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subject: Rav Frand - No! The Jews Are Different!

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: # 1105 The Shabbos Seuda on a No-Carb Diet. Good Shabbos!

No! The Jews Are Different!

The Medrash comments on the pasuk, "And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him..." [Shemos 13:19] as follows: "About such, scripture writes: 'The wise of heart will seize good deeds, but the foolish one's lips will become weary' [Mishlei 10:8], for all of Israel were occupied with (gathering) silver and gold, and Moshe was occupied with the bones of Yosef."

The Medrash thus praises Moshe Rabbeinu's piety. When the masses were busying themselves with taking the spoils from Egypt, Moshe busied himself with taking Yosef HaTzadik's remains. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (in his sefer, Emes L'Yaakov) wonders why Moshe's actions represent great piety (chassidus). Was it not a mitzvah to fulfill the oath made to Yosef [Shemos 13:19] and take his bones with them when they left Egypt? What else would we expect Moshe to do at this moment?

Rav Yaakov points out that Klal Yisrael had a hard time taking the silver and gold from the Egyptians. As difficult as it may seem for us to understand why they should have had a hard time taking the money from Egypt, the truth of the matter is that the pasuk says, "Please speak into the ears of the people and have them ask, every person from his fellow (Egyptian)..."

[Shemos 11:2]. The Almighty, as it were, had to beg the people to take the money! Why "Please take the money"? Since when do people need to be told, "Please take the money"? What does Rav Yaakov mean here? Rav Yaakov says the reason they were hesitant to take the gold and silver was because they thought perhaps they were taking it illegally. Here they would be taking money from the Egyptians and they would not be returning it or paying it back! In reality, that was not the case. The Almighty would not instruct them to do something that was illicit. In fact, they deserved the money. They had worked all these years as slave laborers without proper compensation. Furthermore, the great wealth that the Egyptians possessed all came about because of Yosef. The money was legitimately theirs. But even though this might have conceivably been the "easier mitzvah" to perform, Moshe Rabbeinu chose a mitzvah for which he would not receive any financial benefit. Taking the bones of Yosef with him was a mitzvah that involved no personal gain.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains that it is virtually impossible to imagine what Moshe Rabbeinu was able to accomplish with this Mitzvah. This act of taking the bones of Yosef literally saved Klal Yisrael. We are all familiar with the teaching of Chazal that when the Jews arrived at the Yam Suf (Reed Sea), the Angels complained to G-d "These (the Egyptians) are idol worshippers and these (the Jews) are idol worshippers" (implying – why kill the Egyptians and save the Jews?)

The Medrash states as follows: "In the merit of the bones of Yosef, the Sea split for Israel. About this it is written: 'the sea saw and fled (va'yanos)' [Tehillim 114:3] – this happened in the merit of 'he left his garment in her hand and he fled (va'yanos) outside' [Bereshis 39:12]. The splitting of the Yam Suf – the quintessential paradigm of all miracles – occurred in the merit of the coffin of the righteous Yosef, who generations earlier fled from the seductive efforts of Potiphar's wife.

Yosef knew that by fleeing from the wife of Potiphar, he faced likely imprisonment for the rest of his life. Mrs. Potiphar was not going to stand idly by after she tried to seduce him and he left her standing there. Yosef knew what would happen: She would accuse him of trying to rape her and they would throw the 'Egyptian slave' into prison forever. He had no idea what was going to eventually happen – that Pharaoh would dream and he would interpret the dream and be elevated to second in command in the land.

He did not read Parshas VaYeshev and Parshas Miketz ahead of time to realize all that! This was an incomprehensible act of mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice). In the merit of this great deed, according to the Medrash, the sea split!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky adds the following: When the Angels complained, "These and these are idolaters" (i.e., there is no difference between the Jews and the Egyptians), the Ribono shel Olam responded to them: "No! There is a difference between the Jews and the Egyptians." Granted, they both might worship avodah zarah, but there is something fundamentally different. By Yosef HaTzadik, the fact that he was willing to literally give up his life to preserve moral standards, speaks to the capacity and power of the Jewish soul.

Had it not been for Yosef HaTzadik, the implication is that the Ribono shel Olam would have had to concede to the Angels and tell them they were right – there is no difference between these idolaters and those idolaters...and the Jews would have drowned as well.

In retrospect, we can see who caused the sea to split! "Come and see the wisdom, the piety and the righteousness of Moshe Rabbeinu!" Had he not taken Yosef's bones, had Israel not had the merit of Yosef's coffin accompanying them as they passed through the split waters of the Yam Suf, who knows what would have been?

This is another case where at the time of a person's action, he does not realize what he is accomplishing. However, that action could make the difference for eternity. Moshe Rabbeinu did not realize what he was doing, and Yosef HaTzadik realized the trouble that he was going to get into – but

he did it anyway. Those actions enabled the Master of the Universe to respond to the Angels “No! The Jews are different.”

What Was Pharaoh Thinking???

After having been on the receiving end of ten Divine plagues, and after sending out Bnai Yisrael, Pharaoh suddenly says: We made a mistake. We sent out the Jews! “What have we done? We sent out Israel from being our slaves!” [Shemos 14:5]

I ask you: Pharaoh looks at his country. It is literally destroyed. The cattle are gone. The crops are gone. The firstborn are dead. Talk about destruction! Look at Germany after the bombing of the Allied campaign. Cities – literally destroyed! Nothing left! Good, Pharaoh is a stubborn fool. All along, he did not get it. He was “slow” to catch on. But now, he looks around and he sees his country is devastated. How could he say such a stupid thing – What have we done that we sent out Israel from being our slaves?

Does he not realize with whom he is dealing? Does he not realize that he is dealing with an Omnipotent G-d that he has not been able to stop? And now he plans to start all over again with Him? What was he thinking? Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky in Emes L’Yaakov offers two interpretations, one based on ‘pshat’ (the simple reading of the pesukim), and one based on human psychology.

Based on the simple interpretation, Rav Yaakov says an interesting thing on Parshas Shemos. The first time Moshe asks Pharaoh to “Send out the people,” he asks that Pharaoh release them for only three days and then they would return. Was this a trick? Did the Almighty really mean that Israel would go out for three days and then return to Egypt? What is the alternative? Was it merely a ruse?

