century.

Rabbi Marc Angel urges us to understand the truth about the Middle East. Israel is the only country that has given land to the Palestinians since 1948. Indeed, the Ottoman Empire controlled Israel for hundreds of years and never moved to establish a Moslem country in or anywhere near Israel. Jordan controlled Jerusalem from 1948 until June 1967 but never ceded any land to the Palestinians.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, raises the concept of hate. Our enemies hate us because we are their enemies. An enemy is willing to die to kill us. The Torah demands that we seek peace with the Egyptians but destroy Amalek. The difference is that Egypt invited our ancestors to live in Egypt to escape a drought and only turned to slavery once they

feared that Israel might combine with an enemy nation to take over Egypt. Amalek, however, had a pathological hatred for B'Nai Yisrael and sought to kill all our people, starting with the weakest (those unable to defend themselves). Hamas and some of the other modern Arab nations fit the definition of hate – people with whom one cannot negotiate peace. Israel's treaty with Egypt from more than forty years ago and the more recent Abraham Accords show that Israel is able to negotiate and maintain peaceful relations with some Moslem and Arab countries. Hopefully over time, more countries will change from a hated enemy approach to a positive approach in which a negotiated peace is possible.

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 Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, 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

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Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Beshalach

Words of Remembrance

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

But one of them, their leader no less, does not take gold and silver. He takes Joseph's bones. The Torah tells us why. Decades prior, Joseph beseeched his children, "pakod yifkod – G-d will surely remember you and you shall bring my bones up with you out of here" (Genesis 50:25). Slavery can make one forget commitments – especially about old bones. However, despite more than a century of servitude, Moshe kept the promise. What baffles me is the wording of the request and its fulfillment. Why did Yoseph juxtapose the words "pakod yifkod" (G-d shall remember) with the petition to re-inter his bones? It is repeated in this week's portion. "Moshe took the bones because Joseph said that pakod yifkod – G-d will remember you and bring my bones up" (Exodus 13: 19).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When Yoseph made his children promise that they will take his bones with them, he added an assurance. He promised them that G-d would surely remember them. Even Hashem, appearing to Moshe said, "pakod pakadti," "I have remembered" (Exodus 3:16). Yoseph, too, requested to be remembered. Two hundred years of slavery can take an awful toll on people. It can make them give up their pride, it can make them forget about family, it surely it can cause them to forget about bones. But when requests are linked with comforting words, they endure. Moshe took Yoseph's bones because they were linked with words of reassurance that remained an anthem of the Jews in exile, "G-d will remember you." And Moses remembered, too.

Dedicated in loving memory of Aaron Beck by Marilyn and Jules Beck Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Beshalach

The Zechus of Suffering on Behalf of Others

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1323 Lechem Mishna: What Exactly Is the Mitzva? Are Women Obligated? Must you Make Your Own Bracha on Your Slice? Good Shabbos!

A few years ago, I shared a great vort (brief Torah commentary) that I will first review, and then add a story and an incredible observation from the Be'er Mayim Chaim that takes the vort to a whole new level.

After Bnei Yisrael (the Children of Israel) left Mitzrayim, the pasuk says, "V'amar Paro L'bnei Yisrael" (And Pharaoh said to Bnei Yisrael) 'They are confined in the land, the wilderness has locked them in.'" (Shemos 14:3) The obvious question – which Rashi and Targum Onkelos address – is what does it mean "And Pharaoh said to Bnei Yisrael?" Bnei Yisrael had already left Mitzrayim. To whom could Pharaoh be speaking? The people who deserved to leave Mitzrayim had already left. Those who were undeserving, died during Makas Choshech (the Plague of Darkness). There were no Jews left in Mitzrayim!

Therefore, Rashi and Targum Onkelos do not translate the words “el Bnei Yisrael” to mean “to Bnei Yisrael” but rather “concerning Bnei Yisrael.”

However, the Targum Yonosan ben Uziel has an incredible interpretation: “And Pharaoh spoke to Dasan and Aviram, who were of Bnei Yisrael and who had remained in Mitzrayim.” Dasan and Aviram were thorns in the side of Moshe Rabbeinu and Bnei Yisrael from the early days of Egyptian slavery all the way until the incident with Korach in Sefer Bamidbar. According to the Targum Yonosan ben Uziel, Dasan and Aviram stayed in Mitzrayim when the rest of the Jews left.

The Maharil Diskin famously asks a simple question: Chazal say that four fifths of the Jews in Mitzrayim died during Makas Choshech. They were deemed wicked and not worthy of experiencing Yetzias Mitzrayim (the Exodus). We would think that if anyone amongst Bnei Yisrael would qualify as wicked and undeserving of Yetzias Mitzrayim, it would be Dasan and Aviram. If they were such wicked people that they did not want to leave Mitzrayim, why were they still alive? Why did they not die during Makas Choshech? How is it that they lived to tell the tale and survived all the way into the midbar, up until the rebellion of Korach, more than a year later? What was their zechus (merit) that granted them this ‘longevity’?

The Maharil Diskin gives an amazing answer to his question: Dasan and Aviram had a special zechus. What was their zechus? Dasan and Aviram were employed by the Egyptians as shotrim (taskmasters). Their job was to ensure that the Jews met their daily quota of brick production. Chazal say that even though they had this terrible job of being the taskmasters and the enforcers, they allowed themselves to be beaten by the Egyptians rather than doing their job of whipping the Jews who were not able to produce the required number of bricks. Dasan and Aviram took the punishment of their brethren on their own backs.

In the Nazi concentration camps, in addition to the German officers, there were Jewish kapos, who were given the job of enforcing the labor upon their fellow Jews. They had the same system in Mitzrayim. There were Egyptians who were the overseers, but the people who actually dealt with the Jewish slaves were these shotrim.

In the zechus of the empathy that Dasan and Aviram had for their fellow Jews, they merited survival during Makas Choshech and they were still around after Yetzias Mitzrayim, such that Pharaoh could speak to them and comment that the Jews who left were lost in the wilderness.

The Maharil Diskin even adds that Bnei Yisrael complained to Moshe Rabbeinu earlier, “hiv’ashtem es rucheinu” (You made us smell) (Shemos 5:21). We usually consider this to be a figure of speech. The Maharil Diskin interprets it literally: Because of their wounds from the whippings that did not heal, their bodies reeked.

