

## PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

## Beshalach

Exodus 13:17-17:16

Torah Reading for Week of January 20-26, 2002

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to **depart from Egypt**, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves **trapped** between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the **sea splits** to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. **Moses** and the Children of Israel sing a **song** of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert, the people suffer thirst and hunger and repeatedly **complain** to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth **water from a rock** by striking it with his staff; He causes **manna** to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and **quails** to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The Children of Israel are instructed to gather a **double portion** of manna on Friday, as none will descend on **Shabbat**, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a **jar**, as a **testimony** for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the **Amalekites**, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by **Joshua**.



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The Jews are out of Egypt, but their redemption is not yet complete. Pharaoh and his armies still pose a tangible threat to their freedom; more subtle is the slave mentality that still gnaws at their souls. In *Beshalach*, the process of their liberation from Egypt continues, as the children of Israel battle external and internal threats to their freedom and advance toward the *raison d'être* of the Exodus — to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai.

*And it came to pass when Pharaoh had let the people go, that G-d led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near; for G-d*

*said: Lest the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt.*

Instead, G-d leads them along a more roundabout route, which takes them through "the desert by the Sea of Reeds" (Red Sea).

Moses takes along Joseph's bones for burial in the Holy Land, in fulfillment of the oath made by the Children of Israel at the beginning of their Egyptian exile.

*And G-d went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light...*

Soon, however, their newly-gained freedom is under attack.

*And it was told the king of Egypt that the people had fled. And the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said: "Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?"*

....

## Commentary

(Mechilta)

G-D LED THEM NOT THROUGH THE WAY OF THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES (13:17)

The tribe Ephraim had erred and departed from Egypt 30 years before the destined time, with the result that three hundred thousand of them were slain by the Philistines... and their bones lay in heaps on the road... G-d therefore said: If Israel behold the bones of the sons of Ephraim strewn in the road, they will return to Egypt...

Thus the verse says, *v'lo nacham Elokim* ("and G-d did not lead them," also translating as, "and G-d was not comforted"). This is comparable to a king whose sons were carried off as captives, and some of them died in captivity. The king afterwards came and saved those that were left. While he rejoiced over those that survived, he was never comforted for those that had died.

(Midrash Rabbah)

G-D LED THE PEOPLE ABOUT, BY WAY OF THE DESERT (13:18)

This is comparable to a king who had a son to whom he wished to bequeath an inheritance, but he argued: "If I give it to him now that he is small, he will not know how to take care of it; I will therefore wait until my son studies the writings and comprehends the value [of the property], then I will bequeath it unto him." This is what G-d said: "... I shall first give them the Torah, and then bring them into the Land.

(Midrash Rabbah)

G-d said: If I bring Israel into the land now, each will immediately take possession of his field or vineyard, and they will neglect the Torah. Rather, I shall take them round the desert for forty years, so that they should eat manna and drink the water of [Miriam's miracle] well, and the Torah will be absorbed in their bodies. Thus Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai would say: The Torah was given to be expounded only to the eaters of manna.

AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WENT OUT CHAMUSHIM FROM THE LAND OF EGYPT (13:18)

*Chamushim* means "armed"... Another interpretation: one in five (*chamesh*) among the children of Israel came out of Egypt; four-fifths died during the three days of darkness [because they did not want to leave Egypt].

(Rashi)

Rabbi Joshua interpreted it thus: fivefold they came out of Egypt, for five times their number in converts were gathered into the people of Israel upon their departure from Egypt.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND MOSES TOOK THE BONES OF JOSEPH WITH HIM. FOR HE HAD LAID AN OATH ON THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, SAYING, "G-D WILL SURELY REMEMBER YOU; AND YOU SHALL CARRY UP MY BONES AWAY FROM HERE WITH YOU." (13:19)

How did Moses know the place where Joseph was buried? Serach the daughter of Asher remained of that generation. Moses went to her and asked: "Do you know where Joseph was buried?" She answered him: "The Egyptians made an iron coffin for him, which they sunk in the Nile so that its waters should be blessed."

Moses went and stood on the bank of the Nile and called out: "Joseph! Joseph! The time has arrived regarding which G-d swore, 'I will deliver you,' and the oath which you imposed upon the Israelites has reached the time of fulfillment; if you show yourself, well and good; otherwise, behold, we are absolved of your oath." Immediately Joseph's coffin floated on the surface of the water...

Rabbi Nathan says: He was buried in the sepulchre of the kings; and Moses went and stood by the sepulchre of the kings and exclaimed. "Joseph! The

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And G-d hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel... all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army; and they overtook them encamping by the sea...