The Almighty was not trying “to pull a fast one” on Pharaoh. The Ribono shel Olam does not work like that.

Rav Yaakov says an amazingly novel idea. There is a basic difference between Parshas Shemos on the one hand and the Parshas of VaEra and Bo on the other hand. In Parshas Shemos, Israel was supposed to remain in Egypt for the full 400 years (foretold to Avraham in Bereshis 15:13).

However, the Ribono shel Olam saw that if they stayed in Egypt much longer than the 200+ years that they were currently already there, they would have spiritual destruction and therefore they would not be able to last the 400 years. Therefore, He came up with a plan – Let them out for three days! They will go into the wilderness, they will have a national Avodas Hashem (Divine Service), this will provide a booster shot of ruchniyus (spirituality) and then they will be able to return to Egypt and remain for the rest of the four hundred years!

That was “Plan A”. Pharaoh rejected Plan A. The Almighty then came up with “Plan B”. Plan B was that they were not going to last 400 years in Egypt so the Almighty calibrated the qualitative intensity of the enslavement that they experienced during the time they were in Egypt to be equivalent to 400 years. After Parshas Shemos, there is never any more talk of “Let us go for three days.” It is always “Let us out.” This is what happens in Parshas VaEra and Parshas Bo.

Then in Parshas B’Shalach, Pharaoh says “OK, G-d, You won! I got it! Let them go for three days like You said originally!” They went, and they were gone for three days, then four days, then five days and six days and they are not turning around! Pharaoh says “Hey! What happened over here? You said three days!” This is what prompted him to go after the Jews. He felt that it was not fair that they were not coming back (as Moshe had originally offered). This is the approach based on “pshat”.

The approach based on psychology is as follows: A human being who is blinded – be it by money, be it by greed, be it by tayvah (lust), be it by passion – can look at a situation and see that there is a 99.9% chance that he is going to fail. Nonetheless, if he really wants something because of his greed or his passion or whatever, he will look at that one tenth of one percent and say “Ah! I can still do it!”

Pharaoh looked around and saw every avodah zarah was destroyed – except one. Baal Tzefon was still intact. [Shemos 14:2]. Yes! G-d took on my 99 idols and defeated them. But look! Baal Tzefon is still around. The Jews are confused in the desert. Baal Tzefon has caused them to lose their bearings. I can still get them.

Any rational person could look at this situation and say, “Look, if G-d did all this to you already, Baal Tzefon or anybody else is not going to be able to help you!” But Pharaoh was greedy. He did not want to see the slaves go, and that greed blinded him. It happened to Pharaoh and it happened in Iraq in 1991. When Donald Rumsefeld said, “We are going to go ahead, and we are going to destroy your country – “Shock and Awe” (remember that terminology?) – Saddam Hussein thought he would take on the combined forces of the United States of America and all the Allies and he would survive! Was he crazy? What motivates someone like Saddam Hussein? The answer is that it is the same psychology all over again. Whether it was his greed or his ego or whatever – he went up against the United States. That was insanity!

That is the way human beings think. If there is a one tenth of one percent chance, they will rationalize, they will bend, they will twist themselves into a pretzel and conclude – “I will be able to do it.” That is what we see from Pharaoh. The words “Before Baal Tzefon” indicate that Pharaoh observed that Baal Tzefon was still around. “He is my savior. G-d can’t beat Baal Tzefon!”

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Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar 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 www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information. 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

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Weekly Parsha BESHALACH

Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

Miracles occur in all sizes and shapes. Some are major, completely aberrational and beyond natural or rational explanation. Other miracles that occur to us daily in our own lives take the form of being natural events and part of the rhythm of society and life. Major miracles command our attention, and as we see in this week’s reading of the Torah, even cause us to sing eternal songs that extend through generations of Jewish life till our very day.

Certainly, the splitting of the waters of the sea before the Jewish people, escaping from the Army of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and then for those very waters receding and covering the drowning Egyptian enemy, is a miracle of major importance, and thus remains indelible in the collective memory of the Jewish people. So, Moshe and his sister Miriam lead the Jewish people in song to commemorate this event and to impress upon them the awesome quality of this major miracle.

We are reminded daily in our prayers of this miracle, and the song of Moshe forms an important part of our daily morning prayer service. This type of miracle was repeated when the Jewish people crossed the river Jordan on their entry into the land of Israel after the death of Moshe and at the beginning of the reign of Joshua. This could be termed less of a miracle, than what took place with the Egyptian army, yet it represented the confirmation of the divine will to protect the Jewish people and to enable them to enter, inhabit and settle the land of Israel that would be its eternal homeland over all of the millennia of civilization.

However, the commemoration and memory of the major miracle should also remind us of the so-called minor miracles that occur to us in our daily lives. We are accustomed to everything going right as far as our bodies, social interactions and commercial enterprises are concerned. But it should be obvious that for things to go just right – simply what we call normal life – countless minor miracles must take place. We recite this in our daily prayers as well, and, in fact, we do so three times a day when we acknowledge and thank God for these so-called minor miracles that are with us constantly, evening, morning and afternoon.

This ability to recognize and give thanks for the minor miracles that constitute our daily existence stems from the fact that we experienced, in our collective memory, the great miracle that made us a people, and saved us from the destruction that Pharaoh wished to visit upon us. It is this memory of the great miracle that enables us to recognize the so-called minor miracles that we are living through, especially here in the land of Israel, with the return of Jewish sovereignty.

It is important to maintain the ability to recognize and be grateful for the wonders and miracles that the Lord grants us each and every day of our individual and national lives.

Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha

Covenant & Conversation

Crossing the sea- Why the sudden change between the opening of our parsha and its close?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

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.[2] 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 also linking this to Jonah on the stormy ship.[3] 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." [4] 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.

Shabbat Shalom

[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.

Around the Shabbat Table...

Discussion Questions For Beshallah

1. What do you think God's plan was for the next stage in Jewish history, following the Exodus?

2. Why do you think the Israelites were prone to fear when they left Egypt?

3. How did the Israelites gain the courage to bravely battle Amalek?

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Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim

From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Aviner

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Charedi Dress

Q: What is the reason that there are Rabbis in our [Religious-Zionist] community who dress like Charedim?