The Maharil Diskin says that the Ribono shel Olam, as it were, has a soft spot in His heart for a Jew who suffers on behalf of other Jews. Dasan and Aviram were wicked. They reported Moshe Rabbeinu to Pharaoh for killing the Egyptian. They were horrible people. But they had one incredible zechus. They literally took it on the chin – if not the back – for other Jews. This is such an enormous zechus that it protected them from dying during Makas Choshech and it allowed them to live to tell the tale even though they did not want to leave Mitzrayim.

I once related this Maharil Diskin to an incident involving Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt”l, that was mentioned by his son, Rav Shmuel Auerbach, in his hesped (eulogy) for his father.

There was a gadol in Europe known by the name of his sefer, Baruch Taam (Rav Baruch Frankel-Te’omim (1760-1828)). Baruch Taam’s son became engaged to a girl from a very wealthy and prominent family. At the tenaim, the mechutanim came over and they noticed that Baruch Taam was not really into it. He did not look happy. He looked preoccupied with other matters. The kallah’s mother came over to him and asked why he did not look happy on this joyous occasion. “Are you not pleased with this shidduch?”

Baruch Taam responded that he had no problem with the shidduch. “But the water carrier of the town is very sick and I am worried about him.” (In Europe, in the shtetl, before indoor plumbing and running water, there was someone whose job it was to be the water carrier. A water

carrier would go down to the river and fill up buckets and then carry the buckets on his shoulders to deliver the water to the town’s residences.) In European Jewish society, the water carrier was the low-man on the totem pole. The only requirement for the job was a strong back. Brains were not needed. The mother of the kallah was shocked: “Because the water carrier is sick, you allow that to dampen your simcha? You let the water carrier effect your mood? I can’t understand that!”

Baruch Taam stood up and announced “The shidduch is off! I will not let my son marry into a family that has such a cavalier attitude, which shows no empathy for the misfortune of another Jew.”

This was one of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach’s favorite stories because throughout his life, Rav Shlomo Zalman – among all of his other prodigious character attributes – exemplified the midah of feeling the pain of his fellow Jews.

To return to our topic – the Maharil Diskin says that this was the zechus of Dasan and Aviram.

I want to add an incredible observation to the Maharil Diskin’s vort. The Be’er Mayim Chaim (a very famous Chassidishe sefer, written by Rav Chaim Tyrer (1760-1816), the Rav of Czernowitz) asks as follows: If in fact Dasan and Aviram stayed in Mitzrayim and had a conversation with Pharaoh following Yetzias Mitzrayim, when and how did they leave Mitzrayim? We know that they certainly wound up with the rest of the Jews by the time of Korach’s rebellion and according to the Medrash, they were also the people who left over their portion of mann until the next morning, in violation of Moshe’s instructions (Shemos 16:20). This is the question of the Beer Mayim Chayim.

The Be’er Mayim Chaim answers with a very novel idea. The pasuk in Shiras Az Yashir writes: “When Pharaoh’s horse came with his chariots and horsemen into the sea and Hashem turned back the waters of the sea upon them, the Children of Israel walked on the dry land amid the sea.” (Shemos 15:19) The Beer Mayim Chaim writes that this pasuk is chronologically incorrect. The pasuk should first state that Bnei Yisrael went through the Yam Suf and then then Pharaoh came into the midst of the Yam....” The pasuk records the events backwards!

Because of this observation, the Be’er Mayim Chaim explains as follows: When Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Dasan and Aviram stayed behind. Dasan and Aviram then realized that they “bet on the wrong horse” because Pharaoh and Mitzrayim were destroyed. So, then they also left. However, when they reached the Yam Suf (Red Sea) to rejoin Bnei Yisrael, they saw that it was impassable.

The Beer Mayim Chaim says that there was actually a second Krias Yam Suf (splitting of the Red Sea)! Not only does “And Pharaoh said to Bnei Yisrael” refer to Dasan and Aviram, but also “And Bnei Yisrael walked on the dry land in the midst of the sea” refers to Dasan and Aviram.

These two perennial trouble makers were zoche to their own personal Krias Yam Suf. I wish the Be’er Mayim Chaim would buttress this explanation with a Medrash or a teaching of Chazal, but he seems to present it as his own inference. This, however, only magnifies the question: We asked why Dasan and Aviram didn’t die during Makas Choshech. The answer was that they had a zechus. But the way it comes out now, not only did they have a zechus that spared them the fate of the wicked during Makas Choshech, but their zechus even allowed them to merit their own Krias Yam Suf!!

With this insight, the Beer Mayim Chaim explains another idea in Parshas Korach. Korach challenged Moshe Rabbeinu. Who else took on Moshe Rabbeinu? Ohn ben Peles and Dasan and Aviram. Why would anyone start up with Moshe Rabbeinu? Isn’t it obvious that they are going to lose their battle? The answer is that Dasan and Aviram were overconfident in their personal merit. They felt that they were gedolei yisrael. They even merited their own Krias Yam Suf! That previous personal miracle gave them the impetus and the courage to start up with Moshe Rabbeinu. They felt that they were taking on an equal of theirs and that they could win the battle!

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Rav Kook Torah

Beshalach: This is My God!

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

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

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

Total Suspension of Nature

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

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

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

Immediate Awareness of God’s Rule

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

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

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

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

When God split the Sea, all laws of nature were temporarily suspended. God took “direct control” of the universe. Those witnessing this miracle were instantly aware of God’s intervention and providence, each according to his spiritual level. Certainly none reached the prophetic level of Moses. But whatever enlightenment they attained, it was perceived immediately. They did not need to first examine the natural system of causality, and from this, recognize the prime Cause of creation.

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

Don’t Withdraw, Draw Closer

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General warned the country that we collectively are suffering from an “epidemic of loneliness.” He claimed that the negative health effects of loneliness are on par with those of tobacco use and obesity. According to one recent survey, 20% of American adults report feeling loneliness “a lot of the day.” A growing number of public-health officials see loneliness as the world’s next critical public-health issue.

There are many factors contributing to the rise in loneliness. Technology brings people together online, yet paradoxically, it

increasingly makes people feel lonely offline. Many feel overworked and too tired or busy to find time with others. Mental health challenges have driven people to isolate and be alone.