Even more devastating is the Israelites' reaction:

*Pharaoh drew near. And the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, Egypt marched after them, and they were very much afraid; and the children of Israel cried out to G-d.*

*And they said to Moses: "Are there no graves in Egypt, that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you done this to us, to carry us out of Egypt?"*

*"Is not this the word that we did tell you in Egypt, saying: Let us alone, that we may serve Egypt? For it had been better for us to serve Egypt, than that we should*

*die in the wilderness."*

Moses says to the people:

*"Fear not; stand by and see the salvation of G-d, which He will show you today. For as you have seen Egypt this day, you shall not see them again any more for ever.*

*"G-d shall fight for you, and you shall be silent."*

**The Sea Splits**

*And G-d said to Moses: "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward.*

*"And you, lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."*

As the children of Israel march forward, the divine cloud which had been leading them moves to their rear, interposing between them and the Egyptians; "and there was the cloud and darkness, and it illuminated the night; and these did not come near these all night."

All night, "a mighty east wind" blows over the sea; at dawn, its waters split in two.

**Commentary**

(Mechilta)

time has arrived regarding which G-d swore, 'I will deliver you,' and the oath which you imposed upon the Israelites has reached the time of fulfillment; if you show yourself, well and good; otherwise, behold, we are absolved of your oath." At that moment, Joseph's coffin trembled, and Moses took it and carried it with him.

(Talmud, Sotah 13a)

**AND G-D SAID TO MOSES: "WHY DO YOU CRY OUT TO ME? SPEAK TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY GO FORWARD (14:15)**

As they stood at the shore of the sea, the people of Israel split into four factions.

One faction said: "Let us cast ourselves into the sea." A second faction said, "Let us return to Egypt." A third said, "Let us wage war against the Egyptians." A fourth said, "Let us cry out to G-d."

Thus Moses said to the people: "Fear not; stand by and see the salvation of G-d, which He will show you today. For as you have seen Egypt this day, you shall not see them again any more for ever. G-d shall fight for you, and you shall be silent" (14:13-14).

To those who said, "Let us cast ourselves into the sea," he said: "Fear not; stand by and see the salvation of G-d." To those who said, "Let us return to Egypt," he said: "As you have seen Egypt this day, you shall not see them again any more for ever." To those who said, "Let us wage war against them," he said: "G-d shall fight for you." And to those who said, "Let us cry out to G-d," he said: "And you shall be silent."

These "four factions" represent four possible reactions to a situation in which one's divinely-ordained mission in life is challenged by the prevalent reality.

One possible reaction is: "Let us cast ourselves into the sea." Let us submerge ourselves within the living waters of Torah; let us plunge into the "sea of the Talmud," the sea of piety, the sea of religious life. Let us create our own insular communities, protecting us and ours from the G-dless world out there.

At the other extreme is the reaction, "Let us return to Egypt." Let us accept "reality," recognizing that it is the Pharaohs who wield the power in the real world. We'll do whatever we can under the circumstances to do what G-d expects from us, but it is futile to imagine that we can resist, much less change, the way things are.

A third reaction is to "Wage war against them" — to assume a confrontational stance against the hostile reality, battling the "unG-dly" world despite all odds..

A fourth reaction is to say: It's wrong to abandon the world, it's wrong to succumb to it, and it's wrong to fight it. The answer lies in dealing with it on a wholly spiritual level. A single prayer can achieve more than the most secure fortress, the most flattering diplomat or the most powerful army.

G-d rejected all four approaches. While each of them has their time and place (it's important to create inviolable sanctums of holiness in a mundane world; it's also necessary to appreciate the nature of the prevalent reality and deal with it on its own terms; it's also necessary to wage an all-out war against evil; and it's always important to recognize that one cannot do it on

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*And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground: and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.*

The Egyptians give chase, following the Israelites into the divided sea. G-d commands Moses to again raise his hand over the sea.

*And the sea returned to its strength... The waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.*

Upon beholding the great miracle, "The people feared G-d,

and they believed in G-d and in Moses His servant."

## The Song at the Sea

*Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song to G-d, and spoke, saying:*

*I will sing to G-d, for He has triumphed gloriously  
The horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea  
G-d is my strength and song, He is become my salvation  
This is my G-d, and I will praise him  
My father's G-d, and I will exalt him  
G-d is a man of war; G-d is his name...*

*With the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up  
The floods stood upright like a heap  
The depths were congealed in the heart of the sea...*

*Who is like You among the mighty, O G-d  
Who is like You, glorious in holiness  
Fearful in praises, doing wonders ...*

*Nations heard and shuddered*

## Commentary

one's own and appeal to G-d for help) — neither of them is the vision to guide our lives and define our relationship with the world we inhabit..

Rather, when the Jew is headed toward Sinai and is confronted with a hostile or indifferent world, his most basic response must be to *go forward*.