A: 1. It is the traditional dress. 2. "Our community" is the Nation of Israel.

Mosquito on Shabbat

Q: A mosquito is a potentially lethal bug. Is it permissible to kill one on Shabbat?

A: No. 1. Put on bug-repellant. 2. In Eretz Israel, it is not a lethal bug.

Rashi's Father

Q: It is true that Rashi began his commentary on the Torah "Rabbi Yitzchak said" in order to honor his father, Yitzchak?

A: Perhaps (The Taz in his commentary 'Divrei David' on Rashi points out in the name of an ancient book that Rashi's first question of why the Torah began with the Creation of the World and not the first Mitzvah is brought in the Midrash but not in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak. Some explain that Rashi's father was not a great Torah scholar, and Rashi told him to ask a question which he would bring in his name at the beginning of his commentary. But the Taz explains that this is not correct, since Rashi brings a few comments regarding complex issues in his father's name. For example, in his commentary on the Gemara Avodah Zarah 75a. Ha-Rav David Shevel in his edition of the Divrei David writes that he found a manuscript of the Midrash which does bring the above-question in the name of a Rabbi Yitzchak, and he suggests that Rashi brought this question in the name of the questioner, which he seldom does, in order to begin the commentary with Rabbi Yitzchak, which is also his father's name, in order to honor him).

Newspaper Subscription

Q: I have a newspaper subscription. Can I give the newspaper to a friend after I read it?

A: Yes. Just as in the case of a book you bought.

Strange Kosher Food

Q: Is it permissible to attend a Kosher meal at a Siyum which includes cow udders, grasshoppers, Buffalo and red deer?

A: It is permissible. This is obviously on the condition that it is under reliable Kosher supervision. Grasshoppers are only permissible for Yemenite Jews.

Blessing on Drugs

Q: What blessing does one recite for taking drugs? After all, it is forbidden to benefit from anything in the world without a blessing?

A: One does not recite a blessing on a prohibition, such as eating pork, even if one enjoys eating it, or on murdering someone, even if one enjoys it, and certainly not on taking drugs (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 196:1).

Medicinal Marijuana on Shabbat

Q: What does a suffering person who was prescribed the use of medical marijuana do on Shabbat?

A: The Tzomet Institute of Halacha and technology has a machine which can be used on Shabbat.

Microphone at Wedding

Q: When Ha-Rav recites the blessings under a Chupa, why doesn't he use a microphone?

A: Many Poskim rule that hearing something through a microphone is not considered hearing, and a Minyan must hear the blessings.

Daven for Ill in China

Q: Should we Daven for those who are sick with the Coronavirus in China?

A: Yes. "Hashem has mercy on all His creatures" (Tehillim 145:9).

Obviously, there are worse things in the world, such as the fact that 30,000 children die each day in the world on account of hunger.

Reading about Holocaust

Q: Is reading about the Holocaust considered "Bitul Torah"?

A: It is not Torah, but it is a Mitzvah to read about it. It is a personal decision how much time one devotes to this.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Beshalach

For the week ending 8 February 2020 / 13 Shevat 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parsha Insights

The ABC of Ecology

"This is the thing that Hashem has commanded: 'Gather from it, for every man according to what he eats - an omer per person - according to the number of your people, everyone according to whoever is in his tent shall you take.'" (16:16)

The world gets smaller every day. One of the fears of living in a global village is that the village store is going to run out of food. Will we wake up one day and find our planet can no longer support its population? For years, science fiction has dwelled on highly imaginative schemes to "farm" the solar system. Here's the good news. You can relax and stop planning your trip to Andromeda. It isn't going to happen. Although waste is certainly wrong, there is no need to worry about the nourishing bounty in our world. The letters of the Hebrew language are the building blocks of Creation. When G-d created this existence, He did so using "speech." "And G-d said: Let there be light... And G-d said: Let there be sky.... And G-d said..." This is not merely a narrative tool, a stylistic convention. It means that existence consists of nothing more than G-d speaking, that it is built out of letters and words. This explains why the Hebrew word for "thing," *davar*, is comprised of the same letters as the word for "speech," *dibur*. Ultimately, "things" are no more than G-d's "words."

There's a prayer we say three times a day called *Ashrei* (*Ashrei* is the first word of this prayer.) *Ashrei* is a combination of two of the Psalms of King David. But what is so important about these particular Psalms that we say them three times a day?

If you open a siddur you'll notice that the first letters of each line of *Ashrei* go in alphabetical order. The first line starts with aleph, the second with bet, etc. *Ashrei* also contains the verse, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of all life." This is a promise that G-d will sustain each one of us. What is the connection between having enough to eat and the aleph-beit? With that same aleph-beit that G-d created the world, He creates a sufficiency for every living thing. G-d created this world with a plan. Man is the centerpiece of this plan. Just as He created the ABC of Creation, He has made sure that His plan will be fulfilled, right down to XY and Z. Every creature will receive its needs. We don't have to worry that there won't be enough for everyone to eat. We don't have to worry that the world will become overpopulated. With that same "whole cloth" that G-d fabricated existence, the aleph-beit, He provided a sufficiency for His Creation at all times.

"This is the thing that Hashem has commanded: 'Gather from it, for every man according to what he eats - an omer per person - according to the number of your people, everyone according to whoever is in his tent shall you take.'"

In this week's Torah portion we learn of the manna, the miraculous food that sustained the Jewish People for 40 years in the desert. Manna is the prototype of G-d sustaining man miraculously, providing for his every need. Just as in *Ashrei*, the above verse illustrates that every person receives according to his needs. And interestingly, it also contains all twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Also, if you count the Hebrew letters of this verse, you will find they add up to 70. This corresponds to our global village's seventy nations who are constantly sustained by the Creator. You don't have to worry. The "village store" is never going to be "out of bread."

Sources: Rabbi Sholem Fishbane in the name of Rabbi Uziel Milevsky from *Rabbeinu Bachye*

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Dvar Torah: Beshalach

What's the best way to thank God?

What is the best way to thank Hashem for enabling us to survive?

