

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 10 #16, February 3, 2023; 13 Shevat 5783; Beshalach 5783
Tu B'Shevat is Sunday

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

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

Parshat Beshalach contains a series of tests of the emunah (faith) of B'Nai Yisrael. All the Jews watch a year of plagues that God uses to destroy Egypt and free the Jews to leave the land. By the time that God enables them to cross the Sea of Reeds safely and then drowns the Egyptian army, chariots, and horses, B'Nai Yisrael realize that Hashem controls nature and can defeat any other army in the world. Why then do the people fear that God may not protect them from thirst and hunger? The people still must learn that Hashem loves and protects every individual Jew and asks only that we obey His mitzvot, have emunah, and build a relationship with Him.

The lessons of Beshalach are relevant for us today, as I would like to illustrate with a few incidents. Winter, the period around Tu B'Shevat, is the time when many professionals face the frightening test of searching for a job. When I was completing my Ph.D. and searching for a job, the process involved preparing research papers, attending an annual convention in late December, seeking interviews, and hoping for invitations to visit universities and agencies looking for scholars. Professionals in many fields undergo a similar process whenever they search for a job.

When I was searching for a better job, I competed for two very desirable positions, one at one of the Claremont colleges and the other at the University of Oregon. During that period of affirmative action, in both cases, the decision came down to me or another candidate. Both times, she got the position. Looking back years later, I realize that as a single Jewish man, neither of these communities was ideal for looking for a wife, and I ended up with a better career elsewhere.

My next offer was from the Department of Labor, in a policy and research office. I accepted the job, but a hiring freeze soon after meant that the job no longer existed. Fortunately I was able to obtain an offer from the Federal Trade Commission – and I soon learned that the FTC was a far better match for my interests and talents. Moreover, a job in the DC Metropolitan Area put me in a position to meet Hannah, with whom we have created a life and family.

My point in recalling this history is that Hashem looks after us, as He has for me and for so many others. Incidents that sometimes seem to be great disappointments turn out to be better opportunities that Hashem puts in our path. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, had a mixed reception in his first pulpit as senior rabbi. He told the congregation that he would not be the cause of a dispute, that he would find a different job and that the community should come together to find a rabbi that they could all appreciate. Rabbi Cahan moved to Potomac, MD, where he had a very distinguished career and where the congregation quickly realized what a treasure we had as our rabbi.

Although the era of the prophets ended approximately two thousand years ago, God still keeps up with the world, but now works like a shepherd. A shepherd nudges from the back. The sheep in the back of the flock nudge the sheep in front of them, and when the nudge reaches the front, the flock starts to move. Those of us in front can be unaware of God's nudges, but He is still with us and protecting us. One of the best ways to realize Hashem's influence is to notice that all the dominant powers in the world come and go while the Jews, one of the smallest groups in the world, have been around

for more than 3000 years and will always be here. The lesson of Beshalach is that we must see Hashem's role in our lives, and that if we continue to have emunah, observe His mitzvot, and watch for unexpected opportunities that come our way, we too can participate in His blessings.

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Beshalach: Like a GPS

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5772

It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people that G-d did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near, for G-d said, *“Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt.”* So G-d turned the people toward the way of the Wilderness of the Sea of Reeds...HASHEM went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so they could travel day and night. HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying,

“Speak to the Children of Israel and let them turn back and encamp before Pi-ahirot, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-tzephon you shall encamp before opposite it by the sea. Pharaoh will say of the Children of Israel, ‘They are imprisoned in the land; the Wilderness has locked them in! I will harden the heart of Pharaoh and he will pursue them, and I will be glorified through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know I am HASHEM!” And so they did!
(Shemos 13:17-22 and 14:1-4)

Here we have the unfolding of an ultra-dramatic “chase scene” which we know ends well. We are granted a perfect insight into the strategic thinking that spared the Children of Israel from frightening disappointment, and how Pharaoh was misled and lured into the trap of thinking the Children of Israel were blundering when they were really under strict super supervision and surveillance at every step. We the reading audience have the best human seat in the house to enjoy the ultimate of theatrics.

It's clear to us that the Children of Israel were not really lost and floundering in the Wilderness, but to the earthly human observer, like the participants such as the Children of Israel and Pharaoh and his army, it sure felt and looked just the opposite. Maybe that's why it takes not just a poetic soul but a prophetic soul like Dovid to declare with confidence, *“HASHEM is my shepherd, (therefore) I lack nothing!* (Tehillim 23:1)

I remember it like yesterday although it was more than 31 years ago. It was at an Aufruf at Yeshiva Ohr Somayach in Monsey before the development of their beautiful sprawling campus. We were all crammed into the Beis Midrash for the Kiddush.

Michael, the Chosson(groom) was captivating the listeners in the room with his tale of how he ended up at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem where his eyes were opened to up the excitement of Torah life. He and his companion Debra had completed their doctorates in family counseling, although they were not married, and they decided to travel throughout Europe before settling down to practice.

While in France, Michael explained, they met a little old man on a bicycle who asked them why they were here in France and asserted that they should go to Israel, which was not in their plans at all. When they reached Greece, where the Mediterranean Sea makes Israel accessible, they altered their course and set sail for Israel. While they were traveling in the north of Israel, in the mystical artsy area of Sefad, they were confronted by another little old man on a bicycle who suggested strongly that they go to Jerusalem and look into a Yeshiva and discover their heritage.

At that moment one of the most charmingly humorous and utterly elegant lines I've ever heard were uttered by Reb Nota Schiller, the Dean of Ohr Somayach Jerusalem, who was sitting there listening with his arm draped around the back of the chair of Joe Tannenbaum, zl, a true giant of generosity and Jewish philanthropy. Rabbi Schiller said to Mr. Tannenbaum in a tone just audibly enough for the assembled, *"Joe, you don't know how expensive it is to put these little men on bicycles all over the world!"*

Michael and Debra came to Jerusalem, based again on the suggestion of a little old man on a bicycle. He checked into Ohr Somayach, and she into Neve Yerushelaim, from curiosity at first. Their touring ended right then and there, but their journey had just begun. After a while they were reintroduced. Now they have a wonderful Jewish family.

What looks like a confusion to the casual observer and what feels like chaos to the protagonist may very well be a well-orchestrated and finely directed play. On stage there are all types of actors guiding and prodding each player to their destination just like a GPS.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-beshalach/>

What Do We Mean By Faith?

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021, 2023

After the dramatic scene of the Egyptians being drowned in the Yam Suf, the Torah tells us, *"Bnei Yisrael saw what the mighty hand that God had done in Egypt, and they believed in God and in Moshe, his servant."* (Exodus 14:31). The key word here is *וַיַּאֲמִינּוּ*, "and they believed." But what does this mean? Does it mean that now they believed that God exists? Did they not know this already after the 10 plagues?

What is clear here is that the word *"emunah"* does not mean *"to believe that,"* being able to assert that a statement – such as God exists, or God is all-powerful – is factually true. That idea of belief is medieval and Maimonidean. In the Torah, however, emunah means to believe in – to have faith. "They believed in God." They put their trust in God.

Until now, the miracles had shown God's might. But they did not translate into a relationship between the people and God. They did not translate into faith. The drowning of the Egyptians, however, was an act of salvation. God had saved them, and Moshe had been the instrument of their salvation. They now knew that God – and Moshe – had protected and saved them, and would do so in the future. They had faith in God.

The stories immediately following, however, belie this assertion. Time and again they complain to Moshe; they do not believe that God is there for them. The water is bitter – they complain. They have no food – they complain. There's no water – Moshe comes with the staff. And they're not just saying we need the food. They're not saying, "Please, we need

food. Ask God to bring it to us." No. They are asking "*why did God take us out of Egypt?*" There it was safe. Here they are in danger, in thirst and in hunger, and where – they ask – is God? Their faith in God and their faith in Moshe has all evaporated in the blink of an eye.

Why? Because faith is not something that once achieved continues on its own momentum. **Faith is trust, and trust must be cultivated, sustained and reinforced.** [emphasis added]

The Hebrew word emunah is the same as the word of omein (עֲמֵין), to raise and nurture, and the word omanet (עֲמָנֵת), a nurse-maid. To omein is to nurture growth, to hold and protect someone. Moredechai was "עֲמָנֵת" – he raised Hadassah." (Esther 2:7). There is a play on words here. Hadassah is another name for Esther, but it also means a myrtle, a plant. Mordechai watered this plant, he raised Esther and nurtured her growth. That is what emunah is – to be held, protected and raised by another, and that emunah itself must be watered and cultivated.

This nurturing of emunah takes place in the middle and last story of our parsha. When God brings the manna, God does not just answer the people's need for food. God tells the people: Every day you need to trust that I will bring down the manna. You can't hoard it. You can't hold on to it and store it up. You must trust that it will be there tomorrow.

When there is food in our pantry we feel secure. When Boris Yeltsin visited America in 1989, the most impactful part of his trip was when he stopped by a supermarket. He was awed not only by the quantity and variety of foods available, but by the food security that Americans had just knowing that so much food is readily available to them. To live without food at home and without supermarkets – or food delivery! – is to either live in anxiety and uncertainty, or to live with faith that God will provide.

Having such faith does not come easily; it requires work. And so many were not ready for this faith – they went out and collected more than their daily allotment. By bringing down the manna and demanding the the people to gather no more than a day's worth at a time, God was not only testing their faith, God was cultivating it. Day by day, week by week, month by month, the people slowly learned to have faith and trust in God.

The war with Amalek tells the same story. When Moshe would raise his hands, Bnei Yisrael were victorious. Was this magic, the Rabbis ask. *"Did the hands of Moshe really win the war?"* (Rosh Hashana 3:8). No!, they say. Rather, when Bnei Yisrael looked upward at Moses' hands, they looked up towards God with hope and trust. God responded to this faith accordingly, and they were victorious. Notably, the verse here again uses the word emunah: *"And his hands were faithful until the sun set"* (Ex. 17:12). The faithfulness of his hands, their remaining loyal and steadfast, were the instrument through which the Children of Israel were able to put their faith in God.

This is the question that we all must deal with. How do we cultivate our faith? How do we move beyond "*I believe that God exists,*" to "*I believe that in God; I believe that God is there for me.*" And once we have achieved that seedling of faith, how do we continue to water and cultivate it?

The Mishnah gives an answer. The story of the people looking up to God through gazing at Moses' raised hands, teaches us that when doing a mitzvah, we must not do it by rote. Our performance cannot just be to do what we are obligated to do. We must bring intent to our act. We must look up to God and use the mitzvah to cultivate our relationship with God.

For the Rabbis, this is what is behind the institution of making a beracha before eating or doing a mitzvah. On a day-to-day basis, if we focus on the meaning of the beracha, we can feel that sense of what God has done for us personally. God has made the fruit of the tree, and I am benefiting from that gift. God allows me to wake up in the morning, to experience the gifts of rising from bed, to experience the morning. I thank God for giving me my very life: *Moden ani li'fanekha.*

Regularly, however, we turn our opportunities for these multiple daily recognitions of God into mere ritual. We say: "Okay, check, check, check. I've done what the Mishnah Berura says." And then we ask, "Where's the religiosity in our observance? Where's our relationship with God?" The answer is: they are the mitzvot, but mitzvot are only what you bring to them. If you bring to them a connection with and reflection on God, they will bring God into your world. They will be a source of expressing and cultivating faith.

Our lives need to be lived as religious ones, ones imbued with emunah. The Rabbis have given us a way to do this, to move from observance to emunah. We look upward to Moshe's hands. We think about God when we're doing the mitzvot. That won't work for all of us. For some of us the answer might be learning Tanakh, or contemplating the beauty and awesomeness of nature. But whatever the way, it requires ongoing investment. We must strive to live our lives in the spirit of receiving the manna, of experiencing God's gifts every day. If we do so, we will be able to believe in God, to have faith and to have trust that we are in God's hands and that God will always be there for us.

Shabbat Shalom!

<https://library.yctorah.org/2021/01/what-do-we-mean-by-faith/> Note: Multi word Hebrew quotes omitted because of issues changing software.

Taking the First Step – Thoughts for Parashat Beshallah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"And Moses said to the people, fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show you today. For as you have seen Egypt this day, you shall not see them again any more forever. The Lord shall fight for you and you shall hold your peace. And the Lord said to Moses: Why do you cry out to me? Speak to the children of Israel that they go forward." (Shemot 14:13-15)

The people of Israel were in a terrible position. The Egyptian troops were coming toward them from behind. The sea was in front of them. Being trapped, they blamed Moses for bringing them out of Egypt only to die here. Moses offered words of reassurance. The Lord will fight for you, all will be well.

But apparently Moses himself was not convinced of his own words. The very next verse has God chastising him: Why do you cry out to me?

Moses, realizing the magnitude of the dilemma, tried to calm the people; but he himself was uncertain of what to do. In desperation, he cried out to God for help.

God could have told Moses: You are the leader, set the example, walk into the sea as an act of faith and courage. But instead, God told Moses to instruct the Israelites to go forward. Whereas Moses had told the people to hold their peace and wait for God's salvation, God instructed otherwise. **The Israelites first had to take initiative on their own. They had been passive throughout the period of plagues in Egypt, but now that they were on the road to freedom they had to take on responsibility.** [emphasis added]

Rabbi Meir Simha HaKohen of Dvinsk (1875-1926), in his commentary Meshekh Hokhma, suggested that God wanted the people of Israel to demonstrate faith by plunging into the water first. Moses was to follow the Israelites rather than lead them. The Midrash credits Nachshon ben Aminadav for being the first to enter the water. Once he took the initiative, the Lord split the waters of the sea and the Israelites were miraculously saved.

But the question remains: why did Moses cry out to the Lord in a seeming panic? Why didn't Moses himself march into the sea to set an example of faith and leadership? Why was it Nachshon, according to the Midrash, who took the initiative?

Perhaps the Torah is indicating that even Moses, the greatest of all prophets, had a moment of doubt. At a critical time, he froze. He could not understand why God had brought the Israelites into such an impossible trap and he could not muster the courage to lead the people into the sea. But while Moses hesitated, Nachshon took the lead. Sometimes even the best of leaders falls short. It takes the courage and initiative of others to save the situation.

Once Nachshon took the lead, the Israelites themselves realized that it was time for them to move forward. Moses and the people learned that at a time of national crisis, courageous action is required. The price of freedom is: increased

responsibility.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/taking-first-step-thoughts-parashat-beshallah>

Buber, Hammarskjold, the United Nations — and Shattered Dreams: Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber (1878-1965) was among the most influential thinkers of his time. His writings had a powerful impact on the Swedish diplomat, Dag Hammarskjold (1905-1961), who served as the second Secretary General of the United Nations, from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961.

These two remarkable men met at the United Nations not long after Buber had given a guest lecture at Princeton University in 1958. Hammarskjold had written to tell Buber “how strongly I have responded to what you write about our age of distrust.”

Buber described his meeting with the Secretary General of the U.N. where both men shared a deep concern about the future of humanity. Will the nations of the world actually unite in mutual respect and understanding? Or will they sink into a quagmire of antagonisms, political infighting...and ultimately, the possible destruction of humanity through catastrophic wars?

Buber noted: *“We were both pained in the same way by the pseudo-speaking of representatives of states and groups of states who, permeated by a fundamental reciprocal mistrust, talked past one another out the windows. We both hoped, we both believed that....faithful representatives of the people, faithful to their mission, would enter into a genuine dialogue, a genuine dealing with one another out of which would emerge in all clarity the fact that the common interests of the peoples were stronger still than those which kept them in opposition to one another.”* (A Believing Humanism: Gleanings by Martin Buber,” Simon and Schuster, New York, 1969, pp. 57-59)

It was this dream that linked Buber and Hammarskjold — a dream that diplomats would focus on the needs of humanity as a whole, and not simply hew to their own self-serving agendas. Indeed, this was the founding dream of the United Nations: to be an organization that would bring together the nations of the world to work in common cause for the greater good of humanity.

In January 1959, Hammarskjold visited Buber in Jerusalem. Again, their conversation focused on the failure of world diplomacy to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual cooperation. There were some steps forward, to be sure; but by and large, the harmony of the nations had not come to pass. “Pseudo-speaking” and “fundamental reciprocal mistrust” continued unabated. The representatives continued to “talk past one another out the windows.”

Hammarskjold believed that Buber’s teachings on the importance of dialogue needed as wide a following as possible. He himself began working on a Swedish translation of Buber’s famous book, *I and Thou*. After Hammarskjold was killed in a plane accident, Buber was informed that the Secretary General of the U. N. was working on the Swedish translation of *I and Thou* on the plane. His last thoughts were about dialogue, mutual understanding, sympathetic interrelationships among human beings.

Hammarskjold died in 1961. Buber died in 1965. Did their dreams for the United Nations also die with them?

When we think of the work of the United Nations today — so many years after the meetings of Hammarskjold and Buber — we must admit some positive developments. The U.N. has fostered international cooperation in various areas.

But has the United Nations become a beacon of hope for genuine human dialogue? Do the diplomats work harmoniously for the good of humanity? It would appear that instead of being a bastion of human idealism, the United Nations has become a political battleground where the fires of hatred and bigotry burn brightly.

We justly lament the viciously unfair treatment of Israel at the U.N. We justly deplore the anti-Americanism that festers within the United Nations. But these ugly manifestations of anti-Israel and anti-American venom are symptoms of the real problem: the real problem is that the United Nations has become a central agency for hatred, political maneuvering, and international discord. It has not lived up to the ideals of its founders; it has betrayed the dreams of Buber and Hammarskjold; it has become a symbol of so much that is wrong in our world.

It is probably too late to change the ugly and hateful spirit that pervades the United Nations. Preaching to the nations on the importance of dialogue and mutual respect will most likely fall on deaf ears.

But unless a powerful jolt of realism — and idealism — can be injected into the United Nations, humanity will continue its march into self-destruction.

Positive change in the way the U.N. operates is imperative. If it cannot or will not change, why should it be maintained? Why should we support the charade of a world body that pretends to stand for peace and mutual understanding...when in fact it is the world's most visible bastion of international strife and hatred?

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/buber-hammarskjold-united-nations%20%94and-shattered-dreams-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

Responding to Terror Attack in Israel *

Once again, a Palestinian terrorist has murdered Israelis, this time as they were leaving synagogues services on Friday evening. The terrorist was killed, and the government is planning its reactions to this latest act of Palestinian terror.

All of us who care deeply for the State of Israel must do our best to support the embattled Jewish State. Regardless of our personal political views, we must not stand aside silently while Israel and its citizens are under attack.

First, we need to pray, to turn to the Almighty for strength and guidance, to draw on our spiritual resources. We need to come together as a community.

We also need to be alert to the dangers, to be articulate spokespeople for the House of Israel, to let our elected officials know that we want loud and clear support of Israel, and loud and clear condemnation of those who threaten the very existence of Israel.

We need to let Israel know that we genuinely care, and that our fate is inextricably bound with the destiny of Israel. We need to travel to Israel, to invest in Israeli companies, to buy Israel bonds, to contribute to UJA and to educational institutions in Israel, to human services agencies in Israel. We need to buy Israeli products. We need to support those agencies that fight on behalf of Israel and on behalf of the Jewish People.

We need to do our best to demand justice and righteousness, to promote love and harmony among humanity, to fight against the forces of evil that threaten to undermine human civilization.

We need to remind ourselves that the Heavenly court will deal with each of us by the same standards with which we deal with others. Let those standards be the standards of honesty and goodness, fairness and compassion, integrity and strength of character. May God who brings peace in the heavenly spheres bring peace to us, to all Israel, and to all good people everywhere.

* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/responding-terror-attack-israel>

Hidur Mitzva: My Personal G-d

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The redemption was finally complete. After 10 makos (plagues), the exodus, followed by a breathtaking chase, the Yam Suf split for the Jews. The Mitzriyim chose to rush stubbornly into the miraculously dry seabed in an effort to retrieve their "slaves." But the miracle wasn't for them. The sea returned to its natural properties of water and drowned the Mitzriyim.

Jewish tradition describes that moment as a moment of great revelation. Even the simplest among the Jews experienced Hashem in a way greater than the great prophets Yechezkel and Yeshaya. In those moments, when their greatest fear was removed by Hashem's mighty hand, a gift of clarity was provided to them. More than understanding Hashem's glory, they understood themselves. They understood Hashem as He related to them personally. They were redeemed and touched by His mighty hand. At that moment, each felt a personal relationship with Hashem.

The exact words they said at that time are remarkable. "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him." This was not about G-d as experienced by philosophers or even righteous prophets. This was a very personal experience. An experience in which the human beings touched are overwhelmed with emotion and declare, "I will glorify Him," I am deeply interested in expressing and in showing how I value this love relationship with Hashem.

The Talmud understands two monumental lessons from this statement. Firstly, as a result of our love and admiration for Hashem, we should try to emulate Him. Just as Hashem is patient, benevolent, and forgiving, so should we be. Secondly, when we do a mitzva, we should strive to do it in a nicer way than is strictly required by Halacha. We should strive not just to satisfy the requirements but to also enhance the mitzva in a way that expresses our love.

Although such enhancement obviously should be the result of our own devotion, the Talmud does provide guidance to assist us and give this structure. The Talmud (Baba Kama 9) says that a person should spend one third more to upgrade and enhance the mitzva. Thus, if a mitzva can be fulfilled in a satisfactory way for \$60, our relationship with Hashem guides us to consider upgrading it by \$20 (a third of \$60) as a way to express that this is more than an obligation; it is a relationship.

At first impression one might wonder why the mitzva is divided into these two aspects. First there is the obligation; then there is the enhancement. If that higher observance is what is expected then why not obligate that to begin with? But as we consider the dynamic of relationships we realize that this is a very precise system. There is an aspect of the obligation, and then there is the aspect of adding a ribbon, voluntarily adding an enhancement to the extent that we can.

Take for example, in the world of human relationships, a man who has the practice of buying roses for his wife on her birthday. When they first got married, they were both students and quite thrifty. He was hesitant to buy a dozen or two of classic stem roses due to the expense, so he bought spray-roses as a more affordable alternative. As he became more established in his career, he continued the practice, and began to buy, first a dozen long stem roses, then two or even three dozen roses to honor his beloved wife's birthday.

Then covid hit.

