

Parshas Beshalach

For the week ending 13 Shevat 5756
2 & 3 February 1996

Summary

Pharaoh finally sends the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Hashem leads the Jewish People towards Eretz Yisrael with pillars of clouds and fire on a circuitous route which avoids the *Plishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Bnei Yisrael are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but Hashem protects them. Moshe raises his staff, and Hashem splits the sea, enabling the Bnei Yisrael to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by Hashem, commands his army to pursue the Bnei Yisrael, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in song thanking Hashem. After traveling for three days only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people start to complain. Moshe miraculously produces potable water for them, and in Marah they receive certain *mitzvos*. The people complain to Moshe and Aaron that they had better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quails so they can have meat and provides the 'Manna' for them. It is a miraculous bread that falls from the heavens every day except on Shabbos. However, on Friday a double portion descends to supply the Sabbath needs. Nobody is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but Manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbos. Some of the Manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. After the Jews complain again about the lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Amalek then attacks the Jews. Joshua leads the battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

The Jewish People are in essence 'one man', and when they are also of 'one heart', then the world stops and Heaven meets earth..."

Commentaries

IMAGINE

"And they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe His servant..." (14:31)

To conceive and to imagine. We know that we cannot picture the infinite. We understand that our brain, a finite machine, can not imagine infinity. But if we cannot imagine the infinite, maybe we could, at least, *conceive* of it. Maybe we could probe the borders of the finite with the power of conceptualization, transcending the limit of synapses and neurons, blood and tissue that lie within our heads...

By the time they left Egypt, the *Bnei Yisrael* had experienced the most earth-shaking miracles in the history of the world. They had witnessed the entire natural order turned on its head. Water becoming blood. Plagues of frogs, lice, dangerous animals, an epidemic, boils, hail, locusts. Darkness engulfing their enemies. And finally the death of all of Egypt's first-born. Could it be that only now, with the splitting of the sea and the total destruction of the Egyptian army - only now - "**they had faith in Hashem**"? Didn't they have faith in Hashem until now?

Obviously, the experience at the parting of the sea elevated Yisrael to some new level of faith in Hashem. What was this new dimension of faith that they reached after crossing the sea?

When Yisrael saw the power of Hashem revealed in Egypt, they thought they had seen the extent of Hashem's dominion. They thought that even if they could not imagine the infinite power of the Creator, then, at least, they could conceive of it. However, when they saw the even greater miracles at the sea, they realized that not only was Hashem's power far greater than they had previously conceived, **but even what they were witnessing now was not the total extent of Hashem's dominion**. It was this realization which led to a new level of faith in Hashem, a faith unlimited by what they could imagine, or even what they could conceive...

(Based on the Sfas Emes)

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel
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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-810-315

fax: 972-2-812-890

ohr@jer1.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Gramercy.ios.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

avram.rothman@canrem.com

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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

JUST ONE HEART

“And behold Egypt was journeying after them...” (14:10)

Rashi says that the Egyptians were united *‘with one heart like one man’* in their desire to overtake and subdue Israel. Interestingly, a phrase almost identical to this - *‘like one man with one heart’* - also describes the Jewish People as they are about to receive the Torah at Sinai. An almost identical expression. But with just two small words reversed...

The Jewish People are in essence a unity - like *one man* - because they are all offshoots of the same spiritual root. When they are divided, their schisms are superficial, and what they lack is only unity of purpose - *one heart*. But fundamentally they are an indivisible unit. The nations of the world, on the other hand, are essentially separate, and all that can bind them is pragmatism - *one heart* - then, temporarily, they become like *one man*. However, their unity is based only on expediency, and it dissolves as soon as the common purpose is no longer, whereas the Jewish People are in essence *‘one man’*, and when they are also of *‘one heart’*, then the world stops and Heaven meets earth...

(Rendered from the Ba'al Avnei Ezer from Sotachov zt"l in Mayana shel Torah)

ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

“And the hands of Moshe were heavy and they took a rock and placed it under him and he sat on it.” (17:12)

When Rav Simcha Zissel walked along the main road of Kelm, he would say “How can one walk along this road in peace?” His thoughts were of the tremendous suffering of the prisoners who had been forced to build the road. It was impossible for him to walk there without feeling some of the pain mixed into the asphalt on which he trod.

For most of us, empathizing with others is one of the most difficult parts of serving Hashem. We can *daven* three times a day, and we can be careful what we put into our mouths, our eyes and ears, but when we wish someone *“mazel tov,”* do we really feel great joy? When we hear about a tragedy, are we really distraught? Or do we just go through the motions?

When Yisrael had crossed the Red Sea, they were set upon by Amalek and became embroiled in a bitter struggle. During the battle, when Moshe raised his hands, Israel prevailed, and when he lowered his hands, the enemy grew in strength. When his hands grew heavy, a stone was placed under him so that he could sit down. When Moshe sat, however, he did not sit on a cushion, but on a stone - something uncomfortable, *something that would allow him to experience physically the suffering of the Jewish People*. No one loved the Jewish People more than Moshe Rabbeinu, and yet *Moshe himself didn't rely on his feelings alone to create empathy*. How much more should we, pampered and anesthetized as we are by physical comfort, do something concrete to experience the joy and sadness of our friends!

(Based on Rashi, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz in Growth through Torah - Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

Haftorah: Shoftim 4:4-5:31

SPECIAL DELIVERY

This week's Shabbos has a special name - *Shabbos Shira* - for on this Shabbos we commemorate the song that the Jewish People sang after their deliverance from Egypt. Just as the Parsha this week contains a song of praise to Hashem, so too the Haftorah contains a song - the song that the prophetess Devora sang after the Jewish People threw off the Canaanite yoke.

It was the tribe of Naftali that produced Devora, an extraordinary woman of valor, whose heart burned with fiery devotion to Torah like a torch. Her husband, Barak, was not learned in Torah, but Devora contrived a way to elevate him spiritually.

She decided that she would supply wicks for the Menorah in the *Mishkan*, and her husband agreed to deliver them for her. Devora lovingly made thick wicks of the finest quality, symbolizing her mission to illuminate the Jewish People with the light of Torah. She requested of her husband Barak that he alone should deliver the wicks, and consequently, he became a regular visitor to the Mishkan at Shilo. As Devora had hoped and planned, in Shilo he imbibed the atmosphere of learning and intense devotion to the service of Hashem, with the result that he studied the Torah with such diligence that he grew and grew in spiritual stature. This was all thanks to his wife - *“The wise amongst the women (who) builds up her household.” (Mishlei 14:1)*

(Adapted from “The Midrash Says”)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

**Yom Shabbos Kodesh Hu
twase `ca oth
“The Shabbos Day is Holy...”**

תנו שבח ושירה לא-ל אשר שבת ברא

“Give praise and song to the G-d Who created the Sabbath.”

Singing zemiros at the Sabbath meals has always been the traditional Jewish way of combining praise and song as an expression of our appreciation of the Sabbath, which Hashem created for the entire world but singled us out as the recipients of the special gift of Sabbath observance and elevation.

The striking contrast between a Jew's behavior at his festive meal and that of less disciplined nations is pointed out in the description of King Achashveirosh's banquet which Megilas Esther records took place on “the seventh day when the king's heart was happy with wine.” The Talmud (Megillah 12b) points out that this feast was on the Sabbath when “Jews eat and drink and begin to say words of Torah and sing songs of praise” in contrast to the Persians and Medes who immediately began to discuss lewd matters.

When the Jew's body is filled with Sabbath food his soul begins to sing.

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