In Parashat Beshalach the Torah describes the miraculous redemption of the Israelites. Having emerged on the other side of the Red Sea they sang the famous 'Az Yashir – The song of Moshe. They exclaimed, "Zeh Keili V'Anveihu – This is my God, and I will glorify Him." This was their expression of gratitude to Hashem.

But what does that actually mean? How do you glorify God?

The Gemara in Masechet Shabbat, Daf Kuf Lamed Gimmel Amud Bet, explains I 'glorify Hashem' by beautifying the commandments that I perform. It could be the Tefillin I wear, Tzitzit, Tallit, or the candles that I light just before Shabbat or Yom Tov, the Arba Minim and so on. We shouldn't treat these Mitzvot as opportunities to just about pass the line, to be 'yotzeh,' to do what is right and no more. Rather we should take pride in them to show how much we appreciate the beauty of Mitzvot. In that way we glorify Hashem's name.

There is another 'peirush' that is given by many of our medieval commentators, such as Onkelos, Rashi, Ibn Ezra and the Ramban.

They say that the word 'V'Anveihu' comes from the root 'Naveh' which means a home. Therefore 'V'Anveihu' means, 'I will build a home for Hashem'. Here, from the dawn of the existence of the Jewish nation, as it emerged from Egypt, they aspired to build a Temple – a home for Hashem. The 'Peirush' I like most is that of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch. He said that 'V'Anveihu' literally means 'I will become a home for Hashem'. Indicating that the very essence of my being will be one through which I reflect the existence of the Almighty in the world.

This is something we achieve through the spirituality that hopefully we will attain and also via the 'Chessed' - the loving-kindness that one can extend to others.

When Avraham Avinu stood before the children of Chait, wanting to purchase land to bury Sarah, they declared, "Nasee Elokim Ata Betocheinu – You are a prince of God in our midst."

In Avraham Avinu they saw somebody who embodied the very existence of Hashem through his ways. He was somebody who achieved the 'Vanveihu'. They recognised a great person of Kedusha – of spirituality and also a great master of 'Chessed' - somebody who genuinely cared for others.

This is how we thank Hashem for enabling our people to survive. This is how we glorify him through being veritable princes and princesses. Having Hashem in our hearts and minds all the time.

Shabbat Shalom

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Ohr Somayach

Insights into Halacha

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

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Beshalach: Deserving of Miracles

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Where there is great love there are always miracles. - Willa Cather

There is a well-known Midrash that has the angels standing by God's side as He famously splits the Sea for the Children of Israel while at the same time He drowns the pursuing Egyptian army:

"God," the angels asked, "how can you spare the Hebrews and kill the Egyptians? These are idol worshipers and these are idol worshipers!"

As we know, idol worship is among the most severe sins in the Torah, punishable by death, so the angels' question is entirely reasonable.

The Meshech Chochma on Exodus 14:29 states that idolatry is indeed quite severe, especially as compared to such sins as infighting, gossip, slander or even theft, none of

which carry the death penalty. Nonetheless, he indicates that the divine judgment is reversed when it comes to “group” sin, based on the Jerusalem Talmud (Tractate Peah 4b).

It is true that if an individual commits idolatry, he is deserving of the death penalty, while if he commits one of the “lesser” sins, his punishment (if any) is less severe. However, according to the Meshech Chochman and the Jerusalem Talmud, the tables are turned when we are talking about the entire people of Israel. He brings two examples: In the times of King David, the population was relatively pious, faithfully worshipping God and correctly averting idolatry. However, because the people were talebearers, God would strike the Jewish people down in their wars.

On the other hand, In the times of King Ahav, who leads one of the most idolatrous generations ever, there were no talebearers, and as a result, they emerged victorious and unscathed from their battles. The lesson being, that a community that is kind to each other, that does not bear tales about each other, even if they are idolaters like the generation of Ahav, not only are they not punished, but they merit salvation and victory in their wars. But even a generation of righteous people like those in the time of King David, if they don’t look out for each other, God’s wrath is not far behind.

Therein lies the answer to the angels’ question about the Jewish people at the splitting of the Sea. Even though they were idol worshippers, they behaved well towards one another and that merited not only salvation but outright miracles.

May we ever be deserving of miracles.

Dedication - To the complete and rapid recovery of all those stricken by the coronavirus epidemic.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Beshalach 5780 - Being “G-d’s Hand”

Parashat Beshalach begins with the Jewish nation’s exodus from Egypt, finally liberated from slavery. But when we continue reading the Torah portion, we discover that the liberation was not yet complete. A few days after they began their journey, the former slaves find out that their freedom is far from guaranteed. The Egyptian army led by King Pharaoh chased after the Jewish nation and caught up to them as they camped on the shore of the Red Sea. The trap was perfect: They were surrounded by the sea in front of them and the Egyptian army in back of them.

The story ends with the familiar “Parting of the Red Sea”. The sea split into two, leaving land on which the Jewish nation could advance. The Egyptians who were behind them did not retreat. They continued chasing the fleeing nation into the dry path that had appeared in the sea. But then, just as the last Jew came up out of the sea onto the opposing shore, the dry path was flooded with water and the Egyptian army drowned along with its chariots and arms.

The Jews could not have hoped for a happier ending. When the bodies of the Egyptians - those who had been their slave-masters, torturers, and oppressors – washed up onto shore, the nation broke out into the song, the Song of the Sea (Shirat HaYam) that is written in this week’s parasha and which is recited every morning during Shacharit services.

In this sublime song, the nation expresses its joy and acknowledgment of the miracles G-d performed for it. The song describes the despair and the redemption, Pharaoh’s spitefulness versus G-d’s salvation. But the purpose is described as well:

You shall bring them and plant them on the mount of Your heritage, directed toward Your habitation, which You made, O Lord; the sanctuary, O Lord, [which] Your hands founded.

(Exodus 15, 17)

This is how the nation expressed the recognition that the exodus to freedom was not an end unto itself. Freedom was essential in order to advance to the next stage: reaching the Land of Israel, and building an independent Jewish state with the Temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem at its center.