Some are alone by choice, but many are struggling with a loneliness brought on because of others. I was recently speaking to someone who is the caregiver for their spouse who has been experiencing a decline with her health and faculties. He described the pain and anguish of living with and watching his loved one struggle while attempting to navigating her care and support. That pain, he said, is truly compounded by the feelings of loneliness and abandonment from friends, neighbors, and even some family.

People are generally wonderful. At the moment of a diagnosis, crisis, or loss, we know how to rally, show up, offer meals, support and love. But then we tend to settle in, and too often move on. Nobody forgets about or neglects people they know or love on purpose or intentionally. Nobody thinks about something they could say that would be hurtful or insensitive. These situations are complicated, uncomfortable, and sometimes awkward. Sometimes people disappear because a situation hits too close to home. Sometimes it is because they subconsciously think the situation is contagious and could affect them next. Most often, because it is hard to know what to do or say, people simply withdraw.

In speaking to a few people who are caregivers to their loved ones, and with input from a therapist specializing in support, here are a few recommendations and directions emerged that can guide us all to be better:

REACH OUT – If isolation hurts, then contact and connection comfort and soothe. Don’t just ask how the person struggling is doing, ask the caregiver how they themselves are holding up.

LISTEN & VALIDATE - One of the simplest and most profound ways to help a caregiver is not by doing anything active at all, just by simply listening. Be a friend, a compassionate listener, someone who will give full attention, someone who will provide comfort and not be judgmental.

DON’T - Our friends and family are not looking for us to have the answers or solutions. Don’t offer platitudes or unsolicited advice. Avoid sharing stories about other caregivers or asking why they don’t make certain decisions or place a loved one in a facility or choose another path of care.

CONSISTENCY – Don’t reach out just once. Don’t pledge or promise how you will always be there, and definitely don’t say, “Don’t hesitate to reach out if there is anything I can do to help.” Consistency is key. Check in, follow up, show up, be available.

INVITE & INCLUDE – Don’t assume someone’s condition means they and their caregiver can’t participate in a Shabbos meal or social event. Invite and include when possible and practical. If the caregiver has coverage or help, invite him or her to go out, to get together. Give them social contact that is “normal” and ordinary. Invite them to join at a shiur, shul program, community event, or anything else that lets the caregiver know you are thinking of them and want to spend time with them.

PRACTICAL HELP – The family caregiver has essentially begun taking on the responsibilities of two. Don’t ask if you can help—just help. When you are heading to the supermarket, call or text and say, “I’m going out for groceries, what can I get you.” Offer to take in or pick up their dry cleaners while taking care of your own. Drop off fruits and vegetables for no reason, just because you care. Whichever errand you choose, set expectations before you start. If you are planning to visit that is helpful and meaningful, but make sure to let the caregiver know when to expect you and how long you may stay.

The Torah describes that originally, man was created alone. However, Hashem quickly amends creation: “Lo tov heyos ha’Adom l’vado - It is not good for man to be alone.” (Bereishis 2:18) Aloneness leads to loneliness, and that, says Hashem, is not good.

Pirkei Avos (6:6) teaches that one of the 48 ways that Torah is acquired and lived is with dibuk chaveirim, friends who cling to one another. To be a friend is to not bail, or disappear, to not abandon or desert. True friendship includes dibuk, to cling which is the same word as devek,

glue. Friends stick together and are glued to one another. Camaraderie is caring.

We can't necessarily resolve the health challenges and conditions of people we know and love. But we can inoculate our friends against the epidemic of loneliness. Show you care, stay connected, offer help when you can with specific tasks, and be consistent.

Carrying in Public and the Use of an Eruv

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

In this week's parsha, the Torah recounts the story of the manna, also including the unbecoming episode where some people attempted to gather it on Shabbos. In the words of the Torah:

And Moshe said, "Eat it (the manna that remained from Friday) today, for today is Shabbos to Hashem. Today you will not find it (the manna) in the field. Six days you shall gather it, and the Seventh Day is Shabbos –there will be none."

And it was on the Seventh Day. Some of the people went out to gather, and they did not find.

And Hashem said to Moshe: "For how long will you refuse to observe My commandments and My teachings. See, Hashem gave you the Shabbos. For this reason He provides you with two-day's supply of bread on the sixth day. On the Seventh Day each person should remain where he is and not leave his place" (Shemos 16:25-29).

Although the Torah's words each person should remain where he is and not leave his place imply that even leaving one's home is forbidden, the context implies that one may not leave one's home while carrying the tools needed to gather manna (Tosafos, Eruvin 17b). The main prohibition taught here is to refrain from carrying from one's house or any other enclosed area (halachically called reshus hayachid) to an area available for the entire Benei Yisroel in the Desert to traverse, a reshus harabim. Chazal further explain that moving an item in any way from a reshus hayachid to a reshus harabim is a Torah violation, whether one throws it, places it, hands it to someone else, or transports it in any other way (Shabbos 2a, 96). Furthermore, we derive from other sources that one may also not transport an item from a reshus harabim to a reshus hayachid, nor may one transport it four amos (about seven feet) or more within a reshus harabim (Gemara Shabbos 96b; Tosafos, Shabbos 2a s.v. pashat). Thus, carrying into, out of, or within a reshus harabim incurs a severe Torah prohibition. For convenience sake, I will refer to portage of an item from one reshus to another or within a reshus harabim as carrying, regardless of the method of conveyance.

One should note that with reference to the melacha of carrying on Shabbos, the terms reshus hayachid and reshus harabim do not relate to the ownership of the respective areas, but are determined by the extent that the areas are enclosed and how they are used. A reshus hayachid could certainly be public property and there are ways whereby an individual could own a reshus harabim.

Notwithstanding the Torah's clear prohibition against carrying into, from, or within a reshus harabim, we are all familiar with the concept of an eruv that permits carrying in areas that are otherwise prohibited. You might ask, how can poles and wires permit that which is otherwise prohibited min haTorah? As we will soon see, it indeed cannot, and the basis for permitting use of an eruv is far more complicated.

We are also aware of controversies in which one respected authority certifies a particular eruv, while others contend that it is invalid. This is by no means a recent phenomenon. We find extensive disputes among early authorities whether one may construct an eruv in certain areas; some considering it a mitzvah to construct the eruv, whereas others contend that the very same "eruv" is causing people to sin.