The flower stores were closed. But he felt that his practice of bringing a dozen roses in honor of his wife's birthday must continue. So he found a place in town which sold roses and was still open: the gas station. Although he would normally

have considered the price and quality downright cheap, under the circumstances it was the best he could do. His wife smiled joyously at his determination and creativity.

Our relationship with Hashem is such that there are obligations which we observe. But in addition to the technicalities, there is a mitzva called "Hiddur Mitzva," what we do to glorify the mitzva. In a financial sense the Talmud guides us with the concept of a third as a reasonable expression of devotion. But in addition to the financial aspect, there is the enhancement of the mitzva that we do in the way we perform it.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

Beshalach - Inspiration Starts With I

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

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

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

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

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

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

I believe that one question answers the other. Our ancestors certainly recognized that G-d exists. However, prayer

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

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

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Our "Egyptian Entanglement"

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

The Jewish narrative is forever entangled with ancient Egypt. That entanglement continues to challenge us.

An Organic Entanglement

Our Sages expand the narrative from a historic encounter to an organic mother-child relationship.

Or has God ever tried to go and take for himself a nation from the very bowels of another nation [...]? (Deut. 4:34) - As one who extracts a fetus from the womb of a cow. (*Mekhilta Beshalah*)

The image of blood on the passageways and of the people emerging from the breaking waters of the sea is a powerful image of birthing. Egypt is portrayed not as the familiar historical oppressor but as a woman in the midst of a violent birth. Egypt is the womb in which the Israelites gestated. The portrait which the Sages are painting is not one of a mere historical encounter but of an intimate organic connection.

Under the best of circumstances, severing the bond between the infant and the mother is a complicated business. This is even more the case when the mother is abusive and cruel, where love and loathing are intermingled, as were the primordial light and darkness.

How do we emerge?

So, how do we understand and emerge from what could be called, "The Egyptian Entanglement?" The key lies in how the following verse is interpreted.

[...]and the children of Israel went out with a high hand. (Ex. 14:8)

Onkelos deviates from the straightforward meaning of the Torah text by translating "a high hand," *be yad ramah, as reish galei* – "heads held high."

The key to understanding the differing connotations of "a high hand" as opposed to "heads held high" is in the *Targum Yonatan* on the same verse. He translates, *"With a raised hand overcoming the Egyptians."* The high hand is raised against Egypt.

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Ishbitz (1800 – 1851) explains that, in contradistinction to the raised hand, the head held high indicates that the freedom which the Israelites experienced was "not against others with pride and a feeling of superiority; rather they felt as free people without fear of any man." (*Mei Hashiloah, Beshalah*)

I would like to unpack this teaching of the *Mei Hashiloah*.

There is a danger that the people, because of the trauma of their slavery, would not properly separate from the abusive environment in which they developed. It is very tempting to adopt a stance of victimhood and self-righteousness. Together, these characteristics seem to grant the moral high ground. In fact, adopting a posture of victimhood and allowing it to fashion the personality and the lens through which one views the world around them is very destructive. Too often the victim turns into the victimizer. The abused becomes the abuser. Undoubtedly, the Israelites suffered terrible injustices at the brutal hands of their Egyptian masters. However, to adopt the role as 'victim,' when the post slavery era did not justify it, would in a sense perpetuate the slavery. Their "freedom" would be no freedom at all; it would be slavery in a different form. Their experience would be oriented back towards their oppressors – it would be a reaction to Egypt. R. Mordechai Yosef beckons us to infuse positive content into our freedom.

The Challenge Today

Rousseau famously wrote, "*Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains. Those who think themselves masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they.*" Freedom for all people begins with an *attitude* of freedom. For the Jews, freedom required a paradigm shift away from powerless victim to empowered servants of God joined together by a cosmic destiny.

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

Understanding Rashi on BeShalah

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 "*Vlo 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 נחמו – 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]i.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?

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

The Bones we Carry

By Rabbi Eliezer Lawrence *

I walk through the world with the bones of my ancestors. I carry in my bones the stories — the life, the love, the death, the values of those who came before — so many of whom I never met.

When we have a relationship with ancestry, we begin to encounter the expansiveness of History, of God, and to realize that we are but a character in a larger intergenerational story. While we may be the protagonist of our personal chapter, we also have a role in supporting the larger arc.

Yosef HaTzadik was always aware of the great story of which he was a part. When Potiphar's wife attempts impropriety, he responds “*How could I do this wicked thing and sin before God?*” (Gen. 39:9). When imprisoned, he solves the dreams of his prisoner counterparts and declares “*Surely God can interpret*” (Gen. 40:8). And when he has the chance to rise to power through Pharaoh, we are reminded, “*Pharaoh has been told what God is going to do*” (Gen. 41:25). In each of these deeply consequential turning points, Yosef brings the fact that he is part of a larger divine story into the conversation.

While it is true that Yosef acted towards his brothers in a punitive fashion, temporarily losing sight of his place in the story, he ultimately returns to the truth:

“*And he said, 'I am your brother Yosef, he whom you sold into Egypt. Now, do not be distressed or reproach yourselves because you sold me; it was to save life that God sent me ahead of you'*” (Gen. 45:4).

In parashat Vayechi, Yaakov implores his sons to bury him in Canaan, and it is Yosef HaTzadik who takes the mantle. When Yosef lies on his deathbed, he reminds his brothers that they are but players in a larger narrative that will end in redemption. The path to that redemption is to hold in our consciousness our intergenerational connectivity and reciprocal impact. “*So Yosef made the sons of Israel swear, saying, 'When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here'*” (Gen. 50:25).

But as generations pass, it is not always easy to hold on to those stories. Masechet Sotah tells us that by the time Bnei Yisrael were ready to leave Mitzrayim, in their experience of slavery and time-boundedness, they had lost the location of Yosef's remains. But Serach bat Asher had not forgotten the obligation of her forefathers, and preserved the location of his interment to share with Moshe (Sotah 13a).

Bnei Yisrael would have to carry the coffin for as long as they were traveling — and that is not an easy task. Some might

see intergenerational history and the obligations that emanate forth as burdensome, but in fact, they are ripe with blessing.

"And Moshe took with him the bones of Yosef")Ex. 13:19(. Moshe, on behalf of the Jewish people, brought the intergenerational conciseness forward. It was through the bones of Yosef, according to the Midrash, that the sea was split)Breishit Rabbah 87(. Throughout the 40 years in the desert, Bnei Yisrael continued to carry the bones of their ancestor, the yoke of their heritage and the privilege of the redemptive promise. In sefer Yehoshua, at the time the people entered the Land and were establishing dominion, the presence of God in their collective story was needed more than ever — and so, *"the bones of Yosef which the Israelites has brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shechem"*)24:32(.

In our time, the bones of our ancestors are the values, the traditions, and the mitzvot. When we daven, we carry with us the legacy of our foreparents who prayed for a better life. When we choose to prioritize family time and invest more deeply in the relationships of loved ones, we carry with us the legacy of those who sacrificed endlessly to support and nurture the family whom they held so dear.

In Yiddish, there is a saying, *"me shlept golus"* as we navigate our time in exile, we do so with the less than pleasant and burdensome act of 'schlepping'. While the Hebrew word *"לֵבֶן, ol,"* is often translated as *"burden,"* it also means *"yoke,"* a device used to connect two oxen together to ease the burden of the load. When we carry the stories, the traditions and the commandments of those who came before us, we come to realize that it is the very thing that at first evaluation may seem like a burden, that ultimately allows us to carry the often unexpected weight of life with greater ease.

May we carry in our bones with ease the knowledge that Hashem's mitzvot, our obligations to God, to those who came before us and those who will come thereafter, ultimately sustain us in a path towards ultimate redemption.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Faculty, YCT & Maharat Beit Midrash Program. Note: quotes in Hebrew omitted because of problems with changing software.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2023/02/the-bones-we-carry/>

Shavuon Beshalach

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Sometimes I wonder how much power I have as a chazzan.

Think about it. Auckland has never had a storm where a state of emergency was declared. At least some lifetime Aucklanders have told me that it has never happened in their day. But the year that I come to Auckland and do the prayer for rain on Sukkot, the skies open and rain comes down in torrents, hence showing proof of my special powers of prayer.

Now if I were a real spiritual leader, my followers would spread news of my powers , people would send in their requests and I would use my prayers to get them what they want. All for a nominal fee of course. And I would need a private jet so could fly around the world and the masses could receive my blessings and bask in my countenance.

But I don't do any of those things. I don't know what that says about my spiritual status. Perhaps I'm really not holy enough to have a private jet.

If you've read this long into this comedic bit about rain, allow me to continue with another separate observation about falling water from one of our greatest comedians, Jerry Seinfeld.

Seinfeld wondered about people's strange relationship with water. We throw it on our face and submerge in it completely when bathing or swimming. But God forbid if a little bit of water falls from the sky onto our face or clothes. If we see it outside, we cancel all our plans and do everything we can to seek shelter to avoid the falling water.

There's nothing wrong with this attitude. It's just a different relationship with rain than our Talmudic ancestors had. The whole Talmudic tractate of Taanis devotes itself to how to fast properly so the rain could fall. If I would propose we do that nowadays, I'd be laughed out of the rabbinate. "Are you crazy, rabbi? Why would you want it to rain?!" Do we not spend a lot of our modern lives hoping that it won't rain?

But maybe as the season of Tu Bishvat comes upon us, we can appreciate and be thankful for the rain. Legend has it that trees, flowers, fruits and vegetables cannot be grown without it. As much as I don't want to believe it, food does not sprout from the grocery store shelf. It had to grow somewhere.

And as Jews we have an even more historical relationship with water. We passed through it in the Red Sea and we weren't afraid to go in even if our clothes may have gotten a little wet. So the next time it rains, honor your heritage, go outside, raise your head and taste the lovely juices of the sky. If nothing else, you will then feel like you've earned your hot cocoa afterwards.

As for all the Jews of Auckland, our relationship with water has been forever changed. Now whenever it rains we will think about how we delayed coming onto the new site because of it. In 100 years, our grandchildren will be sitting in Remuera at the new site looking out at the rain and saying, "See that? Our ancestors had to pass through the storm to come from CBD to Remuera. But thank God it only delayed us a week instead of forty years."

Shabbat Shalom and Tu Bishvat Sameach!

P.S. If anyone has been adversely affected by the storms and needs help, please don't hesitate to reach out to office@ahc.org.nz and we'll do all we can to support you.

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Auckland, New Zealand. AHC is in the process of moving from Greys Avenue in Auckland to a new location in Remuera. [Jed: Auckland received 12 inches of rain in one day a week ago.]

Rav Kook Torah Beshalach: The Influence of Amalek

The treacherous attack of Amalek, striking against the weak and helpless, was not a one-time enmity, a grievance from our distant past. God commanded Moses to transmit the legacy of our struggle against Amalek for all generations:

"God told Moses, 'Write this as a reminder in the Book, and repeat it in Joshua's ears: I will totally obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens....' God will be at war with Amalek for all generations.")Exod. 17:14, 16(

Erasable Writing

The evil of Amalek invaded every aspect of the universe. Even holy frameworks were not immune to this defiling influence. Therefore, they too require the possibility to be repaired by erasing, if necessary.

For this reason, the Talmud)Sotah 17b; see Yoreh Dei'ah 271:6(rules that scribes should not add calcanthum)vitriol or sulfuric acid(to their ink, since calcanthum-enhanced ink cannot be erased by rubbing or washing. All writing — even holy books — must have the potential to be erased, as they may have been tainted by sparks of evil.

An extreme example of a holy object that has been totally contaminated is a Torah scroll written by a heretic. In such a case, it must be completely burned by fire)Shabbat 116a; Yoreh Dei'ah 281:1(. Usually, however, holy objects only come in light contact with evil, and it is sufficient to ensure that the scribal ink is not permanent, so that the writing has the potential to be erased.

The Unique Torah of Rabbi Meir

However, we find one scribe who did add calcanthum to his ink: the second-century scholar Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Meir was a unique individual. The Talmud states that there was none equal to Rabbi Meir in his generation. His teachings were so extraordinary that his colleagues were unable to fully follow his reasoning. Because of Rabbi Meir's exceptional brilliance, the Sages were afraid to rule according to his opinion)Eiruvin 13a-b(.

The Talmud further relates that Rabbi Meir's true name was not Meir. He was called Meir because "he would enlighten)me'ir(the eyes of the Sages in Halachah." What made Rabbi Meir's approach to Torah so unique? His teachings flowed from his aspiration to attain the future enlightenment of the Messianic Era. Because of this spiritual connection to the Messianic Era, the Jerusalem Talmud)Kilayim 9:3(conferred upon him the title "your messiah."

Rabbi Meir had no need to avoid using calcanthum, since his Torah belonged to the future era when Amalek's evil will be eradicated. On the contrary, he took care to enhance his ink, reflecting the eternal nature of his lofty teachings. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, taught that scribes should not avail themselves of calcanthum. In the world's current state, everything must have the potential to be erased and corrected, even that which contains holy content. Only in this way will we succeed in totally obliterating Amalek and his malignant influence. Then we will halt the spread of evil traits in all peoples, the source of all private and public tragedy.

Uniting the Oral and Written Law

The influence of Amalek had a second detrimental effect on the Torah. God commanded Moses to communicate the struggle against Amalek in two distinct channels. Moses transmitted God's message in writing - "Write this in the Book" — and orally — "Repeat it in Joshua's ears." The refraction into divergent modes of transmission indicated that the Torah had lost some of its original unity.

Consequently, the Talmud rules that a scribe may not write from memory, not even a single letter)Megillah 18b(. Our world maintains an entrenched division between the written and spoken word. Only with the obliteration of Amalek and the redemption of the world will we merit the unified light of the Torah's oral and written sides.

Once again, we find that Rabbi Meir and his Torah belonged to the future age, when this artificial split will no longer exist. Thus, when Rabbi Meir found himself in a place with no books, he wrote down the entire book of Esther from memory.

In the time of Mordechai and Esther, when we gained an additional measure of obliterating Amalek)with the defeat of Haman, a descendant of Amalek(, the Torah regained some of its original unity. That generation accepted upon itself the Oral Law, in the same way that the Written Law had been accepted at Sinai)Shabbat 88a(.

)Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 127-129. Adapted from Igrot HaRe'iyah vol. III, pp. 86-87)1917(.

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/BESHALACH_65.htm

To be a Leader of the Jewish People)Beshalach 5767, 5773(

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

"That day, God saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians . . . The Israelites saw the great power God had displayed against the Egyptians, and the people were in awe of God. They believed in God and in His servant Moses. Moses and the Israelites then sang this song, saying . . ."

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

There is a fascinating discussion among the Sages as to how exactly they sang. On this, there were four opinions. Three

appear in the tractate of Sotah:

Our rabbis taught: On that day Rabbi Akiva expounded:

When the Israelites came up from the Red Sea, they wanted to sing a song. How did they sing it? Like an adult who reads the Hallel and they respond after him with the leading word. Moses said, I will sing to the Lord, and they responded, I will sing to the Lord. Moses said, For He has triumphed gloriously, and they responded, I will sing to the Lord.

R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean said:

It was like a child who reads the Hallel and they repeat after him all that he says. Moses said, I will sing to the Lord, and they responded, I will sing to the Lord. Moses said, For He has triumphed gloriously, and they responded, For He has triumphed gloriously.

R. Nehemiah said:

It was like a schoolteacher who recites the Shema in the synagogue. He begins first and they respond after him. Sotah 30b

According to Rabbi Akiva, Moses sang the song phrase by phrase, and after each phrase the people responded, I will sing to the Lord – their way, as it were, of saying Amen to each line. According to R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean, Moses recited the song phrase by phrase, and they repeated each phrase after he had said it. According to Rabbi Nehemiah, Moses and the people sang the whole song together. Rashi explains that all the people were seized by divine inspiration and miraculously, the same words came into their minds at the same time.

There is a fourth view, found in the Mechilta:

Eliezer ben Taddai said, Moses began and the Israelites repeated what he had said and then completed the verse. Moses began by saying, I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, and the Israelites repeated what he had said, and then completed the verse with him, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and its rider He hurled into the sea. Moses began saying, The Lord is my strength and my song, and the Israelites repeated and then completed the verse with him, saying, The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. Moses began saying, The Lord is a warrior, and the Israelites repeated and then completed the verse with him, saying, The Lord is a warrior, Lord is His name.
Mechilta Beshallach Parshah 1

Technically, as the Talmud explains, the Sages are debating the implication of the)apparently(superfluous words vayomru lemor, “they said, saying,” which they understood to mean “repeating.” What did the Israelites repeat? For R. Akiva it was the first words of the song only, which they repeated as a litany. For R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean they repeated the whole song, phrase by phrase. For R. Nehemiah they recited the entire song in unison. For R. Eliezer ben Taddai they repeated the opening phrase of each line, but then completed the whole verse without Moses having to teach it to them. Read thus, we have before us a localised debate on the meaning of a biblical verse.

There is, however, a deeper issue at stake. To understand this, we must look at another Talmudic passage, on the face of it unrelated to the passage in Sotah. It appears in the tractate of Kiddushin, and poses a fascinating question. There are various people we are commanded to honour: a parent, a teacher)i.e. a Rabbi(, the Nasi,)religious head of the Jewish community(, and a king. May any of these four types renounce the honour that is their due?

R. Isaac ben Shila said in the name of R. Mattena, in the name of R. Hisda:

If a father renounces the honour due to him, it is renounced, but if a Rabbi renounces the honour

due to him it is not renounced. R. Joseph ruled: *Even if a Rabbi renounces his honour, it is renounced . . .* R. Ashi said: *Even on the view that a Rabbi may renounce his honour, if a Nasi renounces his honour, the renunciation is invalid . . .* Rather, it was stated thus: *Even on the view that a Nasi may renounce his honour, yet a king may not renounce his honour, as it is said, You shall surely set a king over you, meaning, his authority should be over you.* Kiddushin 32 a-b

Each of these people exercises a leadership role: father to son, teacher to disciple, Nasi to the community and king to the nation. Analysed in depth, the passages make it clear that these four roles occupy different places on the spectrum between authority predicated on the person and authority vested in the holder of an office. The more the relationship is personal, the more easily honour can be renounced. At one extreme is the role of a parent (intensely personal), at the other that of king (wholly official).

I suggest that this was the issue at stake in the argument over how Moses and the Israelites sang the Song at the Sea. For R. Akiva, Moses was like a king. He spoke, and the people merely answered Amen (in this case, the words "I will sing to the Lord"). For R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean, he was like a teacher. Moses spoke, and the Israelites repeated, phrase by phrase, what he had said. For R. Nehemiah, he was like a Nasi among his rabbinical colleagues (the passage in Kiddushin, which holds that a Nasi may renounce his honour, makes it clear that this is only among his fellow rabbis). The relationship was collegial: Moses began, but thereafter, they sang in unison. For R. Eliezer ben Taddai Moses was like a father. He began, but allowed the Israelites to complete each verse.

This is the great truth about parenthood, made clear in the first glimpse we have of Abraham:

Terach took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Bereishit 31:11

Abraham completed the journey his father began. To be a parent is to want one's children to go further than you did. That too, for R. Eliezer ben Taddai, was Moses' relationship to the Israelites. The prelude to the Song at the Sea states that the people "believed in God and in His servant Moses" – the first time they are described as believing in Moses' leadership. On this, the Sages asked: What is it to be a leader of the Jewish people? Is it to hold official authority, of which the supreme example is a king ("The Rabbis are called kings")? Is it to have the kind of personal relationship with one's followers that rests not on honour and deference but on encouraging people to grow, accept responsibility and continue the journey you have begun? Or is it something in between? There is no single answer.

At times, Moses asserted his authority (during the Korach rebellion). At others, he expressed the wish that "all God's people were prophets." Judaism is a complex faith. There is no one Torah model of leadership. We are each called on to fill a number of leadership roles: as parents, teachers, friends, team-members and team-leaders.

There is no doubt, however, that Judaism favours as an ideal the role of parent, encouraging those we lead to continue the journey we have begun, and go further than we did. A good leader creates followers. A great leader creates leaders. That was Moses' greatest achievement – that he left behind him a people willing, in each generation, to accept responsibility for taking further the great task he had begun.

FOOTNOTES:

Note: the archives for some earlier years of Rabbi Sacks' writings have not preserved footnotes.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bo/the-far-horizon/> 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.

Why Did All the Pursuers Die at the Red Sea?

By Yossi Ives * © Chabad 2023

Following the Exodus, when it became apparent that the Israelites had no intention of returning to Egyptian slavery, Pharaoh "took six hundred select chariots and all the chariots of Egypt, with officers over them all."¹

But where did the Egyptians get all their horses from? We know that during the various plagues, "all the livestock of the Egyptians died,"² and it's not exactly possible to wage war using dead horses!

Rashi explains that although many animals perished during the plagues, those belonging to the Egyptians who heeded Moses' warning had their animals spared. Indeed, during the plague of hailstones, the Torah explicitly states that "those who feared the word of the Lord drove their servants and their livestock into the houses"³ to spare them from the onslaught that poured down from the skies.

So the pious Egyptians still had horses, which were used to chase down the fleeing Israelites. Rashi concludes his explanation with some very strong words: "From this Rabbi Shimon said that even the best of the Egyptians is to be killed." By this Rashi means that if the horses used to chase the traumatized former slaves were provided by those who were supposedly God fearing, then this suggests that even the best of them were no good.

Why Did Rashi Say That?

While we understand that Rashi felt compelled to explain how the Egyptians had all those horses, we are left wondering why he had to throw in the final line. It seems highly provocative.

This is all the more confounding when we consider that Rashi's commentary was made to be studied even by young students.

Is It Even True?

Is it even accurate to say that all ancient Egyptians were deserving of death? We know an earlier pharaoh protected Abraham,⁴ Joseph rose to great prominence in Egypt, and Pharaoh rolled out the proverbial red carpet for his brothers, situating them in the "best of the land"⁵ and encouraging them to benefit from the "fat of the land."⁶

Not only that, but the Torah explicitly commands "Do not despise the Egyptian."⁷ The Torah permits an Egyptian to convert and for the third generation to marry into the Jewish nation.⁸ How does this fit the blanket rejection of every Egyptian, and the notion that each and every one is worthy of death?