This familiar Jewish hope, expressed in the prayer “May the Temple will be built speedily in our days”, began there on the banks of the Red Sea. The Temple was built, stood for centuries, and then was destroyed. It was rebuilt and destroyed again. And since then, the Jewish nation has never forgotten its aspiration to see the Temple standing in all its glory in Jerusalem.

An interesting midrash reveals another layer in this unique verse. When we read this verse, we are convinced that the Temple was built by G-d Himself. But anyone who

knows history knows that the First Temple in Jerusalem was built by King Solomon, and the Second Temple was built by the immigrants of the “Return to Zion”. Who then, built the Temple?

Bar Kappara taught: The handiwork of the righteous is greater than the creation of heaven and earth, as with regard to the creation of heaven and earth it is written: ‘My hand also has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has spanned the heavens’. Whereas with regard to the handiwork of the righteous it is written: ‘The place which You have made for Yourself to dwell in, Lord, the Sanctuary, Lord, which your hands have established’.

(Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ktuvat, 5)

Bar Kappara, a sage from the Land of Israel in the 1st century, clarifies the language of the verses. In relation to the creation of the world, the hand of G-d is used, metaphorically of course, in the singular; whereas in relation to the building of the Temple, the hands of G-d are mentioned in plural. From this, he concludes, that the handiwork of the righteous is greater than all of creation.

The righteous, those who dedicated themselves to the purpose of building the Temple, are considered to be the “hands of G-d”. Therefore, building the Temple is considered “the handiwork of the righteous” and is attributed also to the hands of G-d. This is what Bar Kappara wishes to teach us. When we work toward positive goals, when we try to add holiness to human reality – we merit being the “hand of G-d”.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Beshalach

פרשת בשלח תשפ

ופרעה הקריב וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם והנה מצרים נסע אחריהם ויראו מאד ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ד'

Pharaoh approached, Bnei Yisrael raised their eyes and behold! Egypt was journeying after them, and they were very frightened; Bnei Yisrael cried out to Hashem. (14:10)

Did it have to be this way? Finally, after 210 years of brutal enslavement, the Jews were leaving. It was a happy day, but it did not last very long. A few days later, when the Jews were standing at the banks of the Red Sea, suddenly Pharaoh and his minions were chasing after them. Understandably, the nation broke out in all-consuming fear followed by their audible crying to Hashem. We return to our opening question: Did it have to be this way? *Chazal (Shemos Rabbah 21:5)* ask this and give a simple, but profound, explanation: Hashem desires the prayers of His children. They present a penetrating analogy, comparing *Klal Yisrael* to a young maiden in distress. Her cries were heard by the king, who came and overpowered her attackers. The king was impressed with the maiden’s character and sought her hand in marriage. All went well for a few weeks, until the king realized that his wife hardly ever spoke. In order to provoke her cries (once again), he went to “hire a thief.” He gathered a group of “thieves” to frighten his wife. All this for one purpose: to get his wife to cry out to him. Likewise, Hashem was used to the Jews crying out to Him. Once they were liberated, it all came to a stop. To alleviate this “problem” and satisfy His desire to hear their cry, He sent Pharaoh and his men after them.

Are we to accept the notion that once liberated, the Jews abandoned their prayers? *Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita*, explains that *Klal Yisrael* certainly did not cease praying to Hashem. It is just that they no longer prayed in the same manner as they had before. As long as a person does not sense that, without Hashem, he has absolutely no chance of resolving his present issue, his prayer is incomplete. We are used to exhausting every avenue of salvation, among them, praying to Hashem. This is our error. One who does not pray on a regular basis to Hashem, as if He were the only avenue of salvation, does not offer a complete/perfect prayer. This is what Hashem sought. He is not the last resort. He is the only resort.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, who explains *Chazal’s* statement (*Berachos 10a*), “Even if the blade of a sharp sword rests on a person’s neck, he should not refrain from begging for mercy.” The simple *p’shat*, explanation, is that even at such a last-ditch moment, when all indications are that one has no chance for salvation, he should still pray, because, even at such an impossible moment, Hashem can come to the rescue.

Rav Yeruchem explains that he should pray because now his prayer is different. Now, he sees the end. Now he sees and realizes that his only hope is Hashem. Such a prayer is unique; it is real, because now he is acknowledging that only Hashem can save him. Veritably, he has prayed often and hard, with devotion and passion, but it was not the same as in the present. He is up against the proverbial wall. He has no

source of hope, other than Hashem. He knows that this is crunch time; the sword is pressing against his throat. When he prays now, it is from the very bottom of his heart, from where he should have prayed all along, but did not, because he relied on the doctors, the medicines, the bankers, everyone but the only One Who can truly help him – Hashem.

This is how we must *daven*: as if we have no other hope, but Hashem. Sadly, we rely on Hashem only when all other hope has been exhausted. If we would only think of Hashem first, instead of last, we would never give up hope, because when it comes to Hashem, we always have hope. For a Jew, giving up hope is not an option.

The following vignettes underscore the notion that one should never give up hope and that when, despite all odds, one perseveres, he/she should be lauded. When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, it was after unsuccessfully having tried 2,000 experiments. A young reporter asked him how it felt to have failed 2,000 times. The inventor thought for a moment and replied, “Actually I have never failed. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2,000 step process.”

A school teacher had a student early in his career who was troublesome and disruptive. He bullied other students and helped himself to whatever they had in their lockers. Finally, as a last resort, he was suspended a number of times. The teacher was wont to have the class memorize famous inspirational sayings. He had the students repeat them back to him at roll call. Among them were, “If you see the obstacles, it is an indication that you have lost sight of the goal.” (One who is goal-oriented focuses on his goal and ignores the obstacles as if they were not there.) “There is no failure except in no longer trying.” While the troublesome student continually complained about school, it was this routine about which he complained the most. The breaking point came when the principal could no longer tolerate his attitude towards the suspensions. This time the suspension was final. He was expelled.