AN OLD MACHLOKES

Here is an instance. In the thirteenth century, Rav Yaakov ben Rav Moshe of Alinsiya wrote a letter to the Rosh explaining why he forbade constructing an eruv in his town. In his response, the Rosh contended that Rav Yaakov's concerns were groundless and that he should immediately construct an eruv. Subsequent correspondence reveals that Rav Yaakov did not change his mind and still refused to erect an eruv in his town. The Rosh severely rebuked Rav Yaakov for this recalcitrance, insisting that if Rav Yaakov persisted, he, the Rosh, would place Rav Yaakov in cherem! The Rosh further contended that Rav Yaakov had the status of a zakein mamrei, a Torah scholar who rules against a decision of the Sanhedrin, which, in the time of the Beis HaMikdash, constitutes a capital offense (Shu"t HaRosh 21:8). This episode demonstrates that heated disputes over eruvim are by no means recent phenomena.

The goal of this article is to explain what allows the construction of an eruv, and present some circumstances in which one authority permits carrying within a specific eruv while another forbids it.

IS IT A MITZVAH?

Before I present the arguments for and against eruv construction in the modern world, we should note that all accept that it is a mitzvah to erect a kosher eruv

when this is halachically and practically possible, as the following anecdote indicates.

Rabbah the son of Rav Chanan asked Abaye: "How can it be that an area in which reside two such great scholars (Abaye and Abaye's Rebbe) is without an eruv?" Abaye answered: "What should we do? It is not respectful for my master to be involved, I am too busy with my studies, and the rest of the people are not concerned" (Eruvin 68a).

The commentaries note that Abaye accepted the position presented by Rabbah that one should assemble an eruv. Abaye merely deflected the inquiry by pointing out that no one was readily available to attend to the eruv, and that its construction did not preempt other factors, specifically Abaye's commitment to Torah study and the inappropriateness for Abaye's Rebbe to be involved in the project. Indeed, halachic authorities derive from this Talmudic passage that it is a mitzvah to erect an eruv whenever halachically permitted (Tashbeitz 2:37, quoted verbatim by the Birkei Yosef, Orach Chayim 363:2). These rulings are echoed by such luminaries as the Chasam Sofer (Shu"t Orach Chayim #99), the Avnei Nezer (Orach Chayim #266:4), the Levush Mordechai (Orach Chayim #4) and Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:139:5 s.v. vilichora).

I mentioned before that the construction of an eruv with poles and wires cannot permit carrying that is prohibited min haTorah. If this is true, upon what basis do we permit the construction of an eruv? To answer this question, we need to understand that not every open area is a reshus harabim – quite the contrary, a reshus harabim must meet very specific and complex requirements, including:

- (A) It must be unroofed (Shabbos 5a).
- (B) It must be meant for public use or thoroughfare (Shabbos 6a).
- (C) It must be at least sixteen amos (about twenty-eight feet) wide (Shabbos 99a).
- (D) According to most authorities, it cannot be inside an enclosed area (cf., however, Be'er Heiteiv 345:7, quoting Rashba, and Baal HaMaor, Eruvin 22a, quoting Rabbeinu Efrayim). Exactly what is the definition of an "enclosed area" is the subject of a major dispute that I will discuss.
- (E) According to many authorities, it must be used by at least 600,000 people daily (Rashi, Eruvin 59a, but see Rashi ad loc. 6a where he only requires that the city has this many residents). This is derived from the Torah's description of carrying into the encampment in the Desert, which we know was populated by 600,000 people.
- (F) Many authorities require that it be a through street, or a gathering area that connects to a through street (Rashi, Eruvin 6a).
- (G) Some authorities add still other requirements.

Any area that does not meet the Torah's definition of a reshus harabim, and yet is not enclosed, is called a karmelis. One may not carry into, from, or within a karmelis following the same basic rules that prohibit carrying into a reshus harabim. However, since the prohibition not to carry in a karmelis is only rabbinic in origin, Chazal allowed a more lenient method of "enclosing" it.

CAN ONE "ENCLOSE" A RESHUS HARABIM?

As I mentioned earlier, carrying within a true reshus harabim is prohibited min haTorah – for this reason, the use of a standard eruv does not permit carrying in such an area (Eruvin 6b). Nevertheless, the construction of large doors that restrict public traffic transforms the reshus harabim into an area that one can now enclose with an eruv. According to some authorities, the existence of these doors and occasionally closing them is sufficient for the area to lose its reshus harabim status. (Rashi, Eruvin 6b; However, cf. Rabbeinu Efrayim, quoted by Baal HaMaor, Eruvin 22a).

PLEASE CLOSE THE DOOR!

There are some frum neighborhoods in Eretz Yisroel where a thoroughfare to a neighborhood or town is closed on Shabbos with a door, in order to allow an eruv to be constructed around the area. However, this approach is not practical in most places where people desire to construct an eruv.

So what does one do if one cannot close the area with doors?

This depends on the following issue: Does the area that one wants to enclose meet the requirements of a reshus harabim min haTorah or is it only a karmelis? If the area is a reshus harabim min haTorah and one cannot occasionally close the area with doors, then there is no way to permit carrying in this area. One should abandon the idea of constructing an eruv around the entire city or neighborhood (see Gemara Eruvin 6a; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 364:2). Depending on the circumstances, one may still be able to enclose smaller areas within the city.

TZURAS HAPESACH

However, if the area one wants to enclose does not qualify as a reshus harabim, then most authorities rule that one may enclose the area by using a tzuras hapesach (plural, tzuros hapesach), literally, the form of a doorway. (However, note that Shu"t Mishkenos Yaakov #120 s.v. amnom and Shu"t Mishnas Rav Aharon #6 s.v. Kuntrus Be'Inyanai Eruvin paragraph #2 forbid this.) A tzuras hapesach consists of two vertical side posts and a horizontal "lintel" that passes directly over them, thus resembling a doorway. According to halacha, a tzuras hapesach successfully encloses a karmelis area, but it cannot permit carrying in a true reshus harabim (Eruvin 6a). Using tzuros hapesach is the least expensive and most discreet way to construct an eruv. In a future article, I hope to explain some

common problems that can happen while constructing tzuros hapesach and how to avoid them, and some important disputes relative to their construction.