Alternative Text

Finally, one has to wonder why Rashi didn't adopt a version of that comment that would have made it far less problematic. The version of the quote Rashi cites is from the midrash Mechilta.⁹ But the quote is recorded in Masechet Sofrim, followed by the words "in a time of war."¹⁰ It is far less controversial to say that when there is a war going on, it is proper to kill an enemy combatant. Why did Rashi not add those words, which would have supplied much-needed context?

These questions are so severe, the Rebbe says, that it must be that there is something we are missing.

Not All Egyptians Are the Same

The reason for all our difficulties stem from an assumption that Rashi is making a general assertion about Egyptians. In reality, Rashi is only referring to the Egyptians of that time and place.

So there is no problem with the positive experiences with the Egyptians recorded in the Torah, nor that the Torah orders us not to despise Egyptians – they are not the same people that Rashi is referring to. But with regards to the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus, Rashi asserts, even those so-called God-fearing ones could not be relied upon to refuse

cooperation with the Israelites' subjugators.

Why the Need to Say It?

Still, one might ask, what compelled Rashi to use such strong language? The main point was to explain where the horses came from, and that is sufficiently explained without a broad generalization about how evil the Egyptians of that generation were. He could have left out the quote entirely!

There is a major problem with the story of the incident at the Red Sea, and it is this that Rashi felt compelled to address. The Torah relates how the entire Egyptian army was wiped out as the waters of the parted sea came crashing down after the Israelites had made it safely through. So complete was the destruction, that "not a single one survived."¹¹

Reading of this total devastation, one is likely to ask: Was there not even a single person who deserved to be spared?

To answer this question, Rashi explains that, indeed, the Egyptians who pursued the Israelites were so corrupt that even the "pious" ones were no good.

To bring home that point, Rashi cites the comment from Rabbi Shimon, saying that the Egyptians of that generation were all complicit in the horrific crimes against the Israelites.

Rashi had no reason to say that the justification for killing the Egyptians was because it "was a time of war." The issue here, according to Rashi, is not that there was a war raging. The real issue was the behavior of the Egyptians during the time the Israelites were enslaved. The punishment meted out at the Red Sea was a reaction to their perverse cruelty and injustice.

Herein lies a pertinent lesson: There are times when one is confronted by true evil, and no amount of appeasement will do. Nazi Germany comes to mind. But in our individual lives this applies as well. There are destructive temptations that risk bringing us down if allowed to attain a foothold in our lives. Against such dangers, we cannot afford to cede an inch. We all face a life struggle against our own internal "evil inclination" that seeks to corrupt us. When confronted with such a foe, only relentless commitment will protect us.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, Parshat Beshalach I.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 14:7.
2. Exodus 9:6.
3. Exodus 9:20.
4. Genesis 12:16.
5. Genesis 47:6.
6. Genesis 45:18.
7. Deuteronomy 23:5.
8. Deuteronomy 23:9.
9. Mechilta to Exodus 14:7.
10. Masechet Sofrim 15:10.

11. Exodus 14:28.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5369748/jewish/Why-Did-All-the-Pursuers-Die-at-the-Red-Sea.htm

Beshalach: Bitter Sweetness

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Beshalach

As G-d promised, the sea split and the Jews passed through it to safety. The Egyptians, including Pharaoh, followed them into the dry seabed, but G-d let the water return to its natural state, drowning them all. The Jewish People's first stop in the desert after the Sea of Reeds was Marah.

Bitter Sweetness

They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water from Marah, for it was bitter; that is why it was named "Marah")"bitter"(. The people complained to Moses...)Ex. 14:23-4(

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

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

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah
on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

Volume 29, Issue 16

Shabbat Parashat Beshalach

5783 B'H

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Crossing the Sea

Our parsha begins with an apparently simple proposition: When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the land of the Philistines, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt prepared for battle. (Ex. 13:17-18)

God did not lead the people to the Promised Land by the coastal route, which would have been more direct.^[1] The reason given is that it was such an important highway, it constituted the main path from which Egypt might be attacked by forces from the north-west such as the Hittite army. The Egyptians established a series of forts along the way, which the Israelites would have found impregnable.

However, if we delve deeper, this decision raises a number of questions. First: we see that the alternative route they took was potentially even more traumatic. God led them around by the desert road towards the Red Sea. The result, as we soon discover, is that the Israelites, when they saw the Egyptian chariots pursuing them in the distance, had nowhere to go. They were terrified. They were not spared the fear of war. Hence the first question: why the Red Sea? On the face of it, it was the worst of all possible routes.

Secondly, if God did not want the Israelites to face war, and if He believed it would lead the people to want to return to Egypt, why did the Israelites leave chamushim, "armed" or "ready for battle"?

Third: if God did not want the Israelites to face war, why did He provoke Pharaoh into pursuing them? The text says so explicitly. "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." (Ex. 14:4). Three times in this one chapter we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 14:4, 8, 17).

The Torah explains this motivation of "I will gain glory for Myself." The defeat of the Egyptian army at the Sea would become an eternal reminder of God's power. "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." Egypt may come to realise that there is a force more powerful than chariots, armies and military might. But the opening of our parsha suggested that God was primarily concerned

with the Israelites' feelings – not with His glory or the Egyptians' belief. If God wanted the Israelites not to see war, as the opening verse states, why did He orchestrate that they witnessed this attack at the Sea?

Fourth: God did not want the Israelites to have reason to say, "Let us return to Egypt." However, at the Red Sea, they did tell Moses something very close to this: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'?" It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert! (Ex. 14:11-12)

Fifth: God clearly wanted the Israelites to develop the self-confidence that would give them the strength to fight the battles they would have to fight in order to conquer the Holy Land. Why then did He bring about a state of affairs at the Sea where they had to do exactly the opposite, leaving everything to God: Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Ex. 14:13-14)

The miracle that followed has so engraved itself on Jewish minds that we recite the Song at the Sea in our daily Morning Service. The division of the Sea was, in its way, the greatest of all the miracles. But it did not contribute to Jewish self-confidence and self-reliance. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still. The Egyptians were defeated not by the Israelites but by God, and not by conventional warfare but by a miracle. How then did the encounter teach the Israelites courage?

Sixth: The parsha ends with another battle, against the Amalekites. But this time, there is no complaint on the part of the people, no fear, no trauma, no despair. Joshua leads the people in battle. Moses, supported by Aaron and Hur, stands on a hilltop, his arms upraised, and as the people look up to Heaven, they are inspired, strengthened, and they prevail.

Where then was the fear spoken of in the opening verse of the parsha? Faced by the Amalekites, in some ways more fearsome than the Egyptians, the Israelites did not say they wanted to return to Egypt. The sheer silence on the part of the people stands in the strongest possible contrast to their previous complaints about water and food. The Israelites turn out to be good warriors.

So why the sudden change between the opening of our parsha and its close? In the opening, God is protective and miracle-working. At the close, God is more concealed. He does not fight the battle against the Amalekites; He gives the Israelites the strength to do so themselves. In the opening, the Israelites, faced by the Egyptians, panic and say that they should never have left Egypt. By the close, faced by the Amalekites, they fight and win.

What had changed?

The answer, it seems to me, is that we have perhaps the first recorded instance of what later became a key military strategy. In one of the more famous examples, Julius Caesar ordered his army to cross the Rubicon in the course of his attempt to seize power. Such an act was strictly forbidden in Roman law. He and the army had to win, or they would be executed. Hence the phrase, "to cross the Rubicon."

In 1519, Cortes (the Spanish commander engaged in the conquest of Mexico) burned the ships that had carried his men. His soldiers now had no possibility of escape. They had to win or die. Hence the phrase, "burning your boats."

What these tactics have in common is the idea that sometimes you have to arrange that there is no way back, no line of retreat, no possibility of fear-induced escape. It is a radical strategy, undertaken when the stakes are high and when exceptional reserves of courage are necessary. That is the logic of the events in this week's parsha that are otherwise hard to understand.

Before they crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites were fearful. But once they had crossed the Sea, there was no way back.^[1] To be sure, they still complained about water and food. But their ability to fight and defeat the Amalekites showed how profoundly they had changed. They had crossed the Rubicon. Their boats and bridges were burned. They looked only forwards, for there was no return.

Rashbam makes a remarkable comment, connecting Jacob's wrestling match with the angel to the episode in which Moses, returning to Egypt, is attacked by God (Ex. 4:24) and

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also linking this to Jonah on the stormy ship. [2] All three, he says, were overcome by fear at the danger or difficulty that confronted them, and each wanted to escape. Jacob's angel, Moses' encounter and the tempest that threatened to sink Jonah's ship, were all ways in which Heaven cut off the line of retreat.

Any great undertaking comes with fear. Often we fear failure. Sometimes we even fear success. Are we worthy of it? Can we sustain it? We long for the security of the familiar, the life we have known. We are afraid of the unknown, the uncharted territory. And the journey itself exposes our vulnerability. We have left home; we have not yet reached our destination. Rashbam was telling us that if we have these feelings we should not feel ashamed. Even the greatest people have felt fear. Courage is not fearlessness. It is, in the words of a well-known book title, feeling the fear but doing it anyway.

Sometimes the only way to do this is to know that there is no way back. Franz Kafka in one of his aphorisms wrote, "Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached." [3] That is what crossing the Red Sea was for the Israelites, and why it was essential that they experienced it at an early stage in their journey. It marked the point of no return; the line of no retreat; the critical point at which they could only move forward.

I believe that some of the greatest positive changes in our lives come when, having undertaken a challenge, we cross our own Red Sea and know that there is no way back. There is only a way forward.

Then God gives us the strength to fight our battles and win.

[1] See the newly published volume, Exodus: The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel which includes maps, beautiful illustrations, detailed explanations, and my new translation of the Hebrew text.

[2] This explanation does not work for the Midrashic view that the Israelites emerged from the sea on the same bank as they had entered. But this is, as far as I can tell, a minority view.

[3] Rashbam, Commentary to Gen. 32:21-29.

[4] Kafka, Notebooks, 16.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"This is my God ve-anveihu, my father's God, and I will exalt Him." (Exodus 15:2)

What is the best way to give thanks to God? As the walls of the sea come crashing down on the elite Egyptian chariots, and the Israelites realize that the Egyptians will never be able to attack or subjugate them again, a spontaneous song of gratitude and praise bursts forth. The Shira is Israel's magnificent cry of religious awe, an acknowledgment of God's "great hand" (Exodus 14:31) and direct involvement with their destiny.

To say that the Israelites were grateful would be a gross understatement. The accepted custom in most synagogues throughout the

world, and for virtually all of Jewish history, is for everyone to rise when the Shira (Song of Praise at the Reed Sea) is read from the Bible. That Shabbat is known as Shabbat Shira.

Every single day, observant Jews recite the Shira, because it is included in the "Verses of Song" with which the morning prayer liturgy begins. The language of the Shira is highly charged and intense. The climactic exclamation of Israelite adoration and commitment is obscured by one word which is difficult to translate: "This is my God ve-anveihu, my father's God, and I will exalt Him" (Exodus 15:2). What does ve-anveihu mean?

Targum Onkelos translates the phrase as "This is my God, and I shall build a Temple for Him," – "naveh" (from ve-anveihu) being the Hebrew word for home.

Rashi prefers "This is my God, and I shall declare His beauty and praises [in prayer]"; "na'eh" or "noy" (from ve-anveihu) being the Hebrew word for beauty and goodness.

An anonymous Talmudic sage builds on the same verb root as Rashi, but gives it a somewhat different twist:

"This is my God, and I shall beautify [His commandments before] Him by serving Him with a beautiful sukka, a beautiful shofar (Shabbat 133b.)"

The opposing Talmudic view, in the name of Abba Shaul, divides the Hebrew into two words: I and Thou – ani ve-hu – turning the verse into a ringing endorsement of proper ethical conduct:

"This is my God, and I shall be like Him: Just as He is compassionate and loving, so must I be compassionate and loving..." (ibid)

These four views may be seen as an ascending order of commitment. The first opinion has the Israelites commit to building a Temple for God. The second view, sensitive to the fact that an external structure says nothing about the nature of the spirituality within it, insists that the Jews declare their intent "to declare God's beauty and praise to all of those who enter the world" (Rashi, ad loc.); in other words, to publicly pray to Him.

The third level is not satisfied with prayers alone, but prefers a whole panoply of adorned rituals. The final position maintains that the most important issue is not what we build, what we pray, or even what we do; it is rather who we are – the personality and character which make up our essential being – that really counts.

Perhaps there is an even deeper level to this difference of opinion. The Midrash Mekhilta (Chapter 3) cited by Rashi (ad loc.) mystifyingly declares that a lowly maidservant

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at the moment of the splitting of the Red Sea had a deeper vision of the divine than even the great mystical prophet of the supernal chariot (ma'aseh merkavah), Ezekiel the son of Buzi.

The sages of the Talmud make another comparison involving Ezekiel, when they declare:

"To whom may Ezekiel be compared? To a town dweller. To whom may Isaiah be compared? To a city dweller" (Hagiga 13b).

I heard a fascinating interpretation of this statement in the name of Rabbi Isaac Bernstein. When a city dweller from London, for example, has an appointment in New York, they go straight to the agreed-upon point of rendezvous. They are oblivious to the tall buildings and impressive plazas they are used to seeing at home anyway. Not so the unsophisticated town dweller. They are liable to become so distracted by the novelty of big-city architecture that they can miss their meeting altogether.

Isaiah and Ezekiel both have uplifting visions of divine splendor. Isaiah, the prophet of the Land of Israel, is likened to the city dweller who, used to living with spirituality all the time, goes straight to the heart of his vision:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

Ezekiel, on the other hand, lives in Babylon, and is therefore compared to the town dweller. He is so wonder-struck by his exalted picture of the divine that he seems to get lost in the myriad of details. Verse after verse describes the angels, the merkavah (mystical chariot), the accoutrements – with no mention of the Divine Presence itself, as it were.

From this perspective, the miraculous experience of the maid-servant at the Reed Sea enabled her, Isaiah-like, to have an even deeper perception than Ezekiel; she got straight to the central core of the issue when she declared "This is my God." She did not get distracted by the details surrounding the divine.

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

Song of the Sea

Teaching young children has always been a joy for me. One of teaching's special advantages is the clarity that emerges from conversation with people under the age of ten.

A cute and oft-told story describes the reaction of one fourth grader to the lesson in which he first learned the difference between poetry and prose.

He remarked, "Wow! I have been writing prose all of my life and didn't even know it!"

I guess it was in the fourth grade when I first learned the distinction between prose and poetry, and when I became aware not only that I was writing prose, but that much of what I was studying in Jewish day school was prose, not poetry.

We were taught that prose is ordinary writing, language which portrays everyday events. Poetry, on the other hand, is the language of the extraordinary. Poems are for special events and rare emotions.

Poetry is a song, and we only sing when special feelings well up within us.

In this week's parsha, Beshalach, we finally encounter poetry. From the beginning of the book of Genesis until this week's portion, we have been reading prose.

Surely, much of what we have been reading has not been ordinary, and we have even read about some miracles. But the language, with the possible exception of Jacob's blessings to his children, has been prose.

It is only in this week's narrative of the crossing of the Red Sea that the poetic bursts forth.

One of the lesser differences between poetry and prose is that the words of the former are surrounded on the page by much blank space. Prose, on the other hand, consists of written or printed words with a minimum of space between them.

You will notice that in the Torah scroll too the prose of all of Genesis and of Exodus until this week's portion consists of words written by the scribe with only minimal space between them. Look at the Torah scroll for this week's portion, and you will see long columns of white space parallel to the holy written words.

These white spaces are found wherever the language of the Torah or of the Prophets makes use of poetry and song. It has been said that these blank spaces are symbolic to feelings so deep and inexpressible that they cannot be reduced to words of black ink and are, instead, wordlessly conveyed in the white empty spaces.

It is with the crossing of the Red Sea that the powerful feelings of the redemption experience emerge from the hearts of the former slaves. Words of poetry come to the surface. Song and music demand expression. These feelings have no precedent in all that has come before in the biblical narrative.

Today, many of us live lives of prose. Day fades into the night, and even years seem to march along uneventfully with only rare episodes of drama. Few of us sing, and even fewer would feel capable of poetry.

That is what is so amazing about the Song of the Sea in this week's Torah portion. Everyone sang. All of Israel joined in the expression of poetic exultation. Our sages tell us that even the "lowly maid servant on the sea saw more than the prophet Ezekiel" and sang!

Moses led the all the men in the song, and Miriam, all the women.

Perhaps it was the contrast between centuries of oppressive slavery and the sudden experience of utter freedom that evoked song in everyone. Perhaps it was the release from the deadly fear of the approaching Egyptian army that gave vent to unanimous poetry. Or it might have been the sight of the hated and dreaded enemy drowning under the waves that inspired all present to sing out triumphantly. Most likely, it was all of the above.

As readers of the weekly Torah portion, each of us struggles to relate what we study to our daily lives. It is, therefore, important that we use this week's narrative to nurture our own poetic urge.

The Talmud compares the miracle of the Red Sea to quite ordinary processes, such as finding a spouse and earning a livelihood. The Talmud does this to inspire us to see the miraculous even in everyday events. Our sages realize the importance of poetry and soul and wish to motivate us to respond with poetry and song even to mundane events. They want us to see the extraordinary in the ordinary.

Of all the many Torah portions that we have read this year, beginning with Genesis and continuing until Beshalach, no biblical text is fully incorporated into our daily liturgy. Finally, from this week's portion, the Song of the Sea was made part of the daily Jewish liturgy, recited every single day of the year, weekday or Sabbath, ordinary day or holiday.

The message is clear: Poetry and song are vital for you. They are evoked by the experience of something very special. Every living moment is very special.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **Hashem Appreciates Jews Who Put Their Neck Out for Other Jews**

The pasukim at the beginning of Perek 14 say, "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, Speak to the Children of Israel and let them turn back and encamp before Pi-Hachiro, between Migdol and the sea, before Ba'al-Tzephon; you shall encamp opposite it, by the sea. Pharaoh will say TO the Children of Israel, 'They are imprisoned in the land, the Wilderness has locked them in.'" (Shemos 14:1-3).

Pharaoh's assessment that the fleeing Jews were lost in the Wilderness prompted him to chase after them with his army. The question is, what does it mean "and Pharaoh said TO the Children of Israel (EL Bnei Yisrael)"? There were not any of Bnei Yisrael left in Mitzrayim

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(Egypt) to whom he could speak! The people who deserved to leave Mitzrayim left already; the ones who were undeserving, died during the plague of Darkness, but there were no Jews left in Mitzrayim!

Because of this problem, most Meforshei HaChumash do not translate the words "El Bnei Yisrael" to mean "TO Bnei Yisrael" but rather "ABOUT Bnei Yisrael". However, Targum Yonosan ben Uziel, gives a different interpretation (as he often does). According to Targum Yonosan ben Uziel, Pharaoh spoke to Dasan and Aviram – two Jews who stayed back in Mitzrayim when their brethren left.

As is well known, Dasan and Aviram were terrible antagonists of Moshe Rabbeinu. They were wicked individuals who gave Moshe constant tzores. Apparently, they stuck around in Mitzrayim, not wanting to leave with Moshe. Pharaoh was addressing them.

The question is, if they were such wicked people that they did not even want to leave when Bnei Yisrael were given permission to leave the country, why were they still alive? The Torah says that Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim "Chamushim" (Shemos 13:18).

According to some Medrashim, this means that only one fifth ('chomesh') of the Jews left Mitzrayim – the righteous Jews. Eighty percent were found unworthy to witness the Exodus, and they died during Makkas Choshech! There is no way that Dasan and Aviram qualified as tzadikim. Not only that, but even if they survived the Choshech, they did not want to leave Mitzrayim! How is it that they lived to tell the tale and survived all the way into the midbar, up to the rebellion of Korach, more than a year later? What was their merit that granted them this 'longevity'?

The Maharil Diskin says an amazing thing. Dasan and Aviram had a zechus in that they were the taskmasters (shotrim) in Mitzrayim. Just like in the Concentration Camps, in addition to the German officers, there were also the 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, the taskmasters.

These taskmasters bore the burden of the Egyptian overseers. The overseers did not whip the lower echelon slaves at the bottom of the ladder. They whipped the Jewish taskmasters, whose job it was to ensure maximum productivity from the slaves at the bottom of the ladder. Dasan and Aviram were part of that crew of taskmasters who bore the whippings of the Egyptian overseers.

The Maharil Diskin adds that earlier Bnei Yisrael complained to Moshe Rabbeinu, "You made us smell" (Hiv'ashtem es Rucheinu) (Shemos 5:21). We usually learn this as 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 and they reported Moshe Rabbeinu to Pharaoh for killing the Egyptian. They were horrible people. But they had one incredible merit. They literally took it on the chin – if not the back – for other Jews. This is such an enormous zechus that it protected them such that they did not die during Choshech, nor did the fact that they did not want to leave Mitzrayim condemn them, and they lived to tell the tale.

Moshe Was Not Abdicating His Role as Leader

The pasuk says that the Jews complained about the food (or lack thereof) in the Wilderness (Shemos 16:3). They incredibly complained to Moshe Rabbeinu that they missed the “good times” they had in Mitzrayim. The Ribono shel Olam then initiated the incredible miracle of the mann – “Lechem min haShamayim.” Every single day for forty years, they would go out in front of their tents and collect a daily ration of mann that was an exact match for the number of people in their households.

Perhaps we became accustomed to the idea of the miracles that occurred during the time of the Exodus. But if we think about it...bread from Heaven, every single day for forty years, is perhaps the greatest miracle of all! It is almost like finding a check in your mailbox every single day to cover all of your basic expenses. This is the miracle of the mann.

Moshe proclaims that with this miracle, the Jews will realize once and for all that it was the Ribono shel Olam who took them out of Mitzrayim: “In the evening you shall know that Hashem took you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning, you will see the glory of Hashem, that He has heard your complaints against Heaven...” (Shemos 16:6-7). Then he tells them: “... For what are we that you should incite complaints against us? ... When, in the evening, Hashem gives you meat to eat and bread to satiety in the morning, as Hashem hears your complaints that you complain against Him – for what are we? Not against us are your complaints, but against Hashem!” (Shemos 16:7-8). In other words, “Why blame us? If you have a complaint, go blame Hashem!”