Not to escape reality, not to submit to it, not to wage war on it, not to deal with it only on a spiritual level, but to go forward. Do another mitzvah, ignite another soul, take one more step toward your goal.

And when you move forward, you will see that insurmountable barrier yield and that ominous threat fade away. You will see that the prevalent "reality" is not so real after all, and that you have it within your power to reach your goal. Even if you have to split some seas to get there.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

## "WHY DO YOU CRY TO ME? (14:15)

"When Pharaoh drew near... the children of Israel cried out to G-d" (14:10). Upon which, Moses also began to pray to G-d. Said G-d to Moses: "Why do you cry to Me?" My children have already prayed and I have heard their prayer.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

G-d said to Moses: "Moses! My children are in dire straits, the sea is closing in on them and the enemy pursues, and you stand and pray at length? Why do you cry to Me? There are times when that calls for lengthy prayers, and times when one must pray shortly..."

*(Mechilta; Rashi)*

## AND IT CAME BETWEEN THE CAMP OF EGYPT AND THE CAMP OF ISRAEL (14:20)

A shepherd was leading his sheep across a river when a wolf came to attack the sheep. What did the shepherd do? He took a large ram and threw it to the wolf, saying to himself, "Let him struggle with this till we cross the river, and then I will return to bring it back."

So, too, when Israel departed from Egypt, the Angel Samael (Satan) arose to accuse them, arguing before G-d: "Master of the Universe! Till now they have been worshipping idols, and now You divide the sea for them?" What did G-d do? He delivered into his hands Job, one of the counselors of Pharaoh, of whom it is written (Job 1:1), "And that man was wholehearted and upright," and said: "Behold, he is in your hands." (ibid., 2:6). Said G-d: While he is busily occupied with Job, Israel will go through the sea; afterwards, I will deliver Job.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

## THERE WAS THE CLOUD AND DARKNESS, AND IT ILLUMINATED THE NIGHT (14:20)

The column, which traveled before the Israelite camp as a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, moved to interject between the two camps and protect the Israelites from the Egyptians. It now was a "cloud and darkness" for the Egyptians while "illuminating the night" for the Israelites.

*(Rashi)*

According to the natural order of the world, can a person who lights a candle say, "So-and-so, who is my friend, may use the light, while so-and-so, who is my enemy, may not"? But G-d is not so confined... His cloud produced light for Israel and darkness for Egypt.

*(Midrash Tehillim)*

## AND MOSES STRETCHED HIS HAND OVER THE SEA (14:21)

Moses went to divide the sea as G-d had commanded, but the sea refused to comply, exclaiming: "What, before you shall I divide? Am I not greater than

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Terror seized the inhabitants of Philistia  
Then panicked the chiefs of Edom  
The mighty men of Moab, trembling took hold of them  
All the inhabitants of Canaan melted away  
Fear and dread shall fall upon them  
By the greatness of Your arm they shall be as still as a stone  
Till your people pass over, O G-d  
Till they pass over, this people whom You have acquired

Bring them, and plant them, in the mountain of Your inheritance  
In the seat of Your dwelling, O G-d, which You have

made

In the sanctuary, O G-d, which Your hands have established

G-d shall reign for ever and ever

Also the women sang:

Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

And Miriam called to them: "Sing to G-d, for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider has He thrown into the sea..."

## In Marah

Moses takes the Children of Israel from the shores of the Red Sea to the Wilderness of Shur, where they travel for three days without finding water. They then arrive in Marah, but "they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter."

## Commentary

you? For I was created in the third day and you on the sixth." When Moses heard this, he went and reported to G-d, "The sea refuses to be divided." What did G-d do? He placed His right hand upon the right hand of Moses.

(Midrash Rabbah)

## AND THE WATERS WERE DIVIDED (14:21)

All the water in the world divided, even the waters in cisterns and ditches, in jars, cups, casks and bowls, as it is written, "And the waters were divided" — it doesn't say "and the water was divided," but "and the waters were divided." The supernal waters divided, as well as the terrestrial....

(Mechilta; Rashi)

## AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WENT INTO THE MIDST OF THE SEA ON THE DRY GROUND (14:22)

Each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the sea. Then sprang forward Nachshon the son of Aminadav and descended first into the sea [and they all followed him].

Why does it say, "And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground"? If they went into the sea, then why does it say "on the dry ground"; and if they went on the dry ground, then why does it say that they went "into the midst of the sea"? This is to teach that the sea was divided only after Israel had stepped into it and the waters had reached their noses — only then did it become dry land.

The daughters of Israel passed through the sea holding their children with their hand; and when these cried, they would stretch out their hands and pluck an apple or a pomegranate from the sea and give it to them.