Let us review. One can permit carrying in a karmelis, but not a reshus harabim, by enclosing the area with tzuros hapesach. Therefore, a decisive factor in planning whether one can construct an eruv is whether the area is halachically a karmelis or a reshus harabim. If the area qualifies as a karmelis, then an eruv consisting of tzuros hapesach permits one to carry; if it is a reshus harabim, then tzuros hapesach do not permit carrying. The issues concerning the definition of a reshus harabim form the basis of most controversies as to whether a specific eruv is kosher or not.

600,000 PEOPLE

An early dispute among Rishonim was whether one of the requirements of a reshus harabim is that it be accessible to 600,000 people, the number of male Jews over twenty that the Torah tells us exited Egypt (see Tosafos, Eruvin 6a s.v. Keitzad). According to Rashi and the others who follow this approach, one may enclose any metropolis with a population smaller than 600,000 with tzuros hapesach to permit carrying. (Rashi in some places describes that the city has 600,000 residents, and in others describes that 600,000 people use the area constantly. The exact definition to be used is the subject of much literature, see Shu”t Mishkenos Yaakov #120 s.v. hinei harishon; and Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 1:139:5.)

However, other early authorities contend that an area with less than 600,000 people still qualifies as a reshus harabim, providing that it fulfills the other requirements that I listed above. In their opinion, such an area cannot be enclosed with tzuros hapesach. Although many authorities hold this way, the accepted practice in Ashkenazic communities was to follow the lenient interpretation and construct eruvin around an area with less than 600,000 people.

Nevertheless, the Mishnah Berurah discourages carrying in such an eruv since many Rishonim do not accept it (364:8; Bi’ur Halacha to 345:7 and to 364:2). There are different opinions whether Sephardim are at liberty to follow this leniency, although the prevalent practice today is for them to be lenient.

MODERN CITY

Most large metropolitan areas today are populated by more than 600,000 people. Some authorities still define many of our metropolitan areas as a karmelis based on the following definition: Any area less concentrated than was the Jews’ encampment in the Desert is considered a karmelis. Since this encampment approximated 50 square miles, these authorities permit an eruv anywhere that the population density is less than 600,000 people per 50 square miles (Shu”t Igros Moshe 4:87). However, other authorities consider any metropolitan area or megalopolis containing 600,000 people to be a reshus harabim, regardless of its population density. Does this mean that there is no heter with which to construct an eruv in a large city? Indeed, many authorities contend this way (Shu”t Mishnas Rav Aharon 1:2).

A LARGE BREACH

The Chazon Ish, however, presented a different approach to permit construction of an eruv in a contemporary large city. His approach requires an introduction. In general, an area enclosed by three or four full walls cannot be a reshus harabim (Eruvin 22a). What is the halacha if each of the three sides of an area is enclosed for most of its length – however, there are large gaps in the middle of the enclosure. For example, walls or buildings enclose most of an area, but there are gaps in the middle of the area between the buildings where streets cross the city blocks. Does the area in the middle, surrounded on both sides by buildings and other structures, still qualify as a reshus harabim, or has it lost this status because it is mostly “enclosed”?

The basis for the question is the following: There is a general halachic principle that an area that is mostly enclosed is considered enclosed even in its breached areas (Eruvin 5b et al.). For example, a yard enclosed by hedges tall enough to qualify as halachic walls may be considered enclosed notwithstanding that there are open areas between the hedges, since each side is predominantly enclosed either by the hedges or by the house.

On the other hand, a breach wider than ten amos (about 17 feet) invalidates the area from being considered enclosed. Therefore, one may not carry within a fenced-in area that has a 20-foot opening without enclosing the opening in some way.

The issue that affects the modern city is the following: Granted that a large breach needs to be enclosed to permit carrying within the area, but is this required min

haTorah or only rabbinically? Let us assume that one encloses a reshus harabim area with walls that run for miles, but the walls have large gaps in the middle. Is this area considered enclosed min haTorah because it is mostly surrounded by walls, or is it considered open because of the gaps?

This question was debated by two great nineteenth-century authorities, Rav Efrayim Zalman Margoliyos, the Beis Efrayim and the Rav of Brody, and Rav Yaakov of Karlin, the Mishkenos Yaakov. The Beis Efrayim contended that a breach is only a rabbinic concern, and that the area is considered enclosed min haTorah, whereas the Mishkenos Yaakov held that a breach qualifies the area as a reshus harabim min haTorah. The lengthy correspondence between the two of them covers also a host of other eruv related issues (Shu”t Beis Efrayim, Orach Chayim # 25, 26; Shu”t Mishkenos Yaakov, Orach Chayim, #120-122). What difference does it make whether this area is considered open min haTorah or miderabbanan, since either way one cannot carry without enclosing the area?

The difference is highly significant. If we follow the lenient approach of the Beis Efrayim, then even if the area in the middle meets all the other requirements of a reshus harabim, the area loses its status as a reshus harabim because of the walls surrounding it, notwithstanding the large gaps in the walls. In this case, it may be possible to construct an eruv in such a place.

On the other hand, the Mishkenos Yaakov would contend that this area is considered a reshus harabim because of the gaps, and we ignore the walls. According to him it will be impossible to construct an eruv.

How one rules in the dispute between these two gedolim affects the issue of constructing an eruv in a contemporary city. Most modern cities contain city blocks that consist predominantly of large buildings with small areas between the buildings, and streets that are much narrower than the blocks. If we view these buildings as enclosures, then one can easily envision that both sides of the street are considered enclosed min haTorah according to the Beis Efrayim’s analysis. This itself does not sufficiently enclose our area because of the streets that run parallel to the buildings. However, at certain points of the city, the parallel streets dead end into a street that is predominantly enclosed with either buildings, fences, walls, or some other way. The result is that this section of the city can now be considered min haTorah as enclosed on three sides by virtue of the buildings paralleling both sides of the street and those on its dead end. Since this area now qualifies as an enclosed area min haTorah, the entire area is considered a reshus hayachid min haTorah.