Knowing what we know about Moshe Rabbeinu, does this seem like an appropriate response by the leader of the Jewish people to talk like that to his flock? “You have a problem? It’s not my problem – take up your issues with Hashem!” This does not sound like the Moshe Rabbeinu we know! How callous can someone be? This is Moshe Rabbeinu – the faithful shepherd of Israel here!

The Gemara (Chulin 89a) makes a drasha from this pasuk. “Rava (some say R’ Yochanan) states: ‘Greater is that which is written about Moshe and Aharon than that which is written about Avraham. For by Avraham, it merely states ‘I am but dust and ashes’ while by Moshe and Aharon it says ‘We are nothing’’’ The humility of Moshe and Aharon thus surpassed that of Avraham. However, the context here is puzzling. This is misplaced humility! This is not the place to say “What do you want from me? I am a nothing!” We see Chazal praise Moshe for this, and yet to us it seems like misplaced anivus.

The Tolner Rebbe, based on a diyuk in Rabbeinu Bachye in this week’s parsha, answers both of these questions. Rabbeinu Bachye notes that the appearance of the word “Zeh” in this parsha of the mann (“Zeh – This is the matter that Hashem commanded...” (Shemos 16:16)) is an allusion to the word “Zeh” in the beginning of the previous chapter (Shemos 15:2) (“Zeh” – This is my G-d and I will glorify Him...) in the Shiras HaYam.

Rabbeinu Bachye explains “For at this moment when they said “Zeh Keli v’Anveyhu,” they were worthy of a miracle such as the mann, about which it says “Zeh HaDavar.” It sounds like Rabbeinu Bachye is making up an irrational Gezeira Shava. This is not something a post Talmudic commentator can suggest without a source from Chazal! What does Rabbeinu Bachye mean?

The Tolner Rebbe provides insight into the intent of Rabbeinu Bachye: Chazal say that by Kriyas Yam Suf, the humblest handmaid saw prophetic visions that were greater than those of the great prophet Yechezkel. They were actually able to point and say “This is (Zeh) my G-d!” But it is more than an emphasis on the word “ZEH” – “THIS.” The emphasis is “This is MY G-d.” (Zeh KELI)! Klal Yisrael reached such a stature and closeness to Hashem at that moment that they could not only recognize the Hand of G-d but that they could feel a personal closeness and intimacy and say “This is MY G-d” – This is the G-d that takes care of ME. In effect, they were saying “This is my Father”.

Since at that moment, they had the closeness and intimacy of a child to a father, they merited receiving the mann. Who puts breakfast on the table for the children? It is the father! Who buys clothes for the children? It is the father! That is what a father does for his child.

If at that moment, Bnei Yisrael reached that level of intimacy and closeness to the Ribono shel Olam that He was not merely a distant G-d in Heaven, but rather that he was their father who put breakfast on the table for them, then that is why they merited receiving ZEH ha’Mon! When a person feels that close to Hashem, the relationship is reciprocal. Then Hashem treats us as His children and every

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single morning when we come down for breakfast, there will be cereal on the table and milk in the refrigerator.

So when Klal Yisrael complain to Moshe Rabbeinu – What are we going to eat? – Moshe Rabbeinu answers – You are endangering the relationship! “If you are talking like that and saying ‘Why did you take us out of Mitzrayim?’ you are jeopardizing the entire Father-Child connection! Moshe Rabbeinu says to Klal Yisrael “We didn’t take you out of Mitzrayim. Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim! You have a complaint? Go to Daddy! Don’t come to me, I am not your father.”

At all costs, Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to preserve this closeness and intimacy that Klal Yisrael had established with the Almighty at Yam Suf. Moshe knew that if they fell away from this closeness and did not look at the Ribono shel Olam as literally taking care of them like a father to a child, then they would lose it. Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu says “V’Anachnu Mah?” – We did not take you out of Mitzrayim! We are nothing! Hashem took you out of Mitzrayim! “You don’t have what to eat? Don’t come to us – go straight to Hashem with your complaints!” When a child approaches a stranger on the street and complains that he has not had breakfast or he does not have shoes, the stranger might say “What do you want from me? Go to your parents. They will take care of you!”

Moshe Rabbeinu was not abdicating his role or passing the buck. Moshe Rabbeinu trying to preserve the level of intimacy that Klal Yisrael had with the Ribono shel Olam at that moment of “This is MY G-d and I will glorify Him.”

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

He is probably the most outstanding Biblical role model for our times. This is my view of Joseph. But why am I referring to him at a time when our public Torah reading is from the Book of Shemot? This is because in Parshat Beshalach there is a reference to Joseph. The Torah describes how at the very moment when the Israelites were hurrying to take whatever possessions they could as they were fleeing the land of Egypt, Moses was engaged in a special mission: To find the remains of Joseph.

This is because Joseph had made his family promise him that they would take his remains with them when the nation eventually left Egypt. So the Torah tells us (Shemot 13:19),

“Vayikach moshe et atzmot Yoseph imo.” – “Moses took the bones, the remains, of Joseph with him.”

I would like to add some depth to this statement. Joseph had received the finest possible chinuch, education, within his parents home. It was thanks to that education that he was well prepared for the challenges of life

ahead of him. It was thanks to that education that he was able to withstand temptation and always remain true to the traditions of his people.

For Joseph what was important was that he should integrate, but not assimilate.

Joseph engaged with the Egyptian society, in fact so much so that he rose right to the top of that society. Instead of allowing the Egyptian culture and way of life to influence him, his actions always reflected the finest quality of his tradition and families.

No wonder therefore that, of all Biblical characters, the Talmud only refers to Joseph as Yosef 'Hatzaddik', Joseph 'the righteous'.

So in Parshat Beshalach we're told, "Vayikach moshe et atzmot moshe imo." – "Moses took the remains of Joseph with him." Yes, it was important both literally and figuratively that Joseph should not be left behind. Indeed he accompanies us to inspire us right to this very day.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Miracles

If a survey were taken, whether for Jews or non-Jews, asking them to describe the greatest miracle in the Torah, undoubtedly, the Splitting of the sea in our Parsha would be the number one choice by a great margin. But if we analyze the details of the miracle itself (later in this essay), we will see it does not appear so miraculous after all. What, exactly, is a Jewish miracle? How do traditional Jews define what is miraculous and what is not? The very idea of a miracle is difficult for most people today to accept as an event that occurred in the past or could occur today. Even for those who believe in the general concept of a God find it hard to believe the notion of the occurrence of a supernatural event, whether in modern times or even in Biblical times. People tend to be skeptical of that which they have never seen. Since a miracle has never been part of their experience, many human beings tend to doubt if such events as described in the Bible took place. Modern man has been trained to think logically, to be analytical, and to believe only in that which has been proven scientifically. People find the notion of a miracle that defies natural law impossible to accept, as they need logic and proof before accepting something as fact. The Talmud (Berachot 35b) seems to indicate that each succeeding generation is less spiritual than the generation before it, starting with Revelation. Since then, world is moving further and further away from the most spiritual moment for the Jewish people, when God spoke to entire people at Mount Sinai. Each generation is less spiritual, and, therefore, believes less in spiritual concepts such as miracles.

The very idea of a miracle has different meanings to different people (if you search the

sports world, for example, you'll find plenty of "sports miracles" Are those incidents natural, or supernatural? Food for thought). Do miracles even occur today in Jewish thought? Was the founding of the Jewish state in Israel in 1948 a miracle? The Six Day War in 1967? Should we view the transporting of 14,000 Ethiopia Jews to freedom and safety Israel from Ethiopia, in the middle of a war zone, in one day in 1991, as a miracle? To many, all of these or some of these events may be considered a miracle. To others, there is nothing miraculous about these events in modern Jewish history. Can an event be considered a miracle if the laws of nature are not violated?

Types of Miracles - The popular understanding of a miracle involves an event that defies nature that benefits many people as a whole. This concept is nurtured by films about the Bible that inevitably show God's intervention in the course of human events through supernatural means. This notion is further supported by the Torah itself, which contains most of the supernatural miracles performed by God. If the Five Books of Moses were the only yardstick of Jewish miracles, then one might surmise that this is the only type of miracle acknowledged by Jews. But another Biblical story, much later in the Bible, broke the mold and redefined the Jewish miracle.

The story of Purim is certainly regarded as a miracle in Jewish thought. The specific prayer recited on the holiday of Purim begins with the acknowledgment of Purim as a *miracle* performed by God and states that God caused the events to occur in the story, and not take place coincidentally as they seemed (Shmoneh Esreh, Blessing of *Modim*, prayers for Special Days). In addition, the very fact that the Purim story was canonized as part of the Bible in the Book of Esther shows that the Rabbis acknowledged the spiritual, religious, and miraculous nature of the narrative (other books were rejected as part of the Bible). And yet, there seems to be nothing particularly miraculous about the Purim story. The series of events described seem very natural as a political story in which the Jewish people were threatened with extinction. Through a series of 'happy accidents or coincidences (Mordechai overhears the plot to kill the King, the King could not sleep just as Haman was approaching the palace - in the middle of the night, of all times) and good fortune (Esther, a Jew in secret, was selected as queen), the Jewish people were saved. The story seems no more miraculous than some of the events of our day, such as the mass exodus of Jews from the former Soviet Union after years of demonstrations and political pressure. Or the mass transport in twenty-four hours of Ethiopian Jews from a war zone to Israel. On the surface, these events seem even more miraculous than a simple reading of the facts of the Purim story. And yet, Jewish tradition universally recognizes the story of Purim as a miracle, despite the lack of any supernatural

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occurrences in the story. This marvel first witnessed in Persia in the days of Mordechai and Esther was indeed a miracle, but a different type of miracle than the supernatural variety experienced up to that point in Jewish history. The Purim story was a *Natural Miracle* in which events happen without defying nature, and yet are still considered miraculous. How is this type of miracle defined and why the change?

The Purim story is the prototype of a natural miracle where God plays a role in Jewish history, but His role is not obvious to the non-believer. Any event that happens naturally but benefits the Jewish people can also, then, be legitimately called a natural miracle. Often, but not always, a series of "coincidences" or "natural chain of events" occur which lead up to this special Jewish event. However, only a person who is wearing spiritual glasses and believes in an active God, will see God's hand in this natural miracle. A person who chooses not to believe, however, may view the entire story as a series of occurrences, such as the political struggle between the Jewish people and the tyrant Haman. This dual nature of viewing this event either as miraculous or as natural is symbolized by the very name of the book and the role of God in the story. "Megillat Esther" technically translated "revealing that which is hidden." And, although the Book of Esther is accepted as part of the Bible and acknowledged in Jewish tradition as a miracle, the name of God does not appear openly even once in the story.

From this juncture in Jewish history onward, miracles take on the dimension of natural events. Why did this change in miracles begin at the story of Purim? This was the first national event in Jewish history taking place outside the Land of Israel (once the Jewish people had entered the Land after the Exodus from Egypt) and the first national story after the destruction of the Temple. Without the Land or the Temple, miracles became natural, not supernatural. Within the Temple itself, the supernatural nature of miracles was evident each and every day. Flies were never seen in the Temple, despite the presence of raw meat and other foods. When the special Two Breads (Showbread) that were displayed for an entire week were removed, they were just as fresh as they were when put out a week earlier. These daily occurrences in the Temple point out the supernatural component in miracles associated with the Temple (Avot 5:5). Without the Temple, however, miracles became natural, not supernatural. In addition, the Talmud states (Berachot 20a) that the people were no longer on such a high spiritual plane to witness such miracles.

Also, after the destruction of the Temple, the relationship between the Jewish people and God changed. In the past, God was more evident, as symbolized by the supernatural miracle. The people clearly saw God in their lives and believed in Him out of a sense of

gratitude for the miracles performed. This is symbolized by the famous Midrash in which God holds the mountain over the people and "forces" them to accept the Torah at Mount Sinai (Midrash Tanchuma, Noach 3). This symbolic act, which has been interpreted to signify that the Jewish people, having witnessed all of the ten plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, the daily manna and all the other overt miracles God performed, did not truly have a "choice" to accept or reject the Torah. Psychologically, they "had" to accept the Torah (Meshech Chochma on Exodus 19). Who could reject a God that performed all these miracles and redeemed the people from Egypt? This relationship between God and the Jewish people continued for hundreds of years, as long as God performed supernatural miracles in which His presence was obvious to the Jewish people. With the Purim story and the beginning of natural miracles, the nature of belief and the relationship to God changed. No longer were the people "forced" to believe. It was now, for the first time, a matter of true choice. Those who chose to see God would believe, and those who chose to reject God could explain away the natural miracles in a rational manner. This new relationship with God began at the time of the Purim story and continues until today. The Talmud acknowledges this change in interpreting a verse written at the end of the Book of Esther. When the megillah states that the "people observed and accepted," (Megillat Esther 9:27) according to the Talmud, it means that they reaccepted at that time what they had initially accepted at Sinai (Shabbat 88a). Why this reacceptance now? At Sinai they had been "forced" to accept a God who had performed overt miracles. Now they were accepting a God out of true free choice, for the first time. This same acceptance or rejection of God and His natural miracles continues today. Those who believe in the divine hand in history do indeed see the mass emigration of Russian Jews, the airlift of Ethiopian Jews, or the bombardment upon Israel of tens of Scud missiles by Iran in 1991, meant to kill Israelis but only one Israeli died as a result, as natural miracles. The creation of the State of Israel, the victories during its wars can be seen as miraculous. However, the non-believer can explain all these events in a natural logical manner, without accepting the notion of a God. Like the Purim story, events in which believing Jews acknowledge as natural miracles, can also be explained without any divine belief whatsoever.

Which Miracle is Greater-- Supernatural or Natural? - On the surface, it would seem that a supernatural miracle would be "greater" than a natural miracle. The fact that the laws of nature need be altered to produce a miracle seems to make this a more difficult feat. However, to God, the creator of those very laws of nature, it is no more "difficult" to create an event that defies nature or works within nature. This equality before God can be seen in the Silent prayer recited three times daily. In the second

blessing, in praising the acts of God, the act of bringing souls back to life is followed by the act of bringing rain. While rain is certainly considered a natural event or natural miracle, resurrection is considered supernatural. And yet, both are placed in the same blessing, according to the Talmud (Berachot 33a) to demonstrate that they are equal in the eyes of God, and neither is more "difficult." The prayer continues with a series of actions performed by God, intertwining the natural and supernatural miracles: giving sustenance to the world (natural), resurrecting the dead (supernatural), causing the falling to stand (natural), healing the sick (natural), redeeming the captives (natural), and keeping His commitment to bring the sleeping dead back to life (supernatural). Nachmanides (Commentary to Genesis 17:1) states that there is absolutely no difference between natural and supernatural miracles. We humans "classify" them into natural and supernatural, because for us, in theory, it would be easier to make it rain than resurrect the dead.

Within the Torah, it seems that God intentionally brought even the most supernatural miracles in their most "natural" form. The most supernatural miracle as noted above, is the splitting of the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) in our Torah Portion. And yet, this supernatural event is brought about through very natural means, as the Torah describes the east wind blowing the entire night prior to the onset of the splitting of the sea (Exodus 14:21). Sefer HaChinuch (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 132) explains that God's greatness is enhanced by performing supernatural miracles through natural means. Other supernatural miracles in the Torah are also brought about through natural means. Each day, millions of Jews in the desert were fed by the supernatural means of the Manna, as bread came down from the heavens (Exodus 16:4). Yet, the Manna appeared in a very natural way, between two layers of dew on the ground each morning (Numbers 11:9). The Midrash (Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 20) comments on this phenomenon that God purposely wanted to make a supernatural miracle (Manna from Heaven) appear natural from the dew. Even at the end of the Torah, when God shows the entire land of Israel to Moses, God commands Moses to first go up to the mountain (Deuteronomy 32:49). It is clear that from Mount Nevo, the entire land cannot normally be seen, and God performed a supernatural miracle to allow Moses to see the entire land. Yet, God asks Moses to go up to the mountain to see the land so that the supernatural miracle will appear to be brought about through natural means. Thus, in Judaism, contrary to the commonsense belief, natural miracles are considered greater and more miraculous than supernatural miracles.

There is a third category of miracles which most people do not consider miraculous simply because it happens so often: We can easily imagine what would be the world's reaction if

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a sunset occurred only once a year rather than every day. The fact that a sunset occurs each day does not make it less miraculous or less beautiful. However, an analysis of the details of "everyday" miracles is beyond the scope of this essay.

* This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Nachshon ben Aminadav Effect

Rabbi Ohad Teharlev

After the Israelites leave Egypt, Pharaoh realizes that the People of Israel are walking in circles and assumes that "they are entangled in the land [and that] the wilderness has shut them in." Hence, he gets his great army ready and sets out to chase them. When the Israelites stand at the edge of the sea, they lift their eyes and see a huge cloud of dust on the horizon. Behold, the Egyptian army is closing in on them. They are terrified, understanding full well there is nowhere to go. Before them lies the sea; behind them – the army of the largest empire of the time. There seems to be no feasible escape route.

In the Jerusalem Talmud (Ta'anit, chapter 2:2), our Sages tell us that in those petrifying moments, the Israelites divided themselves into four factions: "One said – let us jump into the sea; the second said – let us return to Egypt; the third said – let us fight them in battle; the fourth said – let us cry out (in prayer)."

The first group is basically suggesting suicide ("let us jump into the sea"). The second group believes they must all surrender and go back to being slaves ("let us return to Egypt"). The third group suggests going out to battle and fighting, while the fourth group preferred standing in place and praying ("let us cry out").

These four factions actually represent two opposing worldviews. The first two represent a subdued approach, one of passivity, despair and hopelessness. The first, that wants to jump into the water, is in total despair and has no hope. The second group is a little less pessimistic – it believes that the only way to stay alive is to surrender and go back to being slaves.

The other two groups display a more dynamic approach by proposing to get up and take action. The third proposes going out to battle and fighting the Egyptians, despite the slim chances of victory. However, how could people who had been slaves until the previous day and had never picked up a weapon in their lives suddenly face a big and experienced army?! One can only assume that this approach, too, contains an element of despair,

in keeping with Shimshon's "let my soul die with the Philistines". The fourth group that suggests praying is, in fact, calling for an act of the spirit, in accordance with the notion of "even if one has a sharpened sword on one's neck, he should not despair of mercy."

So, which group was right? What would be the right course of action?

Surprisingly, when every individual Israelite was busy dealing with his/her fear and anxiety and contemplating what s/he could do in the terribly complex situation that suddenly presented itself – one man stood up and started walking toward the sea against all odds. His name was Nachshon ben Aminadav. Our Sages tell us that the minute his feet touched the water, the sea started splitting and a new and unexpected escape route presented itself.

I am quite certain that Nachshon ben Aminadav did not belong to one of the pessimistic groups. He may well have thought it was appropriate to fight the Egyptians, and maybe even engage in prayer concurrently. However, his true greatness was in that he chose to take initiative, think outside the box and choose an option which seemed completely hopeless. On the face of it, it appears he chose the same option as the group that proposed suicide by jumping into the sea. However, there was one main difference between him and those who wanted to jump into the sea. Nachshon ben Aminadav was a man of faith. He was an optimist who believed that a new option may present itself, one which would create a reality of hope; one which would look at the sea and see a new horizon. In other words, Nachshon ben Aminadav saw not only the sea, but also the horizon beyond it. Those who wished to fall into the sea, saw no horizon and no hope.

The verses describing the moments of utter distress and the glorious redemption which followed are read year after year in proximity to Tu B'Shvat. This special day in the Jewish Calendar is often associated with the almond tree that starts blossoming in the middle of winter. In the midst of this grey and dreary season, during the coldest days of the year, a blossom appears signaling the coming spring, symbolizing that even when our external reality appears to be dire and miserable, deep inside there lies a seed waiting to bloom into hope. One only has to know how to have faith and to imagine the hopeful future.

Throughout the history of our nation there were long periods of anguish and helplessness. Binyamin Ze'ev Herzl – the man who first envisioned the founding of a Jewish state – followed in the footsteps of Nachshon ben Aminadav. At a time when the Jews of Europe – a minority group with no safe haven – were subject to constant pogroms and persecution, the Zionist vision and the establishment of a state for the Jewish People were nothing short of madness and seemed utterly unfeasible.

Until a man of great fortitude and unrestrained thought stands up and dares to dream of a hopeful future. He makes his way from city to city, and from country to country, and tries to convince both the leaders and the simple folk to be partners to his vision. Many thought him crazy, but he persevered in his "Nachshon-ben-Aminadav-ness", and the rest is history...

Oftentimes, we, too, find ourselves in distress – be it financial, emotional or physical – and feel there is no way out. At such times we should ask ourselves the following question: If we were standing at the edge of the sea with the Israelites after they had left Egypt, which of the groups would we join?

Nachshon ben Aminadav offers a solution. He teaches us that at such moments of utter despair, we should have no fear. Rather, we should dare think outside the box and be true believers. We should be creative and find solutions even if these seem unrealistic. We should have faith that if we take that first step towards the horizon, new opportunities and options will suddenly present themselves and lead us to a place of hope, freedom and a better future.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger **Joy and Dissonance**

This will be the first dvar Torah that I have submitted to TorahWeb that my mother z"l will not read in this world. It will be the first one that she will not copy and forward to family in her attempt to keep us all connected and it is the first that will not be printed and added to her printed collection (because there are just some things that you cannot entrust to the cloud for safekeeping). For the attendant nachas and pride that these divrei Torah provided my mother, I will forever be grateful to TorahWeb for encouraging me to write.

My mother was one of that larger-than-life generation, who left all that was precious to her when she boarded the kinder transport in May of 1939. With the miraculous resilience that we have come to take for granted, she rebuilt, with my father z"l and their peers, a thriving Jewish life in Toronto. That story has been repeated literally countless times. It never and should never cease to awe and amaze us all and challenge any doubts of the miracles with which we live and the soaring strength with which we have been entrusted.

To her last day, my mother, as did most of that remarkable generation, referred to the home from which she and her childhood innocence were forever ripped, as 'home'. I often found it jarring that she was not 'at home' in the place that I, as a child, called home. That curiosity became even more disquieting as my wife and I raised our children. The "homes" of our childhood were the "homes in which we grew up"; but "home" was the abode that we created for, and shared with, our children.

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Maybe this was their least painful way of staying connected to their parents; maybe they did not really "grow up" there or anywhere they cared to remember; maybe this was their way of saying that there will never be a place again that will contain the innocence and security of their childhood home. We learned very early on not to ask and I will never know.