Fast-forward five years. The student who had been such a problem appeared one afternoon at school and proceeded to his old classroom in search of the teacher. Meekly, he entered the room as the teacher was preparing to go home: “Hello. I just wanted you to know that I have turned around my life. When I was expelled, I had not yet reached the bottom. This came a year later, when my various antics led to juvenile detention and then progressed to adult prison. One day, I became so disgusted with myself that I took the razor blade way out of my troubles. As my life slowly ebbed out, I suddenly recalled the dumb quote you had me write one day: ‘There is no failure except in no longer trying.’ Then it suddenly all made sense to me. As long as I was alive, I was not a failure, but, if I allowed my life to end, I would most certainly leave this world a dismal failure. So, with my remaining strength, I called for help. That was the beginning of my new life. Thank you!”

The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, thrives when we throw in the towel. He wants us to give up hope. It makes his “job” that much easier, because we do it for him. Early on in our spiritual journey, the *yetzer hora* presents a negative image of the journey, making it appear terribly compelling. I came across the following story which should make us all think.

A Jew came to a certain town with the intention of collecting *tzedakah*, charity. The man was an eloquent and dynamic speaker, impressing even the *rav* of the community. After the speech, which he delivered to a full house, the fellow asked the *rav* if he would accompany him as he went from door to door to raise money for the poor. Having the community’s *rav* alongside him would elevate his standing in the eyes of the people, and this esteem would translate into more funds. The *rav* consented.

People were generous, opening up their hearts and their checkbooks, with sums that had been unheard of in the past. After the first few people, the *rav* took this Jew into a dark, isolated alley and grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket. He said to him angrily, “What is this scam? If you do not immediately tell me the truth about yourself, I will make sure that you will not leave this alley on your own volition.”

The fellow begged the *rav* to put him down. He agreed to confess and to tell the whole truth. “I am actually a *meshumad*, apostate, who reneged my Jewish heritage and joined the church. I worked my way up and became a priest. I was collecting for my church. I do not understand where I slipped up. I was so careful. How did you see through my ruse?”

The *rav* laughed and replied, “Actually, you were perfect. You did not slip up at all. You had me completely fooled. This is not the first time that I have collected money in this community. Whenever a serious situation has risen in which money was sorely needed, I went from door to door pleading with people. What bothered me today was the size of the checks. When I went for money, I was lucky to obtain ten dollars from the extremely wealthy. Yet, those same people gave hundreds! They were literally throwing their money at you! It was then that it dawned on me. If this was such a worthwhile cause, where was the *yetzer hora*? Why was he not preventing our success? That is when it hit me: You are collecting for him, the *yetzer hora*. He wants you to succeed in raising Jewish money for your church. This is why he is even helping you to succeed.”

What is the lesson from this vignette? We learn that when we get the urge to give up, it is the *yetzer hora* encouraging our downfall. He wants us to give up and stop climbing. As long as we keep on climbing, we are still in the fight. When we stop fighting, we have lost the war.

וַיִּשְׂם אֱתָ הַיָּם לַחֲרֹבָה וַיִּבְקְעוּ הַמַּיִם

And He turned the sea to damp land and the water split. (14:21)

The *Midrash (Socheir Tov 114)* states that the waters of the Red Sea split when they saw *arona shel Yosef*, the coffin of Yosef, which was being transported to *Eretz Yisrael* for burial. At first, the waters remained in place, despite the presence of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Aharon *HaKohen* and all of *Klal Yisrael*. Only after the waters took note of the presence of Yosef’s coffin did they “agree” to split. David *HaMelech* immortalized this *tete-a-tete* in *Tehillim* (114:3), *Hayam raah va’yanoss*, “The sea saw and fled.” “What did the sea see? It saw *arona shel Yosef*.” What was it about Yosef’s coffin that motivated the sea to “acquiesce” to change the course of nature?

The *Ksav Sofer* (quoted by *Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl*) offers an insightful explanation. The *sar shel yam*, the angel in charge of the sea, was not prepared for the change in nature which Hashem had set in motion during Creation. He asked, “Why should I split the sea? Should nature be changed just because *Klal Yisrael* is in danger? Should they go to war with the Egyptians and be allowed to win?” Why change *maaseh Bereishis*, an act of Creation?

At first glance, the angel’s argument is quite sensible and practical. Moshe, however, countered that the Jewish people, having been “guests” of the Egyptians during the hunger that occurred at the time of Yaakov *Avinu*, could not be ingrates and make war with the Egyptians. A debt of gratitude is a firm and demanding responsibility, regardless of the character of the benefactor.

The angel asked, “Who is to say that *Klal Yisrael* is unable to fight due to a compelling debt of gratitude owed to the Egyptians? Perhaps they are simply too lazy to fight.” His attitude changed as soon as he saw Yosef’s *aron*. He now had clear, unabashed proof that gratitude played an overwhelming role in Jewish life. How was this evinced from Yosef?

The *Ramban* asks why Yosef was forced to run (like a guilty person) from Potifar’s wife? He could have easily overpowered her and taken back his garment. He had no reason to run and leave his garment in her hands. All this achieved was to make him appear as if he were an intruder with unholy intentions who had been caught red-handed. *Ramban* explains that he could not make her appear as the evil aggressor (that she was), because he was grateful to her for the hospitality she had shown him when she welcomed him into her home.

We see now why Yosef’s *aron* (or, rather, Yosef) made such an impression on the angel. Yosef could have easily maintained his pristine reputation by smearing Potifar’s wife and exposing her for the immoral woman that she was. What prevented him from doing this was his sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. The angel now desisted, because he saw that the Jewish people adhere strongly to *hakoras hatov*. It is part of their natural heritage, a legacy passed on through the generations. Thus, he “allowed” nature to be altered via the splitting of the Red Sea.

לִמְשַׁרְתָּ לְדֹרֹתֶיכֶם לְמַעַן יִרְאוּ אֶת הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר הָאֲכַלְתִּי אֹתְכֶם בְּמִדְבָּר

It shall be a keepsake for your generations, so that they will see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness. (16:32)

Throughout the entirety of the human experience on this earth, phenomenon is remotely comparable to the *manna*. Hashem fed an entire nation for forty years in a wilderness that provided no hope of sustenance. We did receive the *slav*, quail, from Hashem, but, when one peruses the narrative, it seems that the quail was not a basic necessity for survival. The *manna* was the Jew’s staple.