The Chazon Ish now notes the following: Once you have established that this part of the city qualifies as a reshus hayachid min haTorah, this area is now considered completely enclosed halachically. For this reason, other city blocks that are predominantly enclosed on both sides of the street that intersect with this first area are also now considered to be enclosed areas min haTorah. According to his calculation, a large section of most cities is considered min haTorah enclosed on at least three sides, according to his calculation. Although one cannot carry in these areas miderabbanan because of the “breaches” in their “enclosures,” they are no longer reshus harabim min haTorah and one can therefore enclose the entire area with tzuros hapesach (Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim 107:5). The Chazon Ish concludes that many large cities today qualify as a karmelis and therefore one may construct tzuros hapesach to permit carrying there.

However, other authorities reject this calculation for a variety of reasons, some contending that the gaps between the buildings invalidate the enclosure, thus leaving the area to be considered a reshus harabim, which cannot be enclosed (Shu”t Mishkenos Yaakov; Shu”t Mishnas Rav Aharon).

In conclusion, we see that disputes among poskim over eruvim are not recent phenomena. In practice, what should an individual do? The solution proposed by Chazal for all such issues is “Aseh lecha rav, vehistaleik min hasafek,” “Choose someone to be your rav, and remove doubt from yourself.” He can guide you whether it is appropriate to carry within a certain eruv, after considering the halachic basis for the specific eruv’s construction, the level of eruv maintenance, and family factors. Never underestimate the psak and advice of your rav!

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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 Bereshit: Eat Your Vegetables

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

"Tzelem Elokim": Eat Your Vegetables!

Parashat Bereshit recounts not only the creation of humanity and the rest of the world, but also supplies our most basic ideas about the nature and mission of humanity. Humanity is created with special capabilities and commanded to develop and actualize them in specific ways. The whole world is fresh, totally unspoiled; all potentials await fulfillment. The infant world sparkles with innocence and energy, with the wonder of Creation.

But Creation is really not the only theme of our parasha. Creation is only the beginning; the genesis of the world shares the stage with the genesis and evolution of the relationship between Hashem and humanity.

A BACKGROUND OF FAILURES:

Since we cannot take a detailed look at every event of the parasha, let's just make brief mention of one important event we're not going to look at this time: the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, which forever changes the way people live -- and die. Already moving beyond the theme of Creation, we encounter Hashem as commander ("Thou shalt not eat") and humanity as servant. Without much delay, humanity creates something Hashem had not created: failure. Blighting the beautifully ordered description of the construction of the cosmos, Adam and Eve's sin is humanity's first failure and Hashem's first disappointment (see Bereshit 6:6). This failure changes humanity and changes the world, as the "first family" is ejected from the garden and forced to struggle through life in the more difficult world outside. As this disappointment is the first of many disappointments for Hashem, this failure is the first of many failures for humanity. Many of the stories in the first few parshiot of the Torah are not about Creation, but about disappointment and failure and how they change the course of history by changing Hashem's plan for humanity.

IMAGES OF GOD:

The specific topic we're going to look at this time is the theme of "tzelem Elokim," the idea that humankind is created in the image of Hashem. Our close look at this theme, and the conclusions we draw, should help us understand not only the events of our parasha, but also the development of the theme of all of Sefer Bereshit (Genesis).

"Tzelem Elokim" itself simply means an image or form of Hashem. What is this usually understood to mean? In what way are humans God-like? Some interpretations by mefarshim (traditional commentators):

- 1) Like Hashem, humans have intelligence (Rashi, Rashbam, Radak, Seforno).
- 2) Like Hashem, humans have free will (Seforno).
- 3) As Hashem is a "spiritual" Being, humans have a soul (Ibn Ezra, Radak, Ramban, Seforno).
- 4) As Hashem rules over the universe, humans rule over the lower world (R. Sa'adya Gaon, Hizkuni).
- 5) Like Hashem, humans have the faculty of judgment (Hizkuni).
- 6) Like Hashem, humans have an inherent holiness and dignity (a more modern perspective).

MISSION STATEMENT I:

Although it is always important to see how mefarshim define terms which appear in the Torah, we can often gain additional understanding or a different perspective by examining the Torah directly and sensitively to see if the Torah itself defines the term.

The first time we find the term "tzelem Elokim" is just before the first humans are created:

BERESHIT 1:26-27 --

Hashem said, 'Let us make Man in our image [be-tzalmeinu], in our form; they shall rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, the animal, and all the land, and all that crawls on the land.' Hashem created the man in His image; in the image of Hashem [be-tzelem Elokim] He created him; male and female He created them.

What we have next is a short section with a very clear theme: humanity's mission:

BERESHIT 1:28-30 --

Hashem blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the land and conquer it; rule over the fish of the sea, the bird of the sky, and all animals which crawl on land.' Hashem said, 'I have given to you all grasses which produce seeds on the face of the land, and all the trees which produce fruit with seeds -- it is for you to eat, and for the animal of the land, for the bird of the sky, and for that which crawls on the land which has a living soul; all the grassy plants are to eat.' And it was so.

What we have read so far begins with Hashem's plan to create a being in the image of Hashem and ends with this "mission statement," communicated to the being which has been created. The mission contains three charges:

- 1) Emulate Hashem's creativity by procreating.
- 2) Emulate Hashem's mastery of the universe by "conquering" the world and extending mastery over the lower creatures.
- 3) Emulate Hashem by eating the grasses, fruits, and seeds!

The last element of humanity's mission seems fundamentally different than the previous two elements ("One of these things is not like the other one . . ."): What does eating vegetation have to do with the lofty destiny of humanity? And since Hashem obviously does not eat vegetables, how does one emulate Hashem by doing so? For now, let us hold this question; we will return to it later to see how it adds to the tzelem Elokim mission.

In any case, one thing should be clear about tzelem Elokim which may not have been clear before: tzelem Elokim is not a *description* of humanity, it is a *goal* for humanity. We usually think of tzelem Elokim as a description of humanity's basic nature, which entitles humanity to certain privileges ("We hold these truths to be self-evident . . .") and expresses certain capabilities. But the Torah implies that tzelem Elokim is more than simply a description, it is a mission, a command: humanity must *live up to* tzelem Elokim! People are created with the potential to reflect God by achieving the tzelem Elokim missions -- procreation, mastery of the world, and, well, eating vegetables(!) -- but each person must *become* a tzelem Elokim by actualizing this potential.

If tzelem Elokim is a mission, of course, it can be achieved or failed. How well humanity fares in achieving this mission is the major subtext of the Torah from the creation of Adam until the selection of Avraham in Parashat Lekh Lekha.