(Talmud, Sotah 37a; Midrash Rabbah)

## AND THE SEA RETURNED TO ITS STRENGTH (14:27)

On the third day of creation, when G-d made the dry land emerge from the waters and caused the waters to be gathered together into one place, forming from them the sea, He stipulated with the sea that it should split to allow the Israelites to pass through it on dry land and then overwhelm the Egyptians. Thus it is written, "and the sea returned to its strength (*l'eitano*) when the morning appeared." The word *l'eitano* ("to its strength"), by a transposition of letters, can be read *litnao* ("to its stipulation").

(Zohar; Mechilta)

## AND THE WATERS RETURNED, AND COVERED THE CHARIOTS, AND THE HORSEMEN, AND ALL THE HOST OF PHARAOH THAT CAME INTO THE SEA AFTER THEM (14:28)

The Egyptians are likened to foxes, because they were cunning... What did they say? "Come, let us deal wisely with them" (Exodus 1:10). Let us deal cunningly with Israel and plan such a persecution for them that their G-d will not be able to punish us in the same coin. For if we persecute them with the sword, He can visit us with the sword; and if with fire, He can bring fire upon us. But we know that He swore that He would no longer bring a flood on the world (Genesis 9:11); let us, therefore, persecute them with water, which He cannot bring upon us. G-d then said to them: "Wretches! True I have sworn that I will not bring a flood into the world, but I will do this to you: I will drag each one of you to his own flood." This is what David said (Psalm 63:11): "They shall be dragged to the sea beds; they shall be a portion for foxes."

(Midrash Rabbah)

In that hour, the ministering angels wished to sing songs of praise before G-d, but He rebuked them, saying: "My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you wish to sing before me?!"

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 39b)

## AND THEY BELIEVED IN G-D AND IN MOSES HIS SERVANT (14:31)

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"What shall we drink?" complain the people. G-d shows Moses a certain tree to throw into the water, and the water becomes sweet.

In Marah, the Children of Israel are given "statutes and laws." They also receive the divine promise: "If you will diligently hearken to the voice of G-d... all the diseases which I have brought upon Egypt, I shall not bring upon you, for I am G-d your healer."

## Bread from Heaven

## Commentary

One who believes in Moses, believes in G-d.

*(Mechilta)*

THEN SANG MOSES AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL THIS SONG TO G-D, AND THEY SPOKE, SAYING... (15:1)

How did they render the song? Rabbi Akiva says: Moses said, "For He has triumphed gloriously" and they responded, "I will sing to G-d" (and so on with each verse — Moses would sing the verse, and they would respond with the refrain, "I will sing to G-d").

Rabbi Eliezer says: Moses said, "I will sing to G-d," and they responded, "I will sing to G-d"; Moses said, "For He has triumphed gloriously," and they responded, "For He has triumphed gloriously" (and so on — they repeated each verse after Moses).

Rabbi Nechemiah says: Moses sang the opening words of the song, after which they each sang it on their own.

*(Talmud and Rashi, Sotah 30b)*

These three opinions represent three levels of leadership.

Rabbi Akiva describes an ideal in which a people completely abnegate their individuality to the collective identity embodied by the leader. Moses alone sang the nation's gratitude to G-d, their experience of redemption, and their vision of their future as G-d's people. The people had nothing further to say as individuals, other than to affirm their unanimous assent to what Moses was expressing.

At first glance, this seems the ultimate in unity: hundreds of thousands of hearts and minds yielding to a single program and vision. Rabbi Eliezer, however, argues that this is but a superficial unity—an externally imposed unity of the moment, rather than an inner, enduring unity. When people set aside their own thoughts and feelings to accept what is dictated to them by

At Eilim, they find "twelve springs of water and seventy date palms"; but in the Sin Desert they lack for food. Again, the people complain, crying to Moses and Aaron:

*"Would we had died by the hand of G-d in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness, to kill this whole community with hunger."*

G-d says to Moses:

*"I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying: At evening you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be sated with bread; and you shall know that I am G-d."*

Each morning, "I shall rain down bread from the heavens... each day's allotment on its day." Meat will be provided in the form of quails which will come up about the Israelite camp each evening.

*In the morning the dew lay round about the camp. And when the layer of dew was gone up, behold, upon the*

a higher authority, they are united only in word and deed; their inner selves remain different and distinct. Such a unity is inevitably short-lived: sooner or later their intrinsic differences and counter-aims will assert themselves, and fissures will begin to appear also in their unanimous exterior. So Rabbi Eliezer interprets the Torah's description of Israel's song to say that they did not merely affirm Moses song with a refrain, but repeated his words themselves. Each individual Jew internalized Moses words, so that they became the expression of his own understanding and feelings. The very same words assumed hundreds of thousands nuances of meaning, as they were absorbed by each of the minds, and articulated by each of the mouths, of the people of Israel.