But referring to her parent's home in Fuerthe as "home" did powerfully communicate to my peers and me a suspicious discomfort with the current culture. Though many may have dismissed this as the language of nostalgia, it nevertheless encouraged us to be comfortable with dissonance with all that surrounded us. As a result, I understand why Moshe Rabbeinu surprisingly named his first son in recognition of his feelings of being unwelcome and distant, letting the name of his second son carry his gratitude for a lifesaving miracle. Indeed, that is how Moshe Rabbeinu impressed upon us that as important as it is to be profoundly grateful people, feeling deeply dissonant with our galus environs will often be necessary to embolden us to be attentive to Hashem's will.

As I reflect further on my mother's choice of words, I believe that we can more deeply appreciate the commitment that the Jews made to Hashem as they began to recollect the events of krias Yam Suf in song: "ze keili vanveihu - This is the my god and I will build a home for Him, eilokei avi v'aromimenuh - the god of my father and I will revere Him".

Rashi's comments on this seeming contrast direct us to appreciate an envisioned synthesis of their newly found closeness to Hashem with their cache of age-old teachings, all deeply ingrained with reverence and distance. 'This is my G-d', Chazal explain, has them almost pointing at Hashem and that captures the intensity of the closeness that they felt. Feeling the embrace of Hashem they would build homes rooted in their revered legacy.

That generation understood that living spaces that are built during times of hester panim or with its terrible scars will be hard to call home to the warmth and optimism of Torah lives. Nevertheless, those homes will vibrantly convey a productive and protective dissonance with an unfriendly environment.

Learning from them, we can seize on our redemptive times and our personal moments of redemption, and indeed build happy homes graced with our awareness of Hashem's watchful eye, all the while incorporating the dissonance that we have learned to maintain. It is in celebration of that gift that the Jews sang "this is my god and I will now be able to build a home for him."

May we continue to be part of the upcoming redemption and be blessed to build homes that convey the legacy of generations with joy and dissonance shaping Jews to be ever-attentive to Hashem's bidding.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

Galloping to Mount Sinai

Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women came out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam called out to them, "Sing to HASHEM, for very exalted is He; a horse and its rider He cast into the sea." (Shemos 15:20-21)

Why is Miriam and the women's choir at the sea singing this particular refrain? There are so many more appropriate verses and phrases that would seem to be more appropriate for women to sing. Why exalt the horses being thrown into the sea? Would it not be more fitting to sing, "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him"?! Why focus on the drowning of horses?! Why are the women led by Miriam the prophetess happily singing those particular words?

The Jewish People are excited to exit Egypt and be free from the tyranny of Egypt but there is a greater goal, the ultimate prize that awaits them. They are happily anticipating receiving the Torah. Instead of being slaves to an abusive Pharaoh following his cruel rules and being engaged in useless labor, the Jewish People are readying to become willing servants of a supremely kind G-d, and follow His wise instructions and labor lovingly in a way that brings ultimate meaning to every dimension of life.

The biggest Mitzvah of all that equals all the other Mitzvos, and the biggest accomplishment to look forward to is Limud HaTorah, learning Torah. Here's where things get complicated and the real question arises. Women are not obligated in the Mitzvah of Learning Torah. They are obligated to know Torah and all relevant Halachos and ideas but learning, not. As one of my Rebbeim once explained to us, "If a woman would be able to take a pill would give her total knowledge in Torah matters she would not have to study again, but if a man would take such a pill, the continuous Commandment to learn would still be incumbent upon him." So why would the women be excited to come to Mount Sinai and receive the Torah?! In a way, it's not their business.

The Gemorah in Brochos says the following; Rav said to Rabbi Chiya: "By what virtue do women merit to receive the reward (of Torah learning)? Rabbi Hiyya answered: They merit this reward for bringing their children to read the Torah in the synagogue, and for sending their husbands to study Mishne in the study hall, and for waiting for their husbands until they return from the study hall." (Tractate Brochos 17A)

How does this work? They play a supportive role, assisting their husbands and children. Armed with this information, let us see how valuable is the role of one who assists another.

The Mishne in Makos explains that even though two witnesses are enough to convict, when three witnesses step forward as a group then conspirators are spared when one of them is rendered invalid. All three are needed for a conviction and if they are found to be conspiring witnesses then all three are punished, even though the 3rd is technically an extra. He could try to excuse himself since two witnesses could do the job without him. Even still he is implicated and punished with the other two. "Rabbi Akiva says: The third does not come to be lenient rather, to be stringent concerning him and to render his halakhic status like these (the first two witnesses). And if the verse punishes one who associates with transgressors like transgressors, all the more so will pay a reward to one who associates with those who perform a Mitzvah like who perform the Mitzvah."

Rabbi Akiva states a powerful principle. If the extra witness who was only a tag along to the main violators is punished then, how much more so in the positive direction if one plays a supportive albeit secondary role in the performance of a Mitzvah that they are to be credited like the ones who actually perform the Mitzvah.

Now we can get back to Miriam and her all women's choir. Why were they singing about the horse and its rider drowning? What did the horse do except enable the rider to chase after the Jewish People!?! Now that we know that the horse was punished for its supportive role, Miriam and the all-women's choir appreciated they have what to look forward by galloping to Mount Sinai.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz - We Are Our Own Worst Enemy – The Pharaoh Phenomenon

"I have met the enemy, and he is me." We are, indeed our own worst enemy. That quote comes from the famous cartoon character Pogo which appeared over 50 years ago in newspapers across the United States. This self-reflection, that we are our own worst enemy, is one of the greatest truisms of life.

In the Pele Yoetz, the famous book of mussar, written over 200 years ago in Bulgaria by Rabbi Eliezer Papo, he writes:

A person has the capacity to cause so much damage to themselves. Even his greatest enemy in the world cannot do as much damage as a person is able to inflict on themselves. One of the classic examples we see of this is Pharaoh in Egypt. What an example – a person who was prepared to die, for his firstborn to die, to destroy the entire Egyptian people and society, in the face of plague after plague. This obstinate, arrogant hubris that no matter how much destruction was going on, he knows better. He won't give in – ten times he was warned. When he sees they were confused in the desert, he ran after them, knowing that if he goes after this G-d Who has brought him to

Likutei Divrei Torah

his knees, it will ultimately lead to his death, as it does for him and his entire army. Indeed, in life, sometimes we can be our own worst enemies.

May we all reflect on the challenge that we have in life not to be our own worst enemy, but to be the navigators and captains of our lives, ultimately dictating and directing the path of our lives in the direction they ought to take. *[Excerpted]*



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date: Feb 2, 2023, 10:53 PM

subject: Jewish History Is a Study of the Future - Essay by Rabbi YY

Jewish History Is a Study of the Future

"Moses and the Children of Israel Will Sing"

The Belzer Rebbe, Rabbi Aharon Rokeach (1880-1957)

Future Tense

"That day, G-d saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians . . . The Israelites saw the great power G-d had displayed against the Egyptians, and the people were in awe of G-d. They believed in G-d and in his servant Moses. Moses and the Israelites then sang this song, saying..."[1] The Song at the Sea was one of the great epiphanies of history. The sages said that even the humblest of Jews saw at that moment what even the greatest of prophets was not privileged to see. For the first time, they broke into a collective song—a song we recite every day during the morning prayers.

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

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

בְּשַׁלְחָתָו, אֶת־יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל, ... אֲשִׁיר לְהַזְמָנָה קְדוּשָׁתְךָ, אֶת־יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל.

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

סנהדרין צ, ב: תניא אמר רבי מאיר מנין לתחיית המתים מן התורה שנאמר (שמות טו, א) שיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת ליה, שר לא נאמר אלא ישר מכאן לתחיית המתים מן התורה.

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

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

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

After the War

The following story happened on this very Shabbos, 79 years ago.[2] One of the great rabbis of Pre-war Europe was Rabbi Aharon Rokeach (1880 – 1957), the fourth Rebbe of the Belz Chasidic dynasty (Belz is a city in Galicia, Poland.) He led the movement from 1926 until his death in 1957. Known for his piety and saintliness, Reb Aharon of Belz was called the "Wonder Rabbi" by Jews and gentiles alike for the miracles he performed. He barely ate or slept. He was made of "spiritual stuff." (The Lubavitcher Rebbe once visited him in Berlin, and described him as "tzurah bli chomer," energy without matter.)

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

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

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

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

The First Shabbos

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

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

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

He gave this chilling answer. When the Jewish people sang the Song of the Sea, much of the nation was not present. How many people did not survive

the enslavement of Egypt? How many Jewish children were drowned in the Nile? How many Jews never lived to see the day of the Exodus? How many refused to embark on a journey into the unknown?

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

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

Future and Past

This is what sets apart Jewish history. All of history is, by definition, a study of the past. Jewish history alone is unique. It is a story of the past based on the future. For the Jewish people, history is defined not only by the past but also by the future. Since we know that redemption will come, we go back and redefine exile as the catalyst for redemption and healing.

For the Jewish people, the future defines and gives meaning to the past. With this, the Belzer Rebbe inspired his students to begin singing yet one again, as they arrived at the soil of the Holy Land, on Shabbos Beshalach 1944, 77 years ago.

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

Sunrise

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

But, he continued his story, he survived. I came out of the hell. And the day after liberation, as I lie in a bed for the first time in years, I watched the sunrise. For the first time, I felt so grateful for the sun. I felt empowered that after the long night, which seemed to never end, light has at last arrived.

This is the story of our people. Our sun has set. But our sun will also rise. Life, love, and hope will prevail. "Netzach Yisroel Lo Yishaker," the Eternal One of Israel does not lie. There will be an end to the night. "Moses and the children of Israel will sing."

And the singing can begin now.

[1] Exodus 14:15

[2] The story is recorded in the book "B'kdushaso Shel Aaron," page 436.

[3] Mechilta and Rashi Exodus 13:2

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Feb 2, 2023, 7:20 PM

Rav Frand - Parshas Beshalach

A Three-twined Lesson About Shabbos and Parnassa

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1235 Are women obligated in Lechem Mishneh? Good Shabbos! Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky makes the following observation in three different places in his Emes L'Yaakov, twice in this week's parsha and once in Parshas Ki Sisa:

"And Moshe said, 'Eat it today, for today is a Shabbos for Hashem, you will not find it (the mann) in the field.'" (Shemos 16:25). Rashi elaborates: The Jews went out every morning to find and gather mann for their daily food-consumption needs. They woke up Shabbos morning and asked Moshe whether they should go out to the fields and look for mann as they had been

doing every other day that week. Moshe told them not to go out, but rather to eat what they already had.

Rav Yaakov comments that the question posed to Moshe was whether they should go out to the fields that day or not. The logical answer to that question was "No, don't go out today. There is no mann in the fields today." And yet, his answer was "Eat what you have." Why did Moshe give that answer to the question 'Should we or should we not go out to collect the mann?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They received the mann in Moshe's zechus (merit). As far as they knew, Moshe Rabbeinu is dead. They wondered, "What is going to be with us? We are three million people with no supermarkets and no 7-Elevens." Moshe Rabbeinu, the source of their sustenance, is seemingly gone. When people

are fretting because they do not know what is going to be tomorrow, and they do not know what they are going to eat and their children are screaming, they panic. When people panic, they say "We need to do something!"

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

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

Rav Yaakov explains pshat that once they lost faith in Hashem, they forgot about the lessons of Shabbos—that the Ribono shel Olam will provide for them. When they panicked and built an egel, while it was not literally Chilul Shabbos, it was forgetting the yesod of Shabbos, which is that the Ribono shel Olam will provide.

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

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

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

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

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

The Targum Yonosan ben Uziel was bothered by the same point, but he offers an incredible interpretation. He says that Pharaoh was speaking to Dasan and Aviram, two members of Bnei Yisrael who remained in Mitzraim. However, Dasan and Aviram are present later among Bnei Yisroel in Parshas Korach. We know for a fact that they did leave Mizraim and traveled with Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar. We also know that there are interpretations of the expression “Bnei Yisrael went up Chamushim from the land of Mizraim” (Shemos 13:18) which claim that 80% of Bnei Yisrael died in Mizraim (during Makas Choshech – the Plague of Darkness) and only one-fifth (‘Chamushim’) of the Jewish population merited to leave with Moshe. If all the wicked members of the nation died during Makas Choshech, how was it that Dasan and Avriam, who certainly qualify as

reshaim (wicked people) managed to survive? Why were they still around in Sefer Bamidbar?

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

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

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2022 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

Rav Immanuel Bernstein

date: Feb 2, 2023, 6:59 AM subject: Pshuto Shel Mikra in Beshalach
PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman
zt"l PARSHAT BESHALACH Lashon HaKodesh and Machshevet
HaKodesh

בְּאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: He (Hashem) did not remove the pillar of Cloud by day. (Shemot 13:22)

Commenting on the words “**אָלָא בְּמִישׁ**,” Rashi explains: **הַקְבִּיחַ** “אֶת עַמּוֹד הַעֲנָן יוֹמָם וְאֶת עַמּוֹד הַאַשׁ לִילָּה

Hashem (would not remove) the pillar of Cloud by day, nor the pillar of Fire by night.

In other words, Rashi is observing that the word “**מִשׁ**” — causative, which means that the pasuk is not saying that the Cloud did not depart, but that someone did not remove it. That “Someone” — the subject of the sentence — is Hashem, Who is mentioned in the previous pasuk: “**וְהִנֵּה** לְפָנֶינוּ יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוֹד עַדְןָן בְּלֹתְקָם בְּקָרְבָּן וְלִילָּה בְּעַמּוֹד אַשׁ לְפָנֵיךְ — and Hashem would go before them with a pillar of Cloud to lead them on the way, and by night in a pillar of Fire to give them light.”

The Mizrachi's Approach Regarding this comment of Rashi, the Mizrachi writes:

Even though we also find the causative form used in an intransitive sense, (for example) “וְאַשְׁרָה יוֹשֵׁב נָנוּ נָגֵר לְאַמִּיתָה הַאֲדֻלָּה” — his attendant, Yehoshua son of Nun, a lad, would not depart from within the tent” (Shemot 33:11), [1] nonetheless, since it is possible to explain it here as a causative, without having to add or remove anything, Rashi chose to explain it in accordance with its normal usage. [2]

According to the Mizrachi, it would have been entirely legitimate to explain the word “שְׁמַנְיָה” as referring to the Cloud itself not departing, as we find in the case of Yehoshua. Nonetheless, since Rashi found a way to explain it as a

causative, which is generally what the *hi'fil* denotes, he saw that as the preferred option.

The Gur Aryeh's Approach The Maharal in Gur Aryeh takes an entirely different approach to this explanation of Rashi. The foundation of the Maharal's approach is that the full meaning of the *pasuk* cannot be derived merely from following the rules of grammar. Anyone who wants to understand the *pasuk* fully needs to bear in mind that the language of the *pasuk* is *lashon hakodesh*, and as such, it is a written expression of *Machshevet Hakodesh* — the holy thought and outlook of the Torah. In our case, the Maharal writes:

The word “*שִׁמְעָה*” is a causative form, which is always transitive. Had the *pasuk* wanted to say that the Cloud did not depart, it would have said “*לֹא יָמַשׁ* — *lo yamush*,” with a *vav*. Therefore, the explanation here is that Hashem did not remove it, which means it is a causative. Even though the *pasuk* says regarding Yehoshua “*תִּזְעַל מִתְּזַעַל*,” there is a major distinction between the two cases as is apparent to anyone who knows *lashon hakodesh*. For with regard to people, a transitive form is appropriate, since the person moves himself.[3] In this respect he is acting causatively, for he is causing his body to move. In the case of Yehoshua, the *pasuk* is telling us that “*שִׁמְעָה לֹא*” he did not move himself. The *pasuk* thus speaks of a person as two entities; firstly, his will, and secondly, his body. Similarly, the *pasuk* states later on (14:10) “*וְגַרְבַּה הַקְּרִיבָה*,” which Rashi explains to mean “*הַקְּרִיב אֶת הַלִּלְיוֹתָיו עַצְמוֹ וּמִיהָר לְפִנֵּי הַלִּלְיוֹתָיו* — he drew himself near and hurried before his armies.” This idea, however, is not applicable to a Cloud,[4] and therefore one must explain that “*שִׁמְעָה לֹא*” refers to Hashem not removing the Cloud.

What we have before us is not a technical or grammatical dispute regarding how to explain a certain *pasuk*, but rather a fundamental dispute in the sugya of *pshuto shel mikra*. According to the Maharal, the grammar of *lashon hakodesh* is not the same as the grammar of other languages. We say that Hashem “*רָמַתָּנוּ מִכָּל הַלְּשׁוֹנוֹת*” — elevated us above all other languages.” This means that the language itself is more elevated and reflects holier ideas. As such, the laws of grammar alone will not do justice to the full meaning of what the *pasuk* is saying.

The Difference Between Taking People and Taking Objects In keeping with this approach as to the way *lashon hakodesh* looks at the person, the Gur Aryeh explains Rashi's comments whenever the Torah refers to someone being “taken.” For example, the *pasuk* states (Bereishit 2:15) that Hashem “*took Adam and placed him in Gan Eden.*” Rashi comments: *לְקַחַת בְּדִבְרֵינוּ נָאִם וּפִתְחוֹתָה לִיכְנֵס*. He took him with nice words and persuaded him to enter.

Why does Rashi not leave the *pasuk* to its simple meaning, namely, that HaKadosh Baruch Hu physically took Adam? The Maharal explains that since the essential person is his *da'at* — his will — if a person is taken against his will, then “the person” has not been taken! One can only be considered to have taken someone else if he persuades that person to go, for then the essential person has been taken.[5]

In this regard, Rashi himself (Bereishit 43:15) points out that Onkelos uses a different verb for taking people than he does for taking objects. When an object is taken he uses the term “*נִסְבֵּה*,” whereas if a person is taken he translates “*בָּכְרָה*,” indicating that these are two different types of taking.

Lashon HaKodesh and Derashot Chazal This approach of the Maharal opens up a whole new way of understanding the relationship between the words of the *pasuk* and *derashot* of Chazal. Quite often the *drashah* seems to depart from the *pshat* of the *pasuk* in that it reads it differently than the rules of grammar would dictate or require. The Maharal is telling us that the *drashah* is very often responding to a deeper or higher level of *lashon hakodesh* that is outside of the strict rules of grammar, but nonetheless contained within the words. In this vein, the Maharal speaks critically of those who dismiss the *derashot* as being incongruous with the rules of *pshat*, for in his opinion they have failed to understand the full meaning of the word as part of *lashon hakodesh*, based on which Chazal made their *drashah*.[6]

[1] Here, the *pasuk* uses the same word as in our *pasuk* — *שִׁמְעָה*, yet it clearly refers to Yehoshua himself, that he is the one who did not depart, and not to someone else who did not remove him. [2] That is, as a causative. [3] That

is, the person decides to move, in which case he is the cause of his movement. [4] Which is not capable of moving itself. [5] See also Gur Aryeh to Bereishit 16:3, Shemot 14: 6, and Vayikra 8:2. [6] See, for example, the Gur Aryeh to Bereishit 28:11 concerning the *drashah* of Chazal that Yaakov initially put a number of stones by his head and they combined into one, and Devarim 26:5 concerning Chazal's *peirush* that “*אָרֶץ אֲכִילָה*” refers to Lavan trying to destroy Yaakov. Copyright © 2023 Journeys in Torah, All rights reserved.

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Ways We Shape Our Experience of God's World

by R. Gidon Rothstein

The Evil Inclination Needs an Opening

Yalkut Shimoni 261, on Parshat Be-Shalah, compares Amalek to a fly, a comparison Kli Yakar notes Hazal also applied to the yetzer hara, the evil inclination, in Berakhot 61a. The fly is too weak to make an incision, but takes advantage of open sores or wounds, expands the opening, colonizes the area, and infects the body (still true of many bacteria today). By analogy, the evil inclination cannot seduce fully righteous people, because there is no opening.

Ha-ba litamei, one who seeks or is open to becoming impure, has allowed the inclination in, making it much harder to battle it.

As Does Amalek

Kli Yakar understands the Midrash to be saying the fly analogy applies to Amalek, too, that as long as the Jewish people are whole with God, and have peace among themselves, Amalek will have no power or ability to bother them.

The Jews' travels through the desert to this point have been to places such as Masah and Merivah, so called because the people were at odds with each other, and Rashi to Shemot 19:2 had added that they tested God as well.

Amalek Then Pushes It Further

Given the opening, Amalek found ways to add to their impurity, introducing sexual immorality, a way to have God absent Himself entirely, God forbid, because we know—such as from the Bil'am story later in the Torah—God only resides among the Jewish people when they are careful about sexual morality. Without God's protection, they would lose to Amalek in a war, because they also would not be able to band together to help each other, fighting amongst themselves as they were.

I cheated in that previous summary, because I left out the kind of sexual immorality Kli Yakar assumed Amalek brought. That it was sexual immorality at all he attributes to Moshe Rabbenu's description in Devarim 25:18, asher karekha ba-derekh, translated by some of the translations I found on Sefaria as “met,” “chanced upon,” “encountered.” I believe Kli Yakar was playing on *keri*, the word for a male seminal emission, what he took to hint that there was some element here of what the Midianite women did to the Jews later.

Except here he says it was homosexuality, for reasons I do not think he made fully clear; the best I can come up with is that he took *karekha* to mean it was an act of pure *keri*, with no procreative possibilities, but that is a guess.

Personalized Shiurim

The topic of *shi'urim*, how we calculate halakhic distance, weight, volume, and more, comes up often in our Jewish practice (prominently for most of us at the Seder, when we try to figure out how much wine and matzah to drink and eat to fulfill the *mitzvot* of the night). Shemot 16:16 gave Hatam Sofer a chance to advance a theory he likely would not have taken farther than he did, but that I find tantalizing.

The verse says the Jews gathered manna “*ish le-fi ochlo*, each person according to what s/he eats,” then also says it was an *omer* per person. If an *omer* was enough for a large person, Hatam Sofer points out, it was much

more than needed for a smaller person. He suggests the solution lies in personalizing the omer. In other measures, the possibility of it being personal is clear: a tefah is four finger-widths, an amah six of those, and so on.