Hashem commands us to pattern our lives after those who ate the *manna*, the *ochlei mann*. Furthermore, Moshe *Rabbeinu* instructed Aharon *HaKohen* to place the *tzintzenes ha’mann*, a jar of *manna*, before the Testimony, *Luchos*, in the *Kodesh Ha’Kedoshim*, Holy of Holies, as a keepsake for generations. This was so that later in time, during the generation of Yirmiyahu *Ha’Navi*, it would be shown to *Klal Yisrael* as a lesson to demonstrate the level of *bitachon*, trust, in the Almighty that was evinced by the Nation then, and what was expected of the Nation today – and for all time.

The *manna* experience defined *Klal Yisrael* as the nation of the Torah. It was a prerequisite for *Kabbalas haTorah*, the receiving of the Torah. If we could not pass the litmus test of the *manna*, then we were not yet ready to accept and cherish the Torah. Why is this? How did the *manna* experience refine us to prepare us for *Kabbalas haTorah*?

Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl, explains that one of the primary messages of the *manna* is *bitachon*, trust in Hashem. We must be confident in our belief that Hashem will provide and care for our needs. Without this sense of trust, we are lacking in our ability to receive the Torah and make it our guide for life. Indeed, this is how we survived in the wilderness. Every morning, our ancestors went out in search of their sustenance. When they retired at night, nothing was left: no food, no snacks, absolutely

nothing. The *manna* did not fall by the door of their tents. They had to go out with their pots and collect it. It was a nice walk, roughly twelve kilometers, a significant distance. The Jew who did not endeavor went hungry. This was his *hishtadlus*, endeavoring.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* contends that this relationship between *hishtadlus* and *parnassah* was to continue even after the *manna* ceased to descend from Heaven. The Jews would quickly realize that the bread they would eat/the sustenance from which they would survive, might appear to be the by-product of the earth from which it grows (actually the wheat from which it is made), but wheat/bread does not grow on its own. Hashem makes it grow, but man must plow, sow, weed, pray for rain and harvest the crop. Trusting that Hashem is the only Source of sustenance is the primary lesson of the *manna*. The *hishtadlus* we expend is a vital part of our *bitachon*. This principle has guided us throughout the generations. We do not sit back and expect it to “just happen.” We are *mishtadel*, endeavor, each individual in his own unique manner. *Tefillah*, prayer, is a critical component of *hishtadlus*. Prayer transforms an activity into *hishtadlus*. It is the power source for the *hishtadlus*. Seeds do not grow simply because they are placed into the ground. Hashem allows them to grow. We must pray to Him to activate this process.

Without *bitachon*, we struggle to maintain our commitment to Hashem during difficult times. Imagine locking down one’s field for an entire year during the *Shemittah*, seventh year, when all land is to lie fallow (in *Eretz Yisrael*). Three times a year, we went up to Yerushalayim on a pilgrimage to the *Bais HaMikdash*. During this time, we brought *maaser*, tithes, *Bikurim*, first fruits, and fulfilled many *mitzvos*. We spent and spent, but Who took care of our fields, our families? Hashem. This is *bitachon*. This is how a Jew lives and survives.

As I write this, I read the *pasuk* again and noted the word, *ha’echalti*, I fed. Hashem did not just provide, He fed us. This is how we should view our daily sustenance: Hashem is feeding us, just like our mothers did when we were infants. We are unable to eat on our own. We must be fed. Hashem feeds us. So, when we pick up a piece of bread, cake, any form of food, the *brachah*, blessing, that we recite is a critical part of the eating dynamic. We bless Hashem Who is now about to feed us. Think about that.

Va’ani Tefillah

ברוך אתה ד' שומע תפילה – Boruch atah Hashem Shomea tefillah.

The *Chasam Sofer* (*Shut, Orach Chaim 16* – quoted by *Horav Shimon Schwab*) explains that the entire concept of *tefillah*, prayer – whereby we/humans speak to Hashem and He responds by answering our *tefillas* – is nothing short of a *neis nistar*, hidden miracle. Hashem communicates with a human being either directly, or through the means of a *malach*, angel, or through the experience of *nevuah*, prophecy. While a *navi* is on the level to have a dialogue with Hashem, we, mere mortals, are only on the level of monologue, during which we speak/petition and Hashem responds. The vehicle for this is *tefillah*, which is another example of *neis nistar*.

Rav Schwab explains how the fact that Hashem hears our *tefillas* and responds in kind is a hidden miracle. Otherwise, the concept of praying for Hashem’s help is completely ludicrous. He explains this with a simple, but thought-provoking, analogy. An individual who is critically ill is undergoing serious surgery performed by surgeons who are certainly not G-d-fearing Jews. They could be anything from secular to atheist. In another room, a member of the patient’s family is reciting *Tehillim* that the surgery should have a positive outcome. If the efficacy of the *tefillah* were not a miracle, it would be totally ludicrous to recite *Tehillim* with the hope that the *Tehillim* should cause the secular doctors to perform at their peak. *Tefillah* allows a person to sit at home and pray for positive results. This is a miracle.

Idu Keller - לעילוי נשמת איידל קעללער בת ה' יעקב שמעון פאללאק ע"ה נפטר ל' ג שבט תשס"ז
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Subject Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (dneustadt@cordetroit.com)

Yoshev Rosh - Vaad HaRabanim of Detroit

Weekly Halacha :: Parshas Beshalach

Lichvod Tu'Bshvat - Bal Tashchis: Preservation Of Fruit Trees

Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

It is Biblically prohibited to cut down a fruit tree(1) for no reason. The prohibition is based on a verse in Parshas Shoftim(2): When you besiege a city... to wage war... do

not destroy its trees by swinging an ax against them, for from it you will eat, and you shall not cut it down... only a tree that you know is not a food tree, it you may destroy and cut down...