Rabbi Nechemiah, however, is still not satisfied. If Israel repeated these verses after Moses this would imply that their song did not stem from the very deepest part of themselves. For if the people were truly one with Moses and his articulation of the quintessence of Israel, why would they need to hear their song from his lips before they could sing it themselves? It was enough, says Rabbi Nechemiah, that Moses started them off with the first words of the song, so as to stimulate their deepest experience of the miracle, with the result that each of them sang the entire song on their own.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

## THIS IS MY G-D (15:2)

At the time the Israelites ascended from the Red Sea... the babe sat upon his mother's knee and the suckling sucked at his mother's breast; when they beheld the Divine Presence, the babe raised his neck and the suckling released the nipple from his mouth, and they exclaimed: "This is my G-d and I will Praise Him" ... Even the embryos in their mothers' womb uttered a song.

*(Talmud, Sotah 30b)*

A servant girl saw at the sea what Isaiah, Ezekiel and all other prophets did not behold.

*(Mechilta)*

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face of the wilderness there lay a fine flaky substance, as fine as the hoar frost on the ground.

When the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, "Man-hu?" ("What is it?"); for they knew not what it was. And Moses said to them: "This is the bread which G-d has given you to eat."

G-d explains that the manna will be supplied each morning to provide food for that day; it is forbidden to save one day's manna for the next. Indeed, no matter how much manna the people gather, they each end up with exactly one day's ration of an *omer* for each member of their household.

There are those who nevertheless try to set aside some of

the heavenly food for the next day; the left-over manna "bred worms and spoiled."

But on the sixth day, each ends up with a double portion. Moses says to the people:

"This is what G-d has spoken: Tomorrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath to G-d. Bake that which you will bake today, and what you will boil, boil today; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning... [On the seventh day] you will not find it in the field."

Again, some Jews disobey and go looking for manna on the seventh day. They find nothing. "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my instructions?" says G-d to Moses. "G-d has given you the Sabbath... remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."

G-d instructs Moses to take a jug and "fill an *omer* of [manna] to be kept for your generations; that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out from the land of Egypt."

## Doubt

is only to a positive end, like a doctor who may, at times, cause pain to his patient in order to heal him..

(Malbim)

## AND THEY SHALL GATHER EACH DAY'S ALLOTMENT ON ITS DAY (16:5)

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai was asked by his disciples: Why did not the manna come down for Israel once a year?

He replied: I shall give a parable. This thing may be compared to a king of flesh and blood who had an only son, whom he provided with maintenance once a year, so that he would visit his father once a year only. Thereupon he provided for his maintenance every day, so that he called on him every day. The same with Israel. One who had four or five children would worry, saying: Perhaps no manna will come down tomorrow, and all will die of hunger? Thus they were found to turn their attention to their Father in Heaven.

(Talmud, Yoma 76a)

## FILL AN OMER OF IT TO BE KEPT FOR YOUR GENERATIONS; THAT THEY MAY SEE THE BREAD WITH WHICH I FED YOU IN THE WILDERNESS (16:32)

For forty years, the Children of Israel were sustained by "bread from heaven," instilling in them the recognition that sustenance comes entirely from G-d; that no matter how much one toils to earn his livelihood, he receives no more, and no less, than what has been allotted him from Above.

The challenge is to retain this recognition also after entering the land and making the transition to "bread from the earth." Even when we are nourished by bread which we earn by "the sweat of our brow," we must remember that, in truth, our sustenance comes from G-d, and that we never receive an iota more or an iota less than what is allotted us from Above.

## Commentary

IN THE SEAT OF YOUR DWELLING, O G-D, WHICH YOU HAVE MADE; IN THE SANCTUARY, O G-D, WHICH YOUR HANDS HAVE ESTABLISHED (15:17)

The work of the righteous is greater than the work of heaven and earth. For in regard to the creation of heaven and earth it is written (Isaiah 48:13): "My hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has spread out the heavens" ("My hand," in the singular). But in regard to the work of the hands of the righteous it is written, "In the sanctuary, O G-d, which Your hands have established" ("Your hands," in the plural).

(Talmud, Kenuboth 5a)

AND THEY COULD NOT DRINK OF THE WATERS OF MARAH, BECAUSE THEY WERE BITTER (15:23)

Because they — the Children of Israel — were bitter, everything they tasted was bitter to them.