Pesahim 109b links length to volume in a mikvah, whose minimum size is either a space of three amot by one amah by one amah, or forty se'ah. Since an omer is .3 se'ah, you can do the math, but an omer can be figured out by lengths, and those lengths can be personal (in many areas of halakha, we adopt an average or general size; I think most who read this verse assume that was true of the manna that fell, the creative change Hatam Sofer is making).

As a person's body grew, his/her finger, tefah, and amah all grew, meaning that person's omer did as well, and more manna fell. Each day, when they measured the manna they gathered, and it was an omer, Hatam Sofer thinks it was that person's omer. To spot the lesson, people would have had to be aware of their growth, and take heed of the diet Hashem was teaching them, this amount for this size of person.

The Limits of Praising God

A climactic and famous verse from the Song of the Sea, 15:11, calls Hashem nora tehillot oseh pele, feared, fearful, or awesome in praise, Who performs wonders. Ha'amek Davar identifies the awe/fear in our approach to praising God for pele, wonders we do not understand. In his view, we are not allowed to speak to God as One Who performs whatever if we do not understand that whatever.

For him, it explains Yoma 69b's claim that Yirmiyah and Daniel adjusted their prayers, leaving out ha-gadol, the Great, ve-ha-nora, the Awesome. The way the Gemara presents it, the history of their times, non-Jews dancing on the place of the Temple and ruling over the Jewish people, made it impossible for them to use those appellations for God, until the Anshe Keneset Ha-Gedolah found an explanation.

Netziv is saying that Yirmiyah and Daniel did not doubt that God still was those things, they just didn't themselves understand it, and without such comprehension, it was prohibited to them to praise God in those ways.

Nora tehillot, awesome in praise, indeed, in that (according to Netziv) we must know what we mean when we address God with words of praise, even if Moshe Rabbenu taught us those praises. They must also be our own before we are allowed to say them.

How we shape our world, for Kli Yakar in making ourselves vulnerable to attacks from the more negative sides of existence, for Hatam Sofer in how much manna fell for each of us daily, and for Ha'amek Davar in what we may or may not say to praise God as we address our Creator.

from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> date: Feb 2, 2023, 3:46 AM subject: **Rav Kook on Beshalach:** Preparing for Sinai: The Mitzvot of Marah

Beshalach: Preparing for Sinai: The Mitzvot of Marah Even before the Torah was revealed at Mount Sinai, the Jewish people received several mitzvot at a place called Marah:

"They came to Marah... there God taught them a decree and a law, and there He tested them." (Exod. 16:23-25)

According to Sanhedrin 56b, one of the mitzvot that God taught at Marah was the mitzvah of Shabbat. It appears that Marah was a prelude of sorts for receiving the Torah at Sinai. How did the mitzvah of Shabbat prepare them for the Sinaitic revelation? And in what way was Marah a "test" for the Jewish people?

Preparing to Receive the Torah The area was called Marah because the waters there were bitter (mar).

"When Moses cried out to God, He showed him a certain tree. Moses threw it in the water, and the water became sweet" (Exod. 15:25).

When a person is ill, that which is sweet may taste bitter. Such was the case with the waters of Marah, which appeared to be bitter, but were in fact sweet. This is a metaphor for the Torah itself — its laws are sweet to those with a pure soul and a refined character, yet bitter and burdensome to those with a coarser nature (Maimonides, Hilchot De'ot 2:1).

Marah laid the groundwork for Sinai by reinforcing the traits of kindness and compassion that characterize the Jewish people (Yevamot 79a). The people would then be ready to receive the Torah, as their moral state would allow them to appreciate the sweetness of the Torah's laws.

How did the mitzvah of Shabbat accomplish this?

Even though the Sabbath commemorates the creation of the universe, it was not given to all of humanity. Shabbat is a special gift for the Jewish people (Sanhedrin 58b). Why is that?

The Test of Marah To bolster social order and cohesion, it is important that people are actively engaged in working for their livelihood. Work and business interactions help build relationships and trust between individuals and groups. Even if two people would not ordinarily be inclined to like one another, work can provide a platform for them to bridge any divides, as it is in their mutual interest to collaborate.

If people are not working together, however, these incentives are no longer present. It is human nature to prioritize one's own interests. Without an impetus to gain the good will of others, people tend to revert to self-centered tendencies.1

This was the test of Marah. The Jewish people were given the Sabbath day of rest — would they discover within themselves an innate quality of compassion? Would they remain considerate and accommodating to one another, despite the lack of material benefit to be gained from kindness on the day of rest?

The seven mitzvot of the Noahide Code, which are binding upon all of humanity, do not demand the refinement of human nature. They only require the avoidance of evil. The Torah, however, was given to the Jewish people in order to elevate them to be a holy people. The ethical ideals of Israel cannot be based on expediency and personal gain, but on a love for "that which is good and proper in the eyes of God" (Deut. 12:28). Therefore, it was necessary to bolster the foundations for their innate goodness. In this way, the mitzvot of Marah paved the way for the Torah's revelation at Sinai.

Adapted from *Otzarot HaRe'iyah* vol. II, pp. 172-173) Illustration image: The Sabbath Rest (Samuel Hirszenberg, 1894)

1 We have seen how social distancing measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic have caused "major problems in the economic, social, political and psychological spheres... The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has caused widespread unrest in society and unprecedented changes in lifestyle, work and social interactions, and increasing social distance has severely affected human relations." ('Social Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic. A Systematic Review.' *Invest Educ Enferm.* 2022)

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Posted on 02/02/23

Parshas Beshalach - Sea-Splitting Laughter
By Rabbi Zvi Teichman

Finding themselves between a rock and a hard place, with the sea on one side and the marauding Egyptians quickly approaching from the opposite direction, — וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל 'the Children of Israel cried out to G-d'. Rashi explains that 'they seized the אֹמֶנוֹת — art of their ancestors', implying that they prayed.

In the Selichos we recite on fast days and during Elul and Tishrei, we appeal to 'He Who answered our forefathers at the Sea of Reeds, may He answer us', alluding to the 'cries' that were expressed during that trying moment, that were responded to with the splitting of the sea.

Yet prior to the parting of the sea, almost in the same breath of their cry, the Children of Israel add an additional sentiment.

They said to Moshe, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt?"

Is this the voice of someone imploring G-d for help? Did they suddenly lose it, giving up on their former reliance on G-d, now descending into angry cynical resentment for their dire predicament?

During the 70's, Time magazine related a statistic that eighty percent of all comedians were Jewish. Are we really that funny?

Humor has been described as something that occurs when a person simultaneously appraises a situation as wrong or threatening and yet appraises the situation to be okay or acceptable in some way. Watching someone walk through a door where a pail of water is pitched strategically to fall unknowingly upon the victim, and douses him, arouses laughter. [Benign Violation Theory – Warren and McGraw]

However, when the threat is hostile and hurtful, i.e., a heavy weight waiting to fall on his head, it becomes a formula for cynical and sarcastic demeaning of another. The transition from good humor to caustic assault is too close for comfort.

Nasty puns, sarcastic comments, and cynical mocking are all formulated by assessing a threatening or wrong situation or fact and directing blame or placing shame on another.

Why do Jews have big noses? Because air is free. One could laugh at this example of humor or take offense in the intimation Jews are greedy.

The ability to laugh or be offended would depend on each person's perception of 'benign'.

Cynical comments are often used to diminish the stature of others we feel controlled by. Someone with an overbearing mother-in-law will utter mother-in-law jokes with an undertone of hostility. One who has a healthy relationship, could benignly share a humorous anecdote evincing a warm and friendly laugh.

The Jewish nation are renowned for their skepticism, not easily convinced or influenced.

Rav S.R. Hirsch sees in this very verse — where they cynically comment on the irony of having just left the vast 'graveyard' of Egypt, only to become the unburied victims in the desert of the charging Egyptians, doubting Moshe's leadership and the promise of G-d — as proof of their discerning nature. Quoting in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Halevi he writes: These continuous doubts form an important proof for the mission of Moshe... Moshe had to deal with a clear-minded people whose minds were not befogged by fantastic ideas, and who were not easily taken in, or convinced, by the first man who comes along... This sharp irony — are there no graves... — even in moments of deepest anxiety and despair is characteristic of the witty vein which is inherent in the Jewish race from their earliest beginnings.

Our unique Jewish DNA evidently equips us to perceive a world and all its ironies with this double-edged tongue. Hopefully we can laugh in the face of these absurdities we observe, knowing that all is benign when we place our trust fully in G-d, Who does all only for our good. Or it can prod in those moments of doubt, accusatory and cynical comments bewailing our fate, wondering aloud why G-d has abandoned us.

Even in those dark times when we cannot quite fathom the benign kindness that ultimately prevails even in the most difficult challenges — and rather than laugh we become despairingly sarcastic — nevertheless we are pining for clarity and a closeness that will permit us to believe.

The Maharal addresses the question that all commentaries pose, how can we understand this depiction of their crying out to G-d as a positive prayer 'seizing the art of our forefathers', when immediately following that cry we contemptuously question our fate and the commitment of G-d and Moshe to our survival?

He asserts that this description of their seizing the craft of their ancestors was deficient, they merely responded instinctively, without much thought, heart, or devotion. But, nevertheless, they were answered. Rav Hutner explains, it wasn't their prayers that were fulfilled — as the verse later states that G-d

instructed, that He will fight but they should remain silent — but rather it was their alignment with the instincts of the forefathers that held out hope for their being saved. There is no need for prayer. (פֶּהָד יִצְחָק פָּרוּם עַנִּין ט)
But don't we pray in Selichos that 'He Who answered our forefathers at the Sea of Reeds, may He answer us', indicating that indeed it was their prayers that were heeded?

Perhaps we can take this one step further.

The Targum Unkelos on the word וַיַּצְעַק — and they cried, translates it as וַיַּזְעַקּוּ, and they wailed, a connotation of תְּרֻעָמֹת — complaint. (רַבְּיוֹ בְּחִי)
In fact, we recite each morning וְאַתָּה עֲקַתְּמָה — and their outcry You heard at the Sea of Reeds. (תְּפִילַת וְכָרֹת עַמּוֹ הַבָּרִית)

Their cry was one of complaint. They turned to G-d confused, upset and frustrated, but they didn't abandon Him. This too is a form of prayer, where we openly vent to a Father we may not yet comprehend, but a Father nevertheless.

Rashi after describing this crying out in the craft of their ancestors, cites three instances where each of our four forefathers turned to G-d in prayer. The first is when Avraham sets out on the morning after having prayed the previous day on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom to see if his entreaties would be accepted, it reports he went to the place that עַמְּדָ שָׁם — he stood there the day before. (בראשית כט ז)

The second reference is when Yitzchok returns from Be'er-lachai-roi, going out לְשָׁוֹחֵן בִּשְׂדָה — to supplicate in the field.

Lastly, when Yaakov leaves for Charan, it says, וַיַּפְגַּע בַּמָּקוֹם — he encountered the place, alluding to his praying.

There are many other verses, quoted in the Mechilta, indicating how they each prayed throughout their lifetimes, yet Rashi selected specifically these three, and actually cites a verse regarding Avraham, which is not quoted in the source, the Mechilta.

These three expressions of prayer avoid any mention to their calling out to G-d in supplication, rather emphasizing the nature of the encounter.

עַמְּדָה — standing accents a stationing of oneself directly before G-d.
שָׁחָה — literally, conversing, portrays an image of an intimate, and almost casual conversation with G-d.

פְּגִיעָה — synonymous with the term פָּגִישָׁה — connotes a meeting of two close parties.

Prayer is not merely a forum for petitioning G-d, but more importantly sensing His closeness, His concern, His love.

Confrontation is also at times, a mode of connection. This is the עַקְעָה — we refer to in their 'relating' to G-d, that brought about their salvation. It may not be perfect, but in the relationship we are privileged to have with G-d, there is much hope even when we are cynical kvetchers.

The great Chassidic master, Reb Noach of Lechovitz, was once asked why he didn't follow precisely in the manner of avodah his father set forth. He responded that in fact he did exactly as his father did, "My father never imitated anyone else, and so I don't mimic him either!"

He directed the inquirer to this Rashi that speaks of the 'craft' of the forefathers, and cites three different synonyms for prayer, indicating each one's was originality of approach.

So too, the mode of 'crying out' ironically, was their attempt of connecting to G-d in a manner suited to their experience and circumstance.

The great 19th century Moroccan Gaon, Rav Yosef Knafo points out that the first letters of these three intimate approaches to prayer spell out the word עַקְעָה — abundant flow, but also the word עַשְׁפָה — sin.

We have a special relationship with G-d, it can effect copious blessing, or if abused, corrupt into sin.

Especially so, with this delicate mode of 'crying out' which develops from our unique DNA to be healthily skeptical, we must be wary to never become dangerously cynical that can lead to poisonous negativity.

This quality to laugh when the outcome is benign is our most potent talent. If we look at every difficulty as divinely directed, and no matter what comes

our way, we know it is for our benefit, it can allow us to laugh even in the direst of situations.

A story is related how the great Reb Simcha Bunim of Peshischa was once standing near the ocean and caught sight of a fellow Jew who was drowning and struggling mightily against the powerful waves and current. The Rebbe noticed that the fellow began to wear down, seemingly succumbing to defeat, accepting the inevitable. The Rebbe suddenly screamed out to the poor fellow, apparently in jest, "Send my regards to the Livyasan!" In that instant of humor, he momentarily became distracted from his fate, and renewed his commitment to survive, eventually making it to shore!

Perhaps the Jews finding themselves in a precarious state at the edge of the raging sea, with nowhere to run, engaged in a moment of black humor, ironically blurting out in jest, "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert?" In a flash of renewed reality, they forged forward, jumping into the sea, splitting it and seeing the brilliant truth of G-d's love and commitment to them in all situations they may ever face!

צבי יהודת טיכומא

From: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy info@rabbisacks.org

date: Feb 2, 2023, 9:24 PM

Renewable Energy

Beshalach

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL

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

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

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

"More than the Jewish people has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people."

Rest one day in seven and you won't burn out.

Shabbat, which we encounter for the first time in this week's parsha, is one of the greatest institutions the world has ever known. It changed the way the world thought about time. Prior to Judaism, people measured time either by the sun – the solar calendar of 365 days aligning us with the seasons – or by the moon, that is, by months ("month" comes from the word "moon") of roughly thirty days. The idea of the seven-day week – which has no counterpart in nature – was born in the Torah and spread throughout the world via Christianity and Islam, both of which borrowed it from Judaism, marking the difference simply by having it on a different day. We have years because of the sun, months because of the moon, and weeks because of the Jews.

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

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

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

God wanted the Israelites to begin their one-day-in-seven rehearsal of freedom almost as soon as they left Egypt, because real freedom, of the seven-days-in-seven kind, takes time, centuries, millennia. The Torah regards slavery as wrong,^[3] but it did not abolish it immediately because people were not yet ready for this. Neither Britain nor America abolished it until the nineteenth century, and even then not without a struggle. Yet the outcome was inevitable once Shabbat had been set in motion, because slaves who know freedom one day in seven will eventually rise against their chains. The human spirit needs time to breathe, to inhale, to grow. The first rule in time management is to distinguish between matters that are important, and those that are merely urgent. Under pressure, the things that are important but not urgent tend to get crowded out. Yet these are often what matter most to our happiness and sense of a life well-lived. Shabbat is time dedicated to the things that are important but not urgent: family, friends, community, a sense of sanctity, prayer in which we thank God for the good things in our life, and Torah reading in which we retell the long, dramatic story of our people and our journey. Shabbat is when we celebrate shalom bayit – the peace that comes from love and lives in the home blessed by the Shechinah, the presence of God you can almost feel in the candlelight, the wine, and the special bread. This is a beauty created not by Michelangelo or Leonardo but by each of us: a serene island of time in the midst of the often-raging sea of a restless world.

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

The ancient Greeks could not understand how a day of rest could be part of Creation. Yet it is so, for without rest for the body, peace for the mind, silence for the soul, and a renewal of our bonds of identity and love, the

Yaakov inquires: "If I need to use the facilities during davening, may I recite the beracha of Asher Yatzar after answering Borchu, provided I have not yet begun to say the beracha of Yotzeir Or?"

Introduction: Pesukei Dezimra, Yishtabach and Borchu

All of the above questions deal with the same general issue: What are the laws about making an interruption, a hefsek, between completing the recital of Yishtabach and prior to reciting Birchos Krias Shema, the blessings that are recited before and after the shema, which begin with the beracha of Yotzeir Or. Let me begin by explaining the reason why we recite Yishtabach in our davening.

The Mishnah recommends contemplation as an introduction to praying (Berachos 30b). This experience is reflected when we recite or sing the Pesukei Dezimra, literally, Verses of Song, prior to Borchu and Birchos Krias Shema. To show how important this aspect of serving Hashem is, we find that the great tanna, Rabbi Yosi, yearned to receive the special reward granted to those who recite the Pesukei Dezimra daily (Shabbos 118b). Reciting Pesukei Dezimra properly helps elevate one's entire tefillah to a completely different level. This has the potential to cause our prayer to soar!

Chazal established that we say two berachos, Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach, one before and one after Pesukei Dezimra. Baruch She'amar notes that we use the songs of David to praise Hashem. Since these two berachos are part of the Pesukei Dezimra introduction to our prayer, one may not converse from when he begins Baruch She'amar until after he completes the Shemoneh Esrei (Rif, Berachos 23a). This prohibition includes not interrupting between Yishtabach and the beracha of Yotzeir Or (Rabbeinu Yonah, ad locum, quoting a midrash).

The Tur (Orach Chayim 51), after citing this ruling, quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi that one who talks between Yishtabach and Yotzeir Or commits a sin serious enough that he loses the privilege of joining the Jewish army when it goes to war. According to halachah, prior to the Jewish army going into battle, a specially appointed kohen announces those who are exempt from warfare, which includes, according to this opinion, those who are concerned that their sins may cause them to become war casualties. The Jewish army is meant to be comprised of tzaddikim gemurim, the completely righteous, so that their merits will protect them on the battlefield. Those who are less righteous have no such guarantee, and the Torah therefore exempts them from fighting. Someone whose greatest sin is that he once spoke between Yishtabach and Yotzeir Or, and for which he has not performed full teshuvah, is too sinful a person to be allowed to serve in the Jewish army, out of concern that he might become a casualty.

Interrupting between Yishtabach and Borchu

As I mentioned above, the questions introducing this article all deal with the laws of interrupting between Yishtabach and the beginning of Birchos Krias Shema. The details of these halachos are not discussed in the Gemara, and, therefore, in order to establish what are the rules related to them, the halachic authorities needed to compare these laws to those of Birchos Krias Shema, which are discussed in the Gemara. In general, it is prohibited to interrupt during Birchos Krias Shema, although the Gemara mentions a few exceptions, including, at times, responding to a person's greetings, so as not to offend him. The Rishonim dispute whether one may respond to Borchu, Kedusha, and Amen yehei shemei rabbah (in Kaddish) during Birchos Krias Shema -- the Maharam Rotenberg prohibited it, whereas his disciple, the Rosh, permitted it (Rosh, Berachos 2:5). The Maharam Rotenberg contended that these responses are prohibited during Birchos Krias Shema because it is inappropriate to interrupt praise of Hashem in order to recite a different praise, even something as important as responding to Kaddish or Kedusha. The Rosh permitted this interruption because he held that responding appropriately to Hashem's praises should not be treated more strictly than responding to the greeting of a person, which is permitted under certain circumstances.

The poskim follow the opinion of the Rosh, concluding that one may answer the following responses while reciting Birchos Krias Shema:

- (1) Kaddish: One may answer "Amen, yehei shemei rabbah mevorach le'olam ale'almei almaya," and one may also answer "Amen" to the Chazzan's da'amiran be'alma (at the point that we end what is called chatzi-Kaddish). However, one may not respond to the other places in Kaddish (Chayei Adam 20:4).
- (2) Borchu: One may answer "Boruch Hashem hamevorach la'olam va'ed." This is true whether it is the Borchu that the chazzan recites before Birchos Krias Shema morning and evening, or whether it is the Borchu that the person receiving an aliyah recites prior to the Torah reading of his aliyah (Magen Avraham 66:6).
- (3) Kedusha: One may respond "Kodosh kodosh..." and "Boruch kevod Hashem mimkomo" in Kedusha, but one may not respond to the other parts of Kedusha we traditionally say, even the sentence beginning Yimloch (Ateres Zekeinim).
- (4) Amen to berachos: One may respond "Amen" to the berachos of Ha'Keil Hakadosh and Shema Koleinu (Rema 66:3), but not to other berachos.

Thundering applause

The poskim also dispute whether one should recite the berachos on lightning or thunder while in the middle of Birchos Krias Shema. The Magen Avraham (66:5) rules that one should, whereas the Bechor Shor (Berachos 13a) disagrees, contending that one should not interrupt one praise of Hashem with another. The Chayei Adam reaches a compromise, ruling that one should recite the beracha on lightning or thunder if he is between the berachos of Krias Shema, but not when he is in the middle of reciting one of the berachos. The dispute between the Magen Avraham and the Bechor Shor remains unresolved (Mishnah Berurah 66:19), and, therefore, someone who hears thunder while in the middle of Birchos Krias Shema may choose whether to recite the beracha or not.

Between Yishtabach and Borchu

Now that we understand the accepted halachah concerning interrupting Birchos Krias Shema, we can discuss the laws that apply between Yishtabach and Borchu. We should note that the interval between the completion of Yishtabach and the beginning of Yotzeir Or can be subdivided into three points:

(A) Between Yishtabach and Kaddish.

(B) Between Kaddish and Borchu.

(C) Between Borchu and beginning the beracha of Yotzeir Or.

Although one might think that Birchos Krias Shema do not start until one begins reciting the words of the beracha, the early authorities rule that once one has said or responded to Borchu it is considered that he is already in Birchos Krias Shema (Sefer Haminhag, quoted by Beis Yosef, Orach Chayim 57; Rema 54:3). Thus, one may not interrupt once one has recited Borchu, except for the list of four items mentioned above.

What interruptions are permitted?