We will now follow the history of the tzelem Elokim idea through the first generations of humanity's existence to see whether humanity lives up to the mission or not and whether the mission changes over time.

THE FIRST MURDER:

Our first look at how tzelem Elokim plays out in history brings us to the story of the first siblings, Kayyin and Hevel (Cain and Abel). Hevel offers to Hashem a sacrifice of his finest animals; Kayyin offers his finest fruits. Hashem is happy with Hevel's offering but unsatisfied with Kayyin's. The Torah reports that Kayyin is deeply upset and angry at being rejected. Shortly thereafter, man creates again, as Kayyin invents murder by killing his brother Hevel, whose offering had been accepted. Kayyin then attempts to hide the evidence but soon learns that Hashem doesn't miss much:

BERESHIT 4:3-9 --

It happened, after awhile, that Kayyin brought an offering to Hashem from the fruits of the ground. Hevel also brought from the firstborn of his sheep and from their fittest; Hashem turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayyin and his offering He did not turn. Kayyin became very angry, and his face fell . . . It happened, when they were in the field, that Kayyin rose up to Hevel his brother and killed him. Hashem said to Kayyin, 'Where is Hevel, your brother? . . . Now, you are cursed from the ground . . . you shall be a wanderer and drifter in the land.'

Kayyin's response to his punishment:

BERESHIT 4:13-15 --

Kayyin said to Hashem, 'My sin is too great to bear! You have driven me today from the face of the land, and I will be hidden from Your face, a wanderer and drifter in the land; anyone who finds me will kill me!' Hashem said to him, 'Therefore, anyone who kills Kayyin will suffer seven times' vengeance.' And Hashem gave Kayyin a sign so that whoever found him would not kill him . . .

MURDER, A FAMILY TRADITION:

We will now look at the continuation of what we've been reading about Kayyin. If you're not paying very careful attention, it seems like a collection of "random" events -- the Torah appears to be reporting "trivia" about Kayyin's post-punishment life. But there is much more here than there might seem at first. Our observations should shed light on the development of the tzelem Elokim theme.

BERESHIT 4:17-19--

Kayyin 'knew' his wife; she conceived and bore Hanokh . . . and to Hanokh was born Eerod; Eerod bore Mehuyael, Mehuyael bore

Metushael, Metushael bore Lemekh. Lemekh took two wives, one named Ada and the other named Tzila

Kayyin has had children, and we hear about his descendants. A nice family story, but what is the Torah trying to tell us?

BERESHIT 4:23-24 --

Lemekh said to his wives, 'Ada and Tzila, hear my voice; wives of Lemekh, hear my speech; for a man I have killed for my wound, and a child for my injury. For Kayyin will be avenged seven-fold, and Lemekh seventy-seven.'

Apparently -- as all of the mefarshim explain -- Lemekh has killed someone. As he recounts the murder to his wives, he implies that although he expects to suffer punishment, as his great-grandfather Kayyin suffered for murder, he prays that Hashem will take seventy-fold revenge on anyone who kills him. He explicitly refers to the murder committed by his forebear Kayyin and to the protection extended by Hashem to Kayyin.

What the Torah tells us next is absolutely crucial:

BERESHIT 4:25-5:1-3 --

Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son; she called his name Shet, 'For Hashem has sent to me another child to replace Hevel, for Kayyin killed him' This is the book of the descendants of Adam. When Hashem created Adam, in the image of Hashem He made him . . . Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and bore in his image, like his form, and he called his name 'Shet.'

Certainly, the order of this story -- Kayyin's murder of Hevel, then Kayyin's punishment, then Lemekh's murder, then the birth of another son to Adam and Hava -- is not at all random. What connections is the Torah trying to make?

Lemekh the murderer is a descendant of Kayyin, the first murderer. Not only is Lemekh a direct descendant of Kayyin, he even makes explicit reference to his great-grandfather's murderous behavior and hopes that he will benefit from the same protection as (or greater protection than) Kayyin received, despite the punishment he expects. What the Torah may be hinting is that Kayyin and his family do not sufficiently value human life. Kayyin kills his brother Hevel in frustration and jealousy; Lemekh kills an unnamed person in retaliation for a "wound and injury." For Kayyin, murder is an acceptable solution to problems or frustrations, and he passes his values on to his children. Lemekh's murder and his reference to Kayyin's similar crime manifest the moral failure of this family. One generation's failure to understand the value of human life plants murder in the heart of the next generation.

BEGINNING FROM THE BEGINNING AGAIN:

The Torah next tells us that Adam and Hava have another child "because Kayyin killed Hevel." Actually, Adam and Hava are replacing not only Hevel, but both of their sons -- Hevel, because he is dead, and Kayyin, because his murder and his descendants' similar action shows that his behavior was not a freak incident, but a deficiency in values. By having another child, Adam and Hava begin again, attempting to produce an individual who really understands the mission of humanity as achieving the status of tzelem Elokim. By murdering his brother, Kayyin fails this mission (as we will explain). Lemekh's action shows that Kayyin has not learned from his mistake and has not successfully taught his children to respect human life.

This is why the Torah begins the story of humanity's creation "anew" with the birth of Shet, telling the story as if Adam and Hava had had no children until now:

BERESHIT 5:1-3--

This is the book of the descendants of Adam. When Hashem created Adam, in the image of Hashem He made him . . . Adam lived thirty and a hundred years, and bore IN HIS IMAGE, LIKE HIS FORM, and he called his name 'Shet.'

The Torah is trying to communicate that humanity is starting over, beginning from scratch. The first attempt, the one which produced a murderer and his victim, has come to a tragic close with another murder (Lemekh's). Adam and Hava realize that they must start anew, and the Torah makes this explicit by placing the literary structure of a "beginning" at the birth of Shet. The real "descendants" of Adam are only those who maintain "his image . . . his form", the image and form of tzelem Elokim.

But how has Kayyin failed as a tzelem Elokim? Has he not excelled as a conqueror of the earth, a tiller of the ground who brings fruits to Hashem as an offering? Has he not "been fruitful and multiplied," producing descendants to fill the earth? Have his descendants not exercised creativity like that of the Creator, inventing tools and instruments? True, Kayyin has murdered, and true, his great-grandson Lemekh has as well, but how is this a failure as a tzelem Elokim?