(Chassidic saying)

THERE HE MADE FOR THEM A STATUTE AND A LAW (15:25)

The Israelites were given ten precepts at Marah: the seven which had already been accepted by the children of Noah, to which were added at Marah social laws, the Sabbath, and honoring one's parents.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 56b)

ALL THE DISEASES WHICH I HAVE BROUGHT UPON EGYPT, I SHALL NOT BRING UPON YOU, FOR I AM G-D YOU HEALER (15:26)

I shall never afflict you with the intent to merely punish, as I did the Egyptians. Rather, "I am G-d your healer" — if I do cause you suffering, it

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## Commentary

The Children of Israel travel on to Rephidim, where there's no water. "The people strove with Moses, and said: 'Give us water to drink.'"

"What shall I do with this people!" cries Moses to G-d. "Just a while longer, and they will stone me!"

"Pass before the people," says G-d to Moses, "and take with you of the elders of Israel; and your rod, with which you smote the River, take in your hand, and go.

"Behold, I will stand before you there upon the rock in Horeb; and you shall smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink."

*Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

*And he called the name of the place Massah U'Merivah ("Test and Strife"), because of the strife of the children of Israel, and because they tested G-d, saying: "Is G-d among us, or not?"*

## Commentary

Hence the connection between the manna and the mitzvah of Shabbat. Shabbat, too, carries this lesson, serving as a weekly reminder that our sustenance comes from G-d. On the face of it, it might seem that ceasing work one day a week would lessen one's income; but the Jew knows that his earthly labor is only the channel through which G-d chooses to supply him what is essentially "bread from heaven," and that the best and most efficient conduit is one that conforms to the will of He who supplies sustenance to all His creatures.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

**...BECAUSE THEY TESTED G-D, SAYING: "IS G-D AMONG US, OR NOT?" THEN CAME AMALEK, AND WAGED WAR WITH ISRAEL IN REPHIDIM (17:7-8)**

After all that they had seen G-d do on their behalf — the Ten Plagues brought upon Egypt to free them, the splitting of the sea, the "bread from heaven" that descended each morning to nourish them — how could the people of Israel possibly question, "Is G-d amongst us or not?"

But such is the nature of doubt. There is doubt that is based on rational query. There is doubt that rises from the doubter's subjective motives and desires. But then there is doubt pure and simple: doubt that neutralizes the most compelling evidence and the most inspiring experience with nothing more than a cynical shrug.

## War

*Then came Amalek, and waged war with Israel in Rephidim.*

*And Moses said to Joshua: "Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill, with the rod of G-d in my hand."*

Joshua goes out to battle, while Moses ascends a hilltop with Aaron and Hur (Miriam's son).

*And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.*

*But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur supported his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun.*

*And Joshua harried Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.*

*And G-d said to Moses: "Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven."*

"G-d has sworn by His throne," proclaims Moses: "G-d is at war with Amalek for all generations."

Amalek is the essence of doubt, of irrational challenge to truth. (Thus the Hebrew word *amalek* has a numerical value of 240 — the same as the word *safek*, "doubt"). Because the people of Israel had succumbed to the *amalek* within their own souls, they became vulnerable to attack by Amalek the nation.

*(The Chassidic Masters)*

What is the incident (of Amalek) comparable to? To a boiling tub of water which no creature was able to enter. Along came one evil-doer and jumped into it. Although he was burned, he cooled it for the others.

So, too, when Israel came out of Egypt, and G-d rent the sea before them and drowned the Egyptians within it, the fear of them fell upon all the nations. But when Amalek came and challenged them, although he received his due from them, he cooled the awe of them for the nations of the world.

*(Midrash Tanchuma)*

**AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN MOSES HELD UP HIS HAND, THAT ISRAEL PREVAILED: AND WHEN HE LET DOWN HIS HAND, AMALEK PREVAILED (17:11)**

Did then the hands of Moses wage war or break war? Not so; but so long as Israel looked upwards and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed; and when they did not, they fell.

*(Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 29a)*

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## FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

## THE ANATOMY OF A MIRACLE

After describing how the Red Sea split to allow the Children of Israel to pass through its divided waters, the Torah relates:

*And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea; and the sea returned to its strength at the turning of the morning... ‘*

Noting that the Hebrew word *l'eitano* (“to its strength”) is comprised of the same letters as the word *litna’o* (“to its stipulation”), the Midrash says:

*On the third day of creation, when G-d made the dry land emerge from the waters and caused the waters to be gathered together into one place, forming from them the sea, He stipulated with the sea that it should split to allow the Israelites to pass through it on dry land and then overwhelm the Egyptians. Hence, the verse can be interpreted to read: “And the sea returned to its stipulation.”*

This is one difficulty, however, with this interpretation: the above verse refers not to the sea’s fulfillment of the imperative to *divide*, but to its *returning* to its former state. Yet wasn’t the most important part of the “stipulation” that sea should, contrary to its nature, divide its waters? “Returning to its strength” seem to be little more than a resumption of its natural state.