Notwithstanding the fact that it is prohibited to speak between Yishtabach and Borchu, interrupting at this point is less severe than between Baruch She'amar and Yishtabach or during Birchos Krias Shema. Therefore, under certain circumstances, some interruptions are permitted. For example, if one needs to recite a beracha, it is better to do so after completing Yishtabach before answering (or saying) Borchu than during the Pesukei Dezimra. For this reason, someone who did not have tzitzis or tefillin available before davening, and they become available during Pesukei Dezimra, should put them on immediately after Yishtabach and recite the berachos on them.

The authorities discuss several other instances of interruptions and whether they are permitted between Yishtabach and Borchu, even though none of these interruptions is permitted during Birchos Krias Shema. All of the permitted interruptions qualify either as tzorchei mitzvah, mitzvah requirements, or community needs. To quote the Tur (Orach Chayim 54): "One may not interrupt between Yishtabach and Yotzeir if it is not for community needs or for someone who needs to be supported from charity." Thus, the Tur rules that, even though it is prohibited to talk after Yishtabach, one is permitted to make an appeal for charity at this point. Although, as we will soon see, this position is not universally agreed upon, there were other early authorities who held this way (Rav Amram Gaon, quoted by Tur; Beis Yosef quoting Kolbo #4). The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 54:3) quotes this opinion, although he considers it to be a minority view (see also Hagahos Maimoniyyos 7:70). In many places, it was customary to extend this leniency to include requesting personal assistance for other needs, as we will see shortly.

It is certainly permitted to recite the beracha upon hearing thunder between Yishtabach and Yotzeir, and most authorities permit one to recite Asher Yatzar at this point (Mishnah Berurah 51:8; however, see Chayei Adam [20:3], who prefers that one not recite Asher Yatzar until after Shemoneh Esrei).

At this point, we can answer one of the questions we raised at the beginning of this article: "If I need to use the facilities during davening, may I recite the beracha of Asher Yatzar after answering Borchu, provided I have not begun to say the beracha of Yotzeir Or?"

The answer is that one may recite Asher Yatzar before answering Borchu, but if one has already answered Borchu, he should wait until after Shemoneh Esrei before reciting it.

Before Kaddish or after?

In a situation when one may interrupt after Yishtabach, is it better to interrupt before reciting Kaddish, or after Kaddish and before Borchu? This exact question is discussed at length by the Darchei Moshe, the Rema's commentary on the Tur (Darchei Moshe, Orach Chayim 54:1):

"The custom is to make a mishebeirach for the ill between Yishtabach and Yotzeir; and occasionally, someone cries out [at this point in the davening to call attention to the need] to bring someone to justice, and these are considered mitzvah needs. (The Rema codifies this last practice in his comments to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 54:3.) However, I do not understand why the custom is to do so before Kaddish, and then after the interruption to recite Kaddish. Since this Kaddish refers back to Pesukei Dezimra, as I will explain in Chapter 55, we should not interrupt before it. Furthermore, one following this practice no longer has a basis to recite Kaddish

afterwards, since it now no longer concludes the Pesukei Dezimra.” The Rema then quotes the Kolbo (6), who says that if one did, indeed, interrupt between Yishtabach and Kaddish, then one should say Borchu without Kaddish. The Kolbo suggests another option for someone who interrupted after Yishtabach -- he should recite three or more pesukim of tehillim and then say Kaddish.

On the basis of this Kolbo, the Rema, with the agreement of other talmidei chachamim, changed the practice in his city and made a mishebeirach after Kaddish. However, he subsequently retracted this decision, because he found a more authoritative source that followed the original practice of interrupting before Kaddish rather than afterwards. The Or Zarua quoted a teshuvas ha’geonim that someone who began davening without a talis should stop after Yishtabach, recite the beracha, and put on the talis. However, if the community had already begun Kaddish, he should not recite the beracha. Thus, we see that if one needs to interrupt at this point in the davening, it is better to do so before Kaddish than afterwards. The Rema continues that this position is in line with the kabbalistic works that hold that one should not interrupt between Kaddish and Borchu. (By the way, the Rema himself was heavily steeped in Kabbalah, and authored a work on the topic.)

The Rema then concludes that it is best to avoid any interruption at all, and he cites that, in Prague, they had stopped all interruptions after Yishtabach. In a place where the custom is to interrupt, the Rema concludes that the best procedure is to interrupt after Yishtabach and before Kaddish. However, the chazzan should not interrupt between Yishtabach and Kaddish (Darchei Moshe, Orach Chayim 54:1; Rema, Orach Chayim 54:3).

At this point we can now answer Yitzchak’s question that we mentioned above: “Because of my work schedule, I must daven at a very early minyan. At times, we begin davening when it is too early to put on talis and tefillin, so we put on talis and tefillin after Yishtabach. Someone told me that when we do this, we are creating a problem with reciting Kaddish. Is this true? And if it is true, what should we do?”

The Rema concludes that everyone else should put on talis and tefillin after Yishtabach but the chazzan should put on talis and tefillin before Yishtabach so as not to interrupt between Yishtabach and Kaddish.

Kaddish before Musaf

There is a very interesting side point that results from this above-quoted Rema: In a place where the rabbi delivers a sermon prior to Musaf, the custom is to do so before Kaddish. Is there any problem with reciting Kaddish before Musaf, although there is now a huge interruption between the recital of Ashrei and the Kaddish? Whether the chazzan may immediately recite Kaddish should depend on the above-cited dispute between rishonim. Just as the Kolbo ruled that the chazzan may not recite Kaddish once he interrupted, unless he recites a few verses prior to saying Kaddish, here too, he would be required to recite a few verses prior to reciting Kaddish.

According to the Or Zarua, an interruption after the recital of the verses of Ashrei does not pose any problem with saying Kaddish afterward.

Az Yashir after Yishtabach?

Prior to addressing the final remaining question, we need to discuss a curiosity. The last Biblical passage cited as part of Pesukei Dezimra is Az Yashir, the Shiras Hayam that the Jewish people sang as praise to Hashem, after witnessing the miracles at the crossing of the Red Sea, the Yam Suf. The Tur (51) and the Avudraham explain that this passage is included immediately before Yishtabach because it contains fifteen mentions of Hashem’s holy Name, thus corresponding to the fifteen praises of Hashem that are stated in Yishtabach.

Others cite a different, but similar, idea: We complete Pesukei Dezimra with Shiras Hayam because the four-lettered name of Hashem is mentioned eighteen times between the words Vayehi Be’ashmores (that precede Az Yashir in the Torah) until the end of the Shiras Hayam. This adds up to a total of 72 letters of Hashem’s name and, thereby, represents a very high level of kedusha (Beis Yosef, 51, explaining Orchos Chayim; he also explains why we begin from Az Yashir and not from Vayehi Be’ashmores).

By the way, these two allusions are not conflicting, but complementary. One explains Az Yashir as the introduction to Yishtabach, and the other makes it a representative of the entire Pesukei Dezimra that serves as an introduction to the Shemoneh Esrei.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is now standard practice to include Az Yashir, the earliest versions of Pesukei Dezimra did not include any recital of Az Yashir, and others recited it after Yishtabach. For example, the Rambam’s Seder Hatefilos (located at the end of Sefer Ahavah in his Yad Hachazakah) places Az Yashir after the recital of Yishtabach.

With this introduction, we can now address the question asked above:

“In the shullen in which I used to daven, during the aseres yemei teshuvah we always recited the chapter of tehillim ‘Shir hama’alos mima’amakim’ right after Yishtabach. Someone recently told me that the reason why I do not see this custom practiced any more is because it is a hefsek in the davening. Is this true?”

Here is the background: The Magen Avraham (54:2) quotes the Arizal that during the aseres yemei teshuvah one should add Shir hama’alos mima’amakim after Yishtabach. The Magen Avraham then asks why this is not considered a hefsek. In response to this concern, the Dagul Meirevavah notes the Rambam’s placement of Az Yashir after Yishtabach; thus, it is curious to understand what was bothering the Magen Avraham. (One could also mention the Tur and others, who noted the custom of making charity and other communal appeals after Yishtabach, as proof that reciting Shir hama’alos should not be considered an interruption.)

Presumably, the Magen Avraham feels that adding Az Yashir is not a hefsek, since this is a praise of Hashem, which is the same theme as the entire Pesukei Dezimra. We may, therefore, add other praises to Pesukei Dezimra. However, Shir hama’alos is being added as a supplication, and the Magen Avraham considers this to be an interruption. And, although the Tur and the Rema mention a custom of interrupting for communal or mitzvah needs, today the prevalent practice is to not interrupt, as the Rema himself preferred. We could then conclude that although one may add quotations and passages from Tanach that praise Hashem both to the Pesukei Dezimra and immediately afterwards, one should not add passages that are being used as supplication, and that this is the reason why some did not observe the practice of reciting Shir hama’alos mima’amakim after Yishtabach. However, those who do maintain this practice are following the custom of the Arizal, and should continue to do so.

Conclusion:

The Ramban (Commentary to Shemos 13:16) explains: “All that Hashem desires from this world is that Man should thank Him for creating him, focus on His praise when he prays, and that the community pray together with concentration. Mankind should gather together and thank the Lord who created them, announcing: We are your creations!”

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The Curious Case of the Karpef

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

The title of this article will probably engender much inquisitiveness. What exactly is a karpef? No, it is not a type of French pastry, nor is it referring to the vegetable dipped into saltwater at the Pesach Seder. Rather, it is a term used to refer to an area not designated for human habitation. Before the colloquial “Huh?” is heard, some explanation is in order.

Tale of Three Reshuysos

According to Tosafos, the well known halacha of not carrying outside on Shabbos (‘Hotza’ah’) is based on the episode in Parashas Beshalach of several people attempting to gather the mun (manna) on Shabbos.^[1] The Pasuk states “On the Seventh Day each person should remain where he is and not leave his place”. The main prohibition taught here is to refrain from carrying from one’s house or private enclosed area (known as a Reshus HaYachid) to an area available for the entire Bnei Yisrael in the Desert to traverse (known as a Reshus HaRabbim). Chazal further explain that transporting the item in the reverse order (from Reshus HaRabbim to Reshus HaYachid), or even carrying it 4 Amos (between 6 - 8 feet) in a Reshus HaRabbim itself is prohibited as well.^[2]

So, basically, one may carry inside an area that is considered a Reshus HaYachid on Shabbos, while one may not carry in an area that is considered a Reshus HaRabbim. However, in order to be designated a Biblical Reshus HaRabbim, certain specific complex requirements must be met, including: It must be unroofed, meant for public use or thoroughfare, at least 16 amos wide, and be used by at least 600,000 residents daily.^[3]

Any area that does not meet the Torah’s definition of a Reshus HaRabbim, and yet is not enclosed (and therefore not in the category of a Reshus HaYachid), is called a Karmelis. A Karmelis shares the same basic rules of a Reshus HaRabbim, but since the prohibition is only rabbinic in origin, Chazal allowed a more lenient method of ‘enclosing’ it. This method is called an eruv, which in essence turns a Karmelis into a quasi-Reshus HaYachid, and therefore allows carrying throughout on Shabbos. So... What’s a Karpef?

It is not the author’s intent to get involved in the extremely complex and complicated issues involved in what constitutes a proper eruv,^[4] but rather to highlight a seldom known related issue: the obscure halacha of a karpef. As mentioned previously, a karpef refers to an area not designated for human habitation. The basic halacha is that one may not carry inside of a karpef on Shabbos,^[5] even though Biblically a karpef is considered a Reshus HaYachid! What many do not know^[6] is that its unique halachic status is that if there is a karpef larger than 5,000 square amos^[7] - “Yosair M’Beis Sa’asayim” (roughly 1,650 sq. meters or 17,750 – 20,000 sq. feet; approximately the area size of two or three buildings) inside of an eruv, it can render the entire eruv invalid!^[8]

If so, we must properly identify a karpef, as its definition can greatly impact the validity of many an eruv, since every city has non-residential areas. The Gemara, as well as the Shulchan Aruch, discuss it as place where it's "nizra ruvo ha'zra'im", mostly full of plants and shrubbery - meaning not a place where people ordinary would traverse or live.^[9]

Gardens & Parks

Although this ruling holds true, many decisors extend the definition of human habitation (and thus exception to the aforementioned rule) to include a use of the area for regular human needs. For example, many authorities maintain that a karpef refers exclusively to a vegetable garden or possibly a place that is overgrown with plants and weeds, which is why people would have no reason to go there. On the other hand they aver, public parks and gardens, which are purposely planted for people's pleasure and enjoyment,^[10] ^[11] would not fall under this category, as they are similar to orchards,^[12] and would not invalidate an eruv.

Additionally, since public parks are purposely created by a non-Jewish government, it would not fall into the category of a karpef that can be mevatel an eruv, since our intent is subject to the government's, as well as belonging to non-Jews.^[13] Yet, several others do not agree with this explanation and rule stringently, that even a flower garden would be included in the definition of a karpef.^[14] The halacha pesuka seems to follow the majority (lenient) opinion, especially as it has support from the Meiri, a Rishon whose opinion on topic the machmirim had not known about.^[15]

Cemeteries, Zoos and Empty Expanses

The Chazon Ish^[16] maintains that an empty expanse of land (perhaps a construction site) has the same applicable halacha of a karpef, since it currently has no residential use and consequentially can also invalidate an eruv. Yet, it appears that this is a novel approach, as it does not appear in earlier halachic literature.^[17]

A more common issue is how to classify a cemetery. Although some seem hesitant to "zone it" as such, nevertheless, since many come to a cemetery to daven on specific days (Tisha B'Av, certain Arvei Rosh Chodesh, Yahrtzeits, etc.), the prevailing opinion is to consider it a residential area,^[18] and not a karpef.

Similarly, since many visitors come to a zoo on a regular basis, it has the status of a residential area and would not invalidate an eruv.^[19] Other interesting places that one might not think are considered residential, yet are considered so from a halachic standpoint, include a shuk^[20](open air marketplace), a prison courtyard,^[21] and an airfield tarmac (runway);^[22] all of which are not considered karpifyos, and do not invalidate an eruv.

The Dvar Shmuel's Approach

The most commonly cited as well as most controversial approach to the halachos of karpef is that of the great Rav Shmuel Abuhav. In his famous sefer of responsa, Shu"t Dvar Shmuel,^[23] he raises an interesting point and an exception. He maintains that in an enclosed city (Ir Mukeyes Choma), even one with a karpef inside larger than 5,000 amos, the eruv is still valid. He explains that the reason a karpef normally invalidates an eruv is because an eruv only helps for places of human habitation, and a karpef is not suitable for such. Yet, if the whole city is enclosed, it shows that the whole city is meant for habitation, including the karpef; for if it wasn't, the city's founding fathers would never have enclosed it. In other words, the karpef becomes cancelled out by the city itself!

Many authorities, although several not agreeing with his proofs, nevertheless followed his lenient ruling; chief among them the famed Chacham Tzvi, and his son, Rav Yaakov Emden.^[24] A number of other prominent poskim, however, vehemently disagree, maintaining that such a karpef would invalidate an eruv, even in an enclosed city.^[25] Several decisors ruled that one may only rely on this heter under extenuating circumstances^[26]. The Mishna Berura and the Chazon Ish, among other authorities, maintain that one should not rely on this leniency,^[27] rather asserting that one should erect an eruv around this karpef, thereby excluding it from the rest of the city-wide eruv, and as a result sparing the city eruv from any karpef related consequence.^[28]

Bottom Line

Many contemporary authorities do take the Dvar Shmuel's rationale into account as an additional factor to permit an eruv to exist, even with a karpef in its midst.^[29] It is well known that many cities with a large concentration of observant Jewry in generations past traditionally relied upon the Dvar Shmuel's approach^[30] in construction of their Eruvin, including Yerushalayim in the days of the Aderes, Warsaw in its heyday, and Vilna in the days of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski zt"l. So, what does your city do? Which opinions does your city's eruv follow? One should speak to his Rav and /or Eruv Vaad to find out.

However, as stated before, this article was not meant to give a definitive ruling on the complexities of the karpef. Rather, its purpose is to highlight a small aspect of the extremely intricate and complicated issues involved in the construction of an eruv, and to give the reader an appreciation of those Rabbanim who erect and check the eruv

weekly in rain, sleet, or hail, just to save their fellow Jews from potential Chillul Shabbos.^[31]

This article was written in appreciation to and in honor of my father, Rabbi Manish Spitz, who has for decades tirelessly worked and continues to do so, to ensure that a proper eruv is up to save the rabbim from nichshal, and was the impetus for my interest and research in this inyan, l'iluy nishmas the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben Yechezkel Shraga and R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi and l'zechus for R' Yaakov Tzvi ben Rivka and Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua teikif umiyad. Thanks are also due to noted author and posek Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff for graciously allowing me to paraphrase part of his relevant article "Carrying in Public and the Use of an Eruv".

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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[Footnotes at https://ohr.edu/this_week/insights_into_halacha/5070]

Parshas Beshalach: From Egypt to Sinai

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. A DETAILED TRAVELOGUE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. “DOUBLED” EVENTS

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

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

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

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

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

A BRIEF OUTLINE

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

- A: Kiddush B’khorot – the Divine command to sanctify the firstborn (13:1-2)
- B: The commemoration of the Exodus – including instructing our children (13:3-16)

- C: The events at the Reed Sea (including the Song at the Sea) – (14:1-15:21)
- D: The waters at Marah (15:22-26)
- E: The Mahn (Mannah) (16:1-36)
- F: The waters from Horev (17:1-7)
- G: Amalek (17:8-16)
- H: Yitro and the appointment of judges (18:1-27)
- I: The preparation for entering the covenant (19:1-6)

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

III. STRUCTURE AS MESSAGE

The Torah not only informs us in words – it also informs us in style and structure. Not only by juxtaposing certain laws or narratives (e.g. the juxtaposition of the Mitzvah of Tzitzit with the prohibition of mixed-garments – see BT Yevamot 4a); but even the greater structure of the narrative can often be instructive. A wonderful example of this is R. Yoel Bin-Nun's explanation of the prophecies of Zekhariah (Megadim 12:49-97) – as is the structure of the "28 times" of Shelomo in the third chapter of Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) [I hope to write a shiur on this before Sukkot].

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

CHIASMUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. A: SANCTIFICATION

13:1-2:

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

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

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

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

19:5-6:

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

It involves a constant sanctification involving a life of Mitzvot;

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

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

V. B: INSTRUCTION

13:3-16:

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

Here again, we find the same two features:

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

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

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

18:19-27:

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

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

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

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

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

VI. C: WAR

14:1-15:21:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

17:8-16:

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

VII. D: THIRST

15:22-26:

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

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

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

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

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

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

17:1-7:

Here, we have an entirely different "water-experience". Besides the stronger complaint of the B'nei Yisra'el (which is beyond the scope of this shiur to discuss), note what type of waters Mosheh brings forth. He hits a rock which is on Horev (Mount Sinai) and waters gush forth. The symbolism of new waters flowing from Sinai is almost too obvious to mention. Unlike Marah, these waters are flowing (indicating dynamism and growth) and come from Sinai (the source of that dynamism and growth).

VIII. INTERLUDE: 12 SPRINGS, 70 DATE-PALMS

15:27:

The Mekhilta (Parashat vaYassa #1) makes the connection

R. Elazar haModa'i says: When the Holy One, Who is blessed created the world, he created twelve springs corresponding to the twelve tribes of Ya'akov and seventy date-palms corresponding to the seventy elders.

Before addressing the connection – why are there always seventy elders among the B'nei Yisra'el (see Sh'mot 24:1, Bamidbar 11:16)? I would like to suggest that this number held great significance for the B'nei Yisra'el – since it is the exact number of their ancestors who had descended to Egypt (1:5). The B'nei Yisra'el understood that their future was strongly rooted in their past – a past of twelve brothers, constituting seventy family members.

This is the connection with our springs and date-palms (which represent nourishment). First, let's summarize the evolution of the B'nei Yisra'el since the Exodus:

They take the first step towards sanctification.

They are given a system of perpetuating the story of their Exodus and transmitting it to their children.

They experience – first-hand – God's power.

They learn that their relationship with God is eternal.

Now – they also learn that their relationship is not beginning now – nor did it begin in Egypt. Their relationship is built on an ancient one that goes back to the Land where they are headed – and to their ancestral family which came down from there to Egypt. With this lesson in hand, they were ready for the big lesson of the Mahn.

IX. E: MAHN (Manna)

16:1-27:

As mentioned above, since the story of the Mahn sits at the center of our chiasmus, it must include some clue as to how the B'nei Yisra'el evolved into the people who could stand at Sinai and become God's nation.

There are two central features of how the B'nei Yisra'el were to respond to the Mahn.

They were to only take the proper amount per person in the household.

They were to take double on Friday and take none on Shabbat.

Each of these commands (which, for the most part, the whole nation followed) carries a critical step in the development of the holy nation.

R. Yaakov Medan, in a wonderful article (Megadim 17:61-90), points out that the command for each person to restrict himself to a daily portion for each member of the household represented not only a good deal of faith in God – but also tremendous self-restraint and concern for one's fellow. This is how he explains the “test” of the Mahn (16:4) – that we were tested to see how much concern each of us could demonstrate for our fellow, knowing that if we took more than our portion, someone else would go hungry. Indeed, the B'nei Yisra'el passed this test with flying colors! (v. 18) For a slave people, wandering in a desert to exercise this much self-restraint was a demonstration of their readiness to stand as a unified nation and to enter into a covenant which includes mutual responsibility.

The second piece is an even stronger statement. We first learn about Shabbat in the beginning of B'resheet (Genesis). God created the world in six days and ceases creating on the seventh day. For the first time, we are given the command to abstain from certain types of creative actions on Shabbat – in imitation of God (more on this next week). The lesson of Shabbat is integral to the education of the B'nei Yisra'el: They are not just to be the recipients of God's bounty; they are to be His partners in this world!

X. SUMMARY

Now we can see the step-by-step education of the B'nei Yisra'el and how they come from being a “nation in the midst of another nation” to “a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation”.

Moving from

a static relationship with God which revolves around one event in their personal past and which would be celebrated and commemorated in the family – (13:1-16)...

...to experiencing of God's power “firsthand”; (14:1-15:21)...

...to learning that the relationship with God will be ongoing (15:22-26)...

...to a reminder that their roots are ancient and that their nourishment comes from those roots (15:27)...

...to an exercise in concerned fellowship and partnership with God (16:1-27)...

...to a demonstration that the relationship with God will be a flowing source of life coming from Sinai (17:1-7)....