MISSION II:

To answer this question, we must look to next week's parasha, where we again (and for the last time) find the term "tzelem Elokim." As the generations pass, humanity sinks deep into evil, filling Hashem's young world with corruption. Disappointed again, Hashem floods the world and drowns His creatures -- all except Noah and those aboard the ark with him. As the Flood ends and Noah and his family emerge from the ark to establish the world once again, Hashem delivers a message to Noah and his family at this point of renewal: a

"new" mission statement for humanity. Comparing it to the first mission statement (1:28-30), which was addressed to Adam and Hava, shows that the two statements are very similar. But there are a few very important differences.

BERESHIT 9:1-2 --

Hashem blessed Noah and his children and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land. Fear of you and fright of you shall be upon all the beasts of the field, and all the birds of the sky, with whatever the ground crawls, and all the fish of the sea; in your hands they are given.'

So far, nothing seems new -- humanity once again is blessed/commanded to procreate and is informed that the animals of the world are given to humanity to rule. But as Hashem continues, the picture of humanity's responsibilities and privileges changes radically:

BERESHIT 9:3-4 --

All crawling things which live, they are for you to eat, as the grassy plants; I have given to you everything. But flesh with the soul -- blood -- do not eat.

Although previously, humanity had been given permission to eat only vegetable matter, now Hashem permits humans to eat animals as well, as long as they do not eat the "soul" -- the blood. But is that all? Can it be that the main difference between the first mission and the second mission is vegetarianism versus omnivorism? When humanity failed as vegetarians and filled the world with corruption and evil, Hashem decided to fix everything by allowing the eating of meat? Certainly not. As we read on, the picture becomes clearer:

BERESHIT 9:3-6 --

All crawling things which live, they are for you to eat, like the grassy plants; I have given to you everything, EXCEPT the flesh with the soul -- blood -- you shall not eat; and EXCEPT that your blood, for your souls, will I demand; from the hand of any beast I will demand it, and from the hand of Man; from the hand of EACH MAN'S BROTHER will I demand the soul of Man. He who spills the blood of Man, by Man will his blood be spilled, for *IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE MADE MAN.*

The animals are promised that Hashem will punish them for killing people, and humanity is warned that people will be punished by execution for killing other people -- since people are created be-tzelem Elokim.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL:

What is the theme of this new mission?

Originally, humanity had been charged with the mission of reflecting Hashem's characteristics. That mission included three different elements:

1) Creativity: humanity was to emulate Hashem as Creator by having children. This mandate of creativity may have also included creativity in general, not merely procreation, but it focused most specifically on procreation.

2) Conquering: humanity was to emulate Hashem as Ruler of Creation by extending control over nature, and over the animals in particular.

3) Eating vegetative matter. The point of this command was not that eating vegetables somehow is an essential part of imitatio Dei (emulating Hashem), but that eating vegetables means *not* killing for food.

This third element -- not killing for food -- was an oblique way of expressing the prohibition of murder. If even animals could not be killed for the 'constructive' purpose of eating, humans certainly could not be killed. Kayyin either never understood this element of the mission or found himself unable to meet its demands. But as a murderer, he renounced his status as tzelem Elokim, for the third element of the mission of tzelem Elokim is to emulate Hashem as a moral being. And the most basic expression of morality is the prohibition of murder.

Eventually, even Shet's descendants fall prey to the same weakness, filling the world with evil and violence, and Hashem decides that the entire world must be destroyed. The fact that immorality is the area of their failure is hinted not only by the Torah's explicit formulations ("For the world is full of violence before them," 6:11 and 6:13), but also by the way the Torah formulates the new mission commanded to Noah and his family as they re-establish the world after the Flood:

BERESHIT 9:5 --

... from the hand of each man's *brother,* will I demand the soul of Man

This is clearly a hint to the first murder, that of Hevel by his brother, and a hint as well that the failure of those destroyed by the Flood was in interpersonal morality, since this mission is delivered to those about to re-found the world on better foundations.

This new mission, which makes the prohibition of murder explicit, is a more clear version of the first mission, which merely hinted at the prohibition. But it is much more than a repetition/elaboration. It also expresses implicit disappointment in humanity: before, humanity had

been forbidden to kill even animals; now, animals may be killed for food. Hashem recognizes that humanity cannot maintain the very high moral standards originally set, and so He compromises, permitting killing of some creatures (animals) for some purposes (food). But the prohibition of eating the blood of these animals seeks to limit humanity's permission to kill; blood represents the life-force, the "soul" (the blood-soul equation is one the Torah makes explicit several times later on), and humanity must respect the sanctity of life and recognize its Maker by not consuming the symbol of that life-force. In other words, humanity has permission to take life for food, but this permission comes along with a blood-prohibition, a reminder that even life that can be taken for some purposes is sacred and must be respected.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT:

Next, this new mission asserts that animals and people will be punished for killing people. The penalty for murder is death. Why? The Torah itself supplies the reason: because man is created be-tzelem Elokim. Usually, we understand this to mean that since humans are created in the image of Hashem, it is a particularly terrible thing to destroy human life. This crime is of such enormity that an animal or person who murders a person must be punished with death.

But perhaps the reason there is a death penalty for humans who kill is not only because the *victim* is created in Hashem's image, and destroying an image of Hashem is a terrible act, but also because the *murderer* is created in Hashem's image! Murder merits the death penalty because it destroys two tzalem Elokim: the victim and the perpetrator. The murderer was charged with the mission of tzalem Elokim, emulating Hashem in exercising moral judgment, but he has failed and renounced that mission. And the mission is not an "optional" one -- it is the entire purpose of humanity's existence, the whole reason people were created, as Hashem makes clear in discussing His plans to create humanity. The punishment for rejecting this mission of tzalem Elokim is therefore death, because Hashem grants Hashem-like potential to humans only on condition that they attempt to reflect His qualities. Humanity does not have two options, one being accepting the mission and the other being rejecting it and becoming an animal. A person who rejects the mission of emulating Hashem cannot continue to exist and profane the image of Hashem.

Tzalem Elokim mandates our becoming creators and conquerors, but it also mandates our behaving morally. It means that we have the potential, unlike animals, to create, to rule, and to be moral. But it does not guarantee that we will develop that potential. Tzalem Elokim is something we can *become,* not something into which we are born.

Shabbat shalom

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)