One of the commentaries on the Midrash suggests an explanation based on the Talmudic account of a similar miracle. In the Talmud (Chulin 7a), Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair tells the River Ginnai to divide its waters; when it refuses, he says to it: “If you do not do so, I will decree that no water shall flow in you for ever.” If the same were true of the Red Sea, then its returning to its former strength would be evidence of its having fulfilled its agreement with G-d.

#### A Conditional World

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov extended this principle to the entirety of creation: at the time of the creation of the world all the objects of nature were created on the condition that they obeyed the will of the righteous, even if it ran counter to their normal physical laws. Furthermore - says the Baal Shem Tov - if they did not do so, not only would they cease to exist

— it would be as if they had *never been created*. In other words, had the Red Sea not divided, it would not only never have water again, its *whole previous* existence would be obliterated.

Hence the verse tells us that “the sea *returned to its strength*.” In fulfilling of its agreement with G-d, it both assured its future continuity and at the same time ratified its *past* existence.

This point may be difficult for us to understand. For though we can imagine what it is for something to be obliterated, surely its past existence is an objective fact, which cannot be *retroactively* removed?

The mental block we have in comprehending this possibility is due to a two-fold secular conception to which our minds tenaciously cling: firstly, that objects have a real and independent existence, and secondly, that our time-scheme (in which we cannot reach back and change the past) is the only possible one. Both conceptions are false in Judaism. In the first instance, objects only exist because G-d continually creates them; in the second instance, time is a human conception, one by which G-d is not bound (indeed, one which G-d created and so, obviously, can stand aside from).

It therefore follows that if G-d decides to “uncreate” something, it is retroactively divested of its entire (i.e., past as well as future) being.

Hence, the term which the Midrash reads into the verse is “stipulation.” The closest analogy in human terms to the sea’s state of existence (and that of the entire created reality) is that of a conditional legal agreement. If the condition is not fulfilled, it is not that the agreement suddenly terminates, but rather that this establishes that the agreement never came into being in the first place.

#### The Strengthening of the Sea

But why did G-d “need” to make an agreement with the sea, and why particularly at the moment when it was created? His power over His creations is unlimited; certainly, He could have divided the sea when He wanted, with or without its “consent”!

The answer to that is to be found in the verse’s use of the term “strength” (*l'eitano*) to allude to the sea’s “stipulation” (*litna’o*). One might think that the fact that the sea’s creation was “conditional” would mean

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that its existence is less real; in truth, however, the very opposite is the case: this is the source of its true “strength” and viability.

In his commentary on the first verse of Genesis, Rashi’s interprets the phrase *bereshit* (“in the beginning”) to imply that the world was created “for the sake of Israel and the Torah.” This can be understood on two levels. In the more simplistic sense, this means that the entirety of creation exists to allow and enable the people of Israel to perform G-d’s will on earth. A deeper understanding is that through Israel’s fulfillment of the divine purpose in creation, the world *itself* is sanctified into becoming a “dwelling-place” for G-d and thus brought to its own fulfillment.

If the world would have been created as a something which must subsequently be “forced” to accommodate Israel’s mission, its own “natural” existence would be finite and temporal, nothing more than a “background” or “setting” for - even, at times, an obstacle to - the unfolding of the divine purpose. But by stipulating at the outset that physical objects should change their nature when it was necessary for the sake of Israel’s implementation of the Torah, G-d wrote this miraculous possibility into their very constitution. This means that when miracles occurred, this would not be an *interruption* of their natural existence, but its continuation and *fulfillment*.

This makes their existence of an entirely different order. They become not things which exist for a while and then pass away; but rather things whose destiny is (by the very nature of their creation) linked with the miraculous and eternal existence of Israel and their miraculous and eternal realization of the divine purpose.

Excerpted from *Torah Studies*, www.KehotOnline.com, an adaptation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s talks by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

## THE HEAD

The Zohar refers to Moses as the *raaya meheimna* of Israel—a phrase that translates both as “faithful

shepherd” and “shepherd of faith.” The latter sense implies that Moses is Israel’s “faith provider”—a source and conduit of their faith in G-d.

Indeed, when the Torah speaks of Israel’s faith in G-d in the wake of the miracles of the Exodus, it says, “And believed in G-d and in Moses His servant”—using the very same verb (*vayaaminu*, “and they believed”) to connote Israel’s belief in Moses and in the Almighty. In its commentary on this verse, the Midrash Mechilta goes so far as to derive from this that, “One who believes in Moses, believes in G-d “(!)