...to demonstrating their own readiness to fight and play a role in their own survival (17:8-16)...

...to being introduced to the Beit Midrash of Mosheh Rabbenu (18:1-27)...

...to standing at Mount Sinai and being invited to become God's holy people (19:1-6).

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Parshat Beshalach: Trust Me

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week's parasha introduces several new themes which we will revisit many times as we make our way through the Torah. As a transition between the period of enslavement in Mitzrayim (Egypt) and the journey through the desert, our parasha sets the stage for the rest of the Torah, which follows Bnei Yisrael through their desert journey toward Cana'an.

A. THE BLIND WALK:

Do Bnei Yisrael trust Moshe, their leader? Do they trust Hashem, their God? Several events of this week's parasha typify events we will encounter throughout the rest of the Torah which respond to these questions of trust:

SHEMOT 13:17 --

It happened, when Paro sent out the nation, that Hashem did not lead them by the way of the Land of Philistines, although it was shorter, because He said, "Lest the nation regret [leaving Egypt] when they see war, and return to Egypt."

The parasha opens with Hashem's leading the people toward Cana'an, their destination -- but He doesn't take the shortest route. Hashem knows that if Bnei Yisrael run into adversity (like a war with hostile nations), they might turn right around and run back to Mitzrayim. They don't yet have the confidence and resolve to fight an enemy in order to preserve their independence; their most likely response to a threat is flight to familiarity and safety. People react to uncertainty, anxiety, or danger by reaching for the familiar. Even though the life the people knew in Egypt brought them slavery, cruelty, pain, death, hatred, and oppression, they might, Hashem knows, still try to return to that life if they feel like they are standing on quicksand. People are willing to pay an enormous price to cling to the feeling of security.

How does this impact their relationship with Hashem?

Sometimes, as here, Hashem makes allowances for the people's mentality. But at other times, He challenges them to take risks and not allow their experiences to control them. Sometimes this results in His becoming angry when they fail.

SHEMOT 13:21-22 --

Hashem went before them by day, leading them by a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to illuminate for them, traveling by day and by night. The pillar of cloud did not depart by day, nor the pillar of fire at night, from before the people.

Hashem's presence -- His guidance and protection -- remains with the people at all times. But this does not banish their insecurity: despite constant signs of Hashem's presence, the people continue to wonder whether Hashem is truly with them. Besides the cloud and the fire, the "man" ("manna") which falls from the sky every day, the water which comes from rocks when stricken (on several occasions), and the birds ("selav") which are sent to them every evening for dinner all testify to Hashem's presence. But the people remain unsure: is Hashem truly among them? Can they truly depend on Him?

Why don't the people "get it"? Can't they see the cloud, the fire, the birds? Did their bread fall from the sky back in Egypt, too? Why don't they understand that Hashem is truly with them?

"TRUST ME":

Trust is built on facts, but it is made of emotion and supported by experience, encouragement, and familiarity. The people certainly see the pillars of cloud and fire, they certainly gape at the food falling from the sky and the water from rocks. But these very miracles contribute to their insecurity, offering them the impossible and the bizarre in place of the unremarkable but familiar. The miracles say "Hashem is present" to their intellect, but their hearts tell them that tomorrow there will be no more water from rocks or manna from heaven, that this is all a dream. This is why they violate Hashem's instructions and leave over manna from the day's gleanings: they do not believe it will be there tomorrow. It is all a fairy tale. Their eyes tell them what is here today, but this miraculous ground doesn't look solid enough to step on; if they begin to trust this state of fantastic affairs and depend on it for their needs, it will suddenly evaporate and disappear.

Awhile ago I participated in a training session at a conference. The topic of the session was "Building Leadership by Building Trust." We started off with an exercise called the "Blind Walk." We split into pairs; one member of the pair would close his eyes, and the other would keep his eyes open. The one with his eyes open would lead the other around the

conference center -- down the hallways, up and down stairs, escalators, and elevators, outside the building, into the pool (it was in Miami), into the gift shop, down the boardwalk. I started to lead my partner down the hall, and the first thing I noticed was that he did not trust me! Although we know each other well, he refused to walk at the brisk pace at which I wanted to walk. I was surprised -- did he think I would steer him into a wall or trip him down a flight of stairs? If he trusted me, wouldn't he put his fate into my hands, relax, and walk willingly?

He couldn't do it. Being blind was so unfamiliar and so unsettling that he was unable to let me be his eyes. When it came my turn to close my eyes and have him lead me, I was able to relax and participate only by a tremendous act of will. I did not trust him any more than he trusted me -- the situation was just too unfamiliar -- but for seven minutes I made this leap of faith (hoping it would not involve a leap down the stairs) and forced myself to tolerate it.

This is what Bnei Yisrael face in the desert -- the Blind Walk. But instead of seven minutes, they are walking the Blind Walk all day and all night. Nothing they can see means anything to them; everything is completely unfamiliar. They know Hashem is acting as their eyes, but this knowledge alone does not create trust. They do make the leap of faith at certain times, like when they walk right into the middle of the split ocean, but they cannot maintain the "Blind Walk" at all times. Imagine that the Egyptian army is at your heels, chasing hard in chariots, armed and angry. You turn to your leader frantically, and he tells them that the proper thing to do is to do nothing -- that the invisible God will save you! It is to Bnei Yisrael's immense credit that they accept Moshe's words and obey his command to walk into the sea.

B. HORSES AND CHARIOTS:

Last week we developed the idea that one of the primary aims of the plagues is to introduce Hashem into the public sphere as the Power behind everything. This was expressed by the repeated formula, "They [Mitzrayim] shall know that I am Y-HVH." If, as we suggested, "Y-HVH" means "The One who is Present," then Hashem's saying "They shall know that I am Y-HVH" means, "They will know that I am the God Who is aware of events in the world and intervenes in those events." The specific nature of the plagues expresses the surprising truth (to the pagan mindset) that one God is Master of the water, air, land, animals, and humans, and that these different spheres are not each controlled by a "local" deity.

In this week's parasha, the "education" of the Egyptians comes to an end. Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael, who have just left Egypt, to behave as if they are confused and lost in the desert so that Paro and his people will be tempted to chase them down and recapture them. According to Hashem, the point of this is to show them that "I am Y-HVH" -- "I am present; they cannot do a thing against My will." But since the Egyptian army does not survive the parasha, what is the point of teaching them that "I am Y-HVH"?

Part of the lesson is for the world at large. Although Mitzrayim is the direct object of Hashem's lesson as the immediate oppressor and evildoer, the lesson is targeted toward all of humanity. "I am Y-HVH" is a message broadcast to all nations; Mitzrayim is only the current target/example. That this message is heard by the international community (despite the ancient world's appalling lack of CNN) is confirmed by a) the latter part of the Shirat Ha-Yam (Song of the Sea), which focuses on the reaction of some of the nations, b) next week's parasha, where we hear that Yitro has heard of the miracle at the sea, and also c) in Sefer Yehoshua by Rahav, a resident of Yeriho (Jericho), who tells the spies sent to the city by Yehoshua that everyone is terrified of Bnei Yisrael because they have all heard of the miracles done for them.

"EILEH BA-REKHEV VE-EILEH BA-SUSIM"

We now move to the actual confrontation between Mitzrayim and Bnei Yisrael. In that context, one theme appears with great prominence: the focus on the chariots and horses of the Egyptians. This begins with Paro himself, who leads the move to the chariots:

SHEMOT 14:6 --

He harnessed his CHARIOT and took his nation with him.

We then hear about the quality and quantity of the chariot forces Paro takes with him:

SHEMOT 14:7 --

He took six hundred choice CHARIOTS, and all the CHARIOTS of Mitzrayim, with officers over all of them.

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

SHEMOT 14:9 --

Mitzrayim chased after them and caught up with them camped at the desert; all the HORSES of Paro's CHARIOTS, his HORSEMEN, and his army, at Pi Ha-Hirot, before Ba'al Tzepon.

We next hear about the chariots from Hashem himself:

SHEMOT 14:17 --

"I will strengthen the heart of Mitzrayim, and they will come after them; I will bear down upon Paro, his whole army, his CHARIOTS and his HORSEMEN."

We hear about the horses and the chariots again as they begin to follow the Bnei Yisrael into the water:

SHEMOT 14:23 --

Mitzrayim chased and came after them -- all the HORSES of Paro, his CHARIOTS and HORSEMEN, into the sea.

We next hear the curious detail that Hashem rips the wheels off of the chariots, and that the chariots begin to drag "roughshod" over the temporarily exposed seabed:

SHEMOT 4:25 --

He [Hashem] removed the wheels of their CHARIOTS, and they dragged heavily

We next hear about the chariots in Hashem's command to Moshe to rejoin the split waters:

SHEMOT 14:26 --

Hashem said to Moshe, "Stretch your hand over the waters, and they will return upon Mitzrayim, on his CHARIOTS and on his HORSEMEN."

And we hear about them again as they are destroyed:

SHEMOT 14:28 --

The waters returned and covered the CHARIOTS and the HORSEMEN of all of the army of Paro which had come after them in the sea; not even one was left.

We next hear about the horses and chariots in the first line of the Shirat Ha-Yam:

SHEMOT 15:1 --

Then Moshe and the Bnei Yisrael sang this song to Hashem: "I shall sing to Hashem, who has been exalted; the HORSES and CHARIOTS, He tossed into the sea."

And then once more during the Song, once just after the Song, and once more in Miryam's song:

SHEMOT 15:4 --

The CHARIOTS of Paro and his army, he threw into the sea; the choicest of his officers sank in the Yam Suf.

SHEMOT 15:19 --

For the HORSES of Paro came, with his CHARIOTS and HORSEMEN, into the sea, and Hashem returned upon them the waters of the sea

SHEMOT 15:21 --

Miriam responded to them, "Sing to Hashem, for He has triumphed; HORSE and its CHARIOT He threw into the sea."

Why do horses and chariots get so much attention here? Why does the Torah mention them so many times in the process of the story and in recounting the songs?

One other question has been bothering me since we left Sefer Bereishit: remember that when Yosef revealed himself to his brothers and sent them back to Canaan to bring Ya'akov down to Egypt, Ya'akov did not believe his sons when they told him that Yosef was still alive and was the (de facto) king of Egypt. The Torah says that he believed the story only when

he saw the wagons which Yosef had sent from Egypt to pick him up. What is there about wagons that convinces Ya'akov that the story is true? And, for that matter, why does Paro himself make such a big deal out of the wagons when he tells Yosef how to arrange for his father to come down to Egypt?

Here, a bit of Torah U-Mada seems warranted: what role did chariots play in warfare at the time of the Exodus, and what role did wheeled vehicles play in general? Archaeological, textual, and other historical evidence has convinced many scholars that while the wheel was certainly known in Cana'an at the time of the Avot, it was not widely used for either transportation (wagons) or war (chariots and war-wagons). On the other hand, we know very well from the Torah that wagons and chariots are very much in use in Egypt. Several reasons are advanced by scholars:

- 1) Cana'an tends to be hilly and rocky, which makes life hard on the wheels. Until technology had produced a more sturdy wheel, it was more practical to use pack animals like donkeys for transportation (remember that Ya'akov's sons use donkeys to transport the food they buy from Mitzrayim back to Cana'an). Egypt's softer, flatter terrain, on the other hand, is gentler to wheeled vehicles.
- 2) If you think producing and maintaining a modern automobile is a complicated process, it was no easier 4,000 years ago to build a wagon or chariot and keep it in good repair. Producing and maintaining wheeled vehicles was an industry which required:
 - a) Considerable technical know-how.
 - b) Skilled craftsmen to build and fix the various parts of the vehicles.
 - c) Special workshops.
 - d) Storehouses for parts.
 - e) The gathering of different types of material (including several types of wood, leather, reeds, and later on, large amounts of metal)
 - f) Plenty of money in order to pay for the whole industry. (Think "Detroit.")

For these reasons, **only organized nations with powerful economies could afford to support a wheeled-vehicle industry.** Cana'an was highly splintered, tribal, and somewhat nomadic, while Egypt was more unified and had a more stable agricultural economy (supported by the fertile Nile delta).

This may explain why the appearance of the wagons convinced Ya'akov that the story about Yosef was true: the wagons could only have been supplied by a powerful person from Egypt, someone who could allocate valuable resources (wheeled vehicles) to the task of carrying Ya'akov and his family down to Egypt. And who would have done such a thing for him besides his son?

In Tanakh, the first time we hear of a large-scale chariot force being used by Bnei Yisrael is in the time of Shlomo Ha-Melekh (see I Melakhim 4:26, II Divrei Ha-Yamim 9:25, I Melakhim 10:26). Only once David had unified the country and Shlomo had built it into an economic power was it practical to field a military force of chariots. In fact, Shlomo built cities just for the chariots (see I Melakhim 9:19).

CHARIOTS OF WAR:

In our parasha, we encounter wheeled Egyptian vehicles once again: chariots drawn by horses. According to historians, chariots served a dual purpose on the battlefield:

- 1) They served as a moving platform from which to fire arrows (and occasionally to toss javelins).
- 2) They served to scare the enemy out of its wits (see Devarim 20:1).

Horses, which were used to draw chariots, were used mostly for this purpose alone; it was fairly rare (and considered somewhat low-class) for a person to ride on the horse itself (later on, this changes, as we see from Qohelet 10:7). Just as the automobile industry of today is always tinkering with new designs and ideas, introducing new models every year, ancient civilizations did a lot of experimenting with different chariot designs. In order to design effective models for different terrain and different purposes, and in order to take advantage of better technology and better materials, there was constant experimentation with different ways of building chariots. The Egyptian war-chariot reached the height of its development in the 14th century BCE, shortly before the reign of Ramses II -- the Pharaoh who is supposed to be the Paro we know so

well.

One other element is critical to the story: in several places in Tanakh, we see that Mitzrayyim is *the* place to buy horses. Horse-breeding and trading are major industries there. In fact, the Torah specifically forbids Jewish kings to send people to Egypt to buy horses (Devarim 17:16); the warning is necessary only because Egypt is so attractive a market for horses, which are necessary for a strong chariot force and for less violent purposes. Later in Tanakh, we hear that Shlomo Ha-Melekh does indeed buy horses from Mitzrayyim (I Melakhim 10:28-29). In addition, he buys chariots from Mitzrayyim.

BACK TO THE SCENE ON THE SEA:

Now we return to our original question: why does the Torah place so much emphasis on the Egyptian chariots, horsemen, and horses? Furthermore, of all the details which the Torah could have reported to us about the destruction of the Egyptian army, why do we hear that Hashem "removed the wheels from their chariots" and dragged them over the seabed?

Several possibilities:

- 1) To account for Bnei Yisrael's great fear in facing this army.
- 2) To dramatically depict the power and momentum of the Egyptian pursuit and Hashem's sweeping destruction of the Egyptian army.
- 3) The Torah's emphasis on horses and chariots is meant to hint to *Mitzrayyim's* emphasis: the Egyptians, horse-breeders and horse-traders par excellence, professional chariot-makers and chariot-sellers, have built the technology of warfare to a pinnacle. And they *believe* in what they have built. Their chariots and horses will bring the Jewish slaves back, no matter what Power is helping the fleeing Bnei Yisrael. With sophisticated and deadly weapons, Egypt believes it can best even the awesome Y-HVH, whose great power has just demolished mighty Egypt. In modern terms, they believe that the final factor in war is more accurate missiles, faster and stealthier airplanes, and more powerful nuclear weapons -- not the support of Hashem.

This is why the Torah makes special mention of Hashem's removal of the wheels of the chariots as they cross the seabed. Using Bnei Yisrael as a decoy, Hashem draws the Egyptians into the danger zone and then overpowers them by paralyzing their trusty weapons. Removing the wheels of their chariots strips the Egyptians bare of the war-tools they trust to guarantee their victory. They drag to a halt with the walls of water trembling around them, and in the moments between the removal of the wheels and their deaths, the Egyptians have just enough time to understand what has happened:

SHEMOT 14:25 --

Mitzrayim said, "I must run away from Bnei Yisrael, for Hashem is fighting for them against Mitzrayyim!"

C. DEATH UNDER COVER:

At what time of day does the sea split, and at what time of day do the people cross the exposed seabed? A look at the text supplies the answer:

SHEMOT 14:21 --

... Hashem moved the sea with a powerful east wind ALL NIGHT, and made the sea into dry land. The waters were split.

Apparently, the waters separate slowly, under the pressure of the wind Hashem causes to blow all through the night. This means that it is dark. Keep reading:

SHEMOT 14:24-25 --

It happened, at the MORNING WATCH, that Hashem faced the Egyptian camp through a pillar of fire and cloud, and confounded the Egyptian camp. He [Hashem] removed the wheels of their chariots

Bnei Yisrael enter the parted sea and begin to cross while it is yet dark (the morning watch means the third of the night closest to morning), and Egypt gives chase through the darkness. Sometime during this pursuit, Hashem causes the chariots to lose their wheels, grounding the Egyptian pursuers in their tracks.

SHEMOT 14:27 --

Moshe stretched his hand out over the sea, and the water returned to its strength TOWARD MORNING; Egypt was running toward him, but Hashem overturned Mitzrayim in the midst of the sea.

Sometime shortly before dawn (morning), Bnei Yisrael complete their crossing. Moshe turns back to the parted sea, stretches out his hand, and the walls of water crash onto the seabed, drowning the trapped Egyptians - in the dark before morning.

To review the process briefly:

- 1) The wind blows "all night" in order to split the water;
- 2) Hashem "looks" in fury at the Egyptians, terrifies them, and removes their wheels at the "ashmoret ha-boker" -- the night being divided into three "ashmorot," "watches," and the "ashmoret ha-boker" being the final third of the night;
- 3) Finally, Moshe is commanded to return the waters to normal "towards morning," whereupon the Egyptians drown.

In other words, Bnei Yisrael do not actually witness the Egyptians drowning, since it takes place just before dawn! They only know for sure what has happened when they see the bodies float to shore after sunrise, as the text emphasizes:

SHEMOT 14:30-31 --

... Yisrael saw Mitzrayim dead on the shore of the sea. Yisrael saw the mighty hand which Hashem had used against Mitzrayim; the nation feared Hashem, and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant.

Only now do Bnei Yisrael know what has happened, when they "see Mitzrayim dead on the shore"; only *then* do they "see the mighty hand . . ." because only THEN do they realize what has happened.

Where else do we find "unwitnessed destructions" in the Torah?

- 1) No'ah is commanded to build a "tzohar" for the teiva (Ark), which is something like a window. The Midrash cites two opinions about this tzohar: one says it was a window, the other says it was a luminous gem-like material which provided light for the teiva. According to some interpretations (early sources for which I am currently unable to trace), what drives this second opinion is that No'ah was not considered worthy enough to witness the destruction of the rest of the world. He merits being saved, but he is not so perfect that he can stand above all of humanity and watch everyone else die.
- 2) As Lot and his family leave Sodom, they are commanded not to turn around to see the destruction of the city. Of course, Mrs. Lot disobeys and turns into a pillar of salt.

As the sun rises over the sea and the Egyptian bodies become visible on the shoreline, Bnei Yisrael finally understand what has happened to their pursuers. But they do not witness the crashing of the sea over their enemies. The Egyptians deserve their fate, but Bnei Yisrael are not so perfect that they can stand above the Egyptians and witness their destruction. For this reason, the whole scene takes place under cover of night. Only as the day dawns do Bnei Yisrael "see the mighty hand with which Hashem did to Mitzrayim."

WHY SING?

This brings us to the next theme of the parasha, which we will deal with only briefly: the Song. What is its purpose? Why do the people sing, and why is the Song recorded in the Torah? The most obvious function of the Song is praise. But what else might be the purpose of the Song?

Looking at the structure of the Song may yield a clue. It splits neatly into three parts:

PART I: PESUKIM 1-6:

- a) Begins in third person, describing Hashem, and moves to second person in the last line as a transition to the second part.

b) Ends with a poetic "summary" line.

c) Topic: praise of Hashem's power

PART II: PESUKIM 7-12:

a) All in second person, addressing Hashem.

b) Ends with a poetic "summary" line.

c) Topic: description of the actual event of the splitting and joining of the sea.

PART III: PESUKIM 13-18:

a) All in second person, addressing Hashem, until the last line, which returns to third person (like the beginning of the Song).

b) Ends with a poetic "summary" line.

c) Topic: The fear of the nations as the Bnei Yisrael travel through the desert, and a look forward to establishing a place of holiness on a special mountain once they get to Eretz Cana'an.

Looking at other songs which appear in the Torah and their function also provides possibilities:

The Song of Ha'azinu: Moshe is commanded to teach it to the people and make sure they remember it so that it will be passed down to later generations. The predictions it contains will serve as a resource to explain to the people how to understand events which happen to them in the course of history. In other words, the purpose of the Song is educational.

The same may be true of the Song in our parasha: one of its purposes is to teach the people something and remind them of it in future generations: Part I reminds them of the power of Hashem; Part II reminds them of how He saved them at the sea; and Part III reminds them of the international reaction to the event and directs their attention toward the ultimate goal: establishing a center for worship of Hashem in Eretz Cana'an.

Song is an excellent medium for education because of its vivid imagery and, of course, because it is easier to remember a song than a list of facts.

Shabbat Shalom

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

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

WHO'S IN REFIDIM?

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

"And Amalek came, and attacked Israel at REFIDIM..."
(see Shmot 17:8, after 17:1-7)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AMALEK ATTACKS

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

most probably, primarily the women and children.

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

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

Amalek capitalizes on Bnei Yisrael's disadvantage. [They break the laws of the 'Geneva Convention.'] Even in war there are accepted norms of conduct; men fight men, armies engage armies. Amalek's attack is outright unethical, even by wartime standards.

[See Rashi & Ibn Ezra on "ayeif v'yagaya" on Devarim 25:18.]

YIRAT ELOKIM

Further support of this interpretation may be drawn from the conclusion of the pasuk cited earlier from Sefer Devarim:

"...v'LO YA'RAY ELOKIM - and he (Amalek) did not fear God." (Devarim 25:18, see Rashi & Ibn Ezra in contrast to Chizkuni)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this sense, one could suggest that "zecher Amalek" - the remembrance of Amalek - could be understood as a 'generic' term describing any aggressive nation that would act in a similar unethical manner, and not necessarily a 'genetic' term, describing any family 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)