All fruit trees(3) are included, even a tree that bears bitter or wormy fruit.(4) If, however, people will unknowingly eat the wormy fruit, then it is permitted to cut the tree down.(5)

Many poskim maintain that the prohibition applies only to chopping down the entire tree but not when just a few branches are cut.(6) Although some authorities are stringent,(7) it is permissible to cut branches to meet any need or to fulfill a mitzvah, e.g., if the branches are hovering over a sukkah.(8)

It is forbidden to cut a fruit-bearing tree that has yet to bear fruit.(9) An aged tree, however, which experts say is no longer able to produce fruit and is bothersome to maintain, may be cut down.(10)

There is a minority opinion that holds that even a non- fruit- bearing tree should not be cut down indiscriminately.(11) It is permitted, though, to cut down such a tree for any purpose or need, either commercial or personal.(12)

THE ELEMENT OF DANGER

As if to reinforce the Biblical prohibition quoted above against cutting down a fruit tree, we find in Rabbinic literature some ominous warnings against doing so. The Talmud(13) quotes Rav Chanina as blaming his son’s untimely passing on the fact the his son had cut down a fig tree while it was still flourishing. Additionally, we find in the Talmud(14) that the moon and stars are “punished” (eclipsed) because healthy, fruit-bearing trees are chopped down. Rabbeinu Yehudah he-Chasid in his Will [45] also warns against destroying any fruit-producing trees.

These additional Rabbinical admonitions lead some poskim(15) to conclude that even when halachically permitted to cut down a tree – as we will explain later – still, one should be reluctant to do so, for there is an element of danger involved even when there is no halachic restriction. Many other poskim,(16) however, maintain that the Rabbinical deterrents were merely meant to add a measure of severity to the Biblical prohibition, but when it is halachically permitted, there is no danger involved at all. The following list, therefore, is based on the opinion of the more lenient authorities.

The basic rule is that it is only forbidden to cut a tree down unnecessarily, in a destructive manner. It is permitted to chop a tree down if one will benefit from destroying it. Therefore it is permitted to cut down a fruit tree:

* If the tree is ruining or weakening other nearby trees.(17)

* If the wood of the tree is more valuable than its fruit.(18)

* If one needs to build a home on the site(19) where the tree is growing. (20) Some poskim allow cutting the tree down only for a mitzvah need,(21) e.g., to build a shul or a mikveh. Some poskim recommend that one never cut down a tree in order to build a home on its site.(22)

* If a fruit-laden tree is darkening the window of a house [or brings bugs into the house, etc.], unless the problem can be alleviated by trimming the branches.(23)

As mentioned earlier, some poskim are hesitant about cutting down a fruit tree under any circumstances. While many rely on the more lenient poskim who permit doing so – halachically, if one could follow one of the following options he would go a long way towards satisfying even the more stringent opinions.(24)

Thus whenever possible it is preferable:

* To ask a non-Jew to cut down the tree.(25)

* To sell the tree with the surrounding area to a non-Jew before cutting it.(26)

* Before chopping it down, to let the tree wither and die on its own.(27)

* Whenever possible, to transplant the tree elsewhere.(28)

It is advisable that any decision involving the axing of a tree be presented to a competent rabbi. When presenting the question, the following information should be submitted:

* If the tree bears, or will bear, fruit.

* The location of the tree.

* Its value and significance.

* The reason for cutting it down.

* If it is possible or worthwhile to transplant it.

* If it can be cut down by a non-Jew.

* If it can be sold to a non-Jew.

BAL TASHCHIS

As an extension of the Biblical prohibition against cutting down fruit trees, the Rabbis added an injunction(29) against needlessly destroying anything of value, be it an article of clothing, a piece of food, a beverage,(30) or a utensil. Anyone who ruins anything(31) that could be used by others transgresses this injunction.(32) But when the item is destroyed for a purpose there is no issue of bal tashchis. Thus:

* It is permitted to destroy anything of value for any need, medical reason, or monetary benefit.(33)

- * It is permitted to break a glass under the chupah to remind us of the destruction of Jerusalem.(34)
- * It is permitted to rip apart kosher tzitzis strings in order to replace them with newer or better ones.(35)
- * It is permitted to replace a kosher yeriah in a Sefer Torah with a newer or a better one.(36)
- * It is permitted to burn a table or a chair if one has no other firewood with which to warm himself or cook his food.(37)

FOOTNOTES: 1 The prohibition applies also to trees owned by non-Jews, as well as to trees which do not have an owner at all; Shulchan Aruch Harav (Shemiras Guf v'Nefesh 14). 2 Devarim 20:19. 3 "Fruit trees" are only those trees whose fruit one would recite a borei pri ha-eitz over; Shevet ha-Levi 5:95. 4 Darchei Teshuvah 116:51. 5 Be'er Moshe 5:136. 6 See Mishneh Lamelech (Isurei Mizbe'ach 7:3); Aruch ha-Shulchan 116:13; Har Tzvi O.C. 2:101; Harav Y.S. Elyashiv and Harav S. Wosner (quoted in Eitz ha-Sadeh 1, note 15). 7 See Doveiv Meisharim 2:42. 8 See Darchei Teshuvah 116:51. It is definitely permitted to prune a tree in order to enhance its growth; ibid. 9 Darchei Teshuvah 116:51. 10 Rambam Hilchos Melachim 6:9; Shulchan Aruch Harav (Shemiras Guf v'Nefesh 15). See also Seforno Devarim 20:20. 11 Piskei Tosafos (Pesachim 132). 12 Darchei Teshuvah 116:51. 13 Bava Kamma 91b; Bava Basra 26a. 14 Sukkah 29a. See also Pesachim 50b. 15 See Yaavetz 1:76; Chasam Sofer Y.D. 102; Maharsham 1:22; 7:178; Minchas Elazar 3:13; Levushei Mordechai 57; Divrei Yoel 1:92. 16 Shulchan Aruch Harav (ibid.16); Binyan Tziyon 1:61; Bayis Shelomo Y.D. 191; Shevet ha-Levi 5:95. 17 Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 6:8, based on Bava Kamma 92a; Shulchan Aruch Harav (Shemiras Guf v'Nefesh 15); Doveiv Meisharim 1:134. 18 Ibid. 19 This leniency should not be relied upon in order to make room for taking walks or allowing air to circulate more freely, etc.; Chavos Yair 195; Beis Yitzchak Y.D. 1:142; Aruch ha-Shulchan Y.D. 116:13. 20 Taz Y.D. 116:6 based on the Rosh, and agreed to by most poskim; see Shulchan Aruch Harav (ibid.); Chochmas Adam 68:7; Binyan Tziyon