The Talmud goes even further, applying the same to the sages and Torah scholars of all generations. Citing the verse (Deuteronomy 30:20) “To love the L-rd your G-d and to cleave to Him,” it asks, “Is it then possible to cleave to the Divine?” and replies: “But whoever attaches himself to a Torah scholar, the Torah considers it as if he had attached himself to G-d” (Talmud, Ketubot 111b).

A fundamental principle of the Jewish faith is that there are no “intermediaries” between G-d and His world; our relationship with Him is not facilitated by any “third party”. So what is the significance of the role of our leaders and Torah scholars in regards to our faith in and attachment to G-d?

## The Awareness Factor

The explanation, says Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi in his *Tanya*, lies in understanding the father/child metaphor employed by the Torah to describe our relationship with G-d. “You are children to the L-rd your G-d” say Moses in Deuteronomy 14:1. While we were still in Egypt, G-d speaks of us as “My firstborn child, Israel” (Exodus 4:22).

In what way is G-d our “father”? There are, of course, the obvious parallels. Like a father, G-d creates us and provides us with sustenance and direction. He loves us with the boundless, all-forgiving love of a father. Rabbi Schneur Zalman delves further into the metaphor, examining the biological and psychological dynamics of the father-child model and employing them to better understand our relationship to each other and to our Father in Heaven.

A microscopic bit of matter, originating in the father’s body, triggers the generation of a life. In the mother’s womb, a single cell develops into a brain,

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heart, eyes, ears, arms, legs, toenails; soon it emerges into the world to function as a thinking, feeling and achieving human being.

Physically, what has originated in the father's body and psyche is now a separate, distinct and (eventually) independent individual. On a deeper level, however, the child remains inseparable from his begetter. In the words of the Talmud, "A son is a limb of his father." At the very heart of the child's consciousness lies an inescapable truth: he is his father's child, an extension of his being, a projection of his personality. In body, they have become two distinct entities; in essence they are one.

One may argue: perhaps in the child's mind, the seat of his self-awareness and identity, the singularity of parent and offspring lives on. Here the child's relationship with his father is sensed; here resides the recognition of their intrinsic oneness. But the brain is only one of the child's many organs and limbs. The rest of him may indeed stem from its parental source, but is now a wholly separate entity.

Obviously, this is not the case—any more than it would be correct to say that the eyes alone see or that "just" the mouth speaks. The component parts of the human being comprise a single, integrated whole; it is the *person* who sees, the *person* who speaks, the *person* who is aware. The toenail of the child, by virtue of its interconnection with the brain, is no less one with the father than is the brain itself, the organ which facilitates this oneness.

But what if the toenail, or any other limb of the body, severs its connection with the brain? This would cut it off from its own center of vitality and consciousness, and, as a result, also from its parental origins. In other words, the unity of all the child's limbs and organs with the father's essence is dependent upon their maintaining their connection with their own mind, a connection which imbues them all with the awareness of this unity.

### The Body Israel

Israel, too, is comprised of many "organs" and "limbs." There are the great sages of each generation who devote their life to the assimilation of the Divine essence of Torah, whose entire being is permeated with the awareness of G-d's truth. These are

the mind of the nation. Israel has a heart, individuals whose lives exemplify compassion and piety, and hands—its great builders and achieves. Each and every individual, from the "Moses of the generation"\* to the ordinary "foot soldier", forms an integral part of the body of G-d's firstborn—each is equally "the limb of the father."

But as with the physical father-child relationship, it is the mind of the child which facilitates the bond with his father. As long as the many organs and limbs of his body remain a single integrated whole, they are all *equally* the father's child. The mind is not serving as an "intermediary", G-d forbid—every part of the body, including the "toenail", possesses the self-knowledge that makes the two ostensibly distinct "bodies" of the father and child a single entity. But it is only by virtue of their connection to their mind that this awareness resides within all the child's "parts".

The same applies to the "body" that is Israel. It is our life-bond with our "mind"—the sages and leaders of Israel—that both integrates us as single whole and imbues us with our connection to our Creator and Source.

True, a Jew cannot ever sever his or her bond with G-d, any more than even the lowliest "toenail" of the child's body can choose to go off on its own and undo its relationship with its father. But while we cannot change what we are, we can determine to what extent our identity as G-d's child will be expressed in our daily life. We can chose, G-d forbid, to disassociate ourselves from the leaders which G-d has implanted in our midst, thus banishing our relationship with Him to the subconscious of our soul. Or, we can intensify our bond to the minds of Israel, thereby making our bond with the Almighty a tangible and vibrant reality in our lives.

*Based on Tanya chapter 2 and the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe; rendered by Yanki Tauber, editor@chabadonline.com*

\* As each generation's leader is called—see Midrash Rabba, Breishis 56:7; Tikkunei Zohar 114a; Rashi's commentary on Chulin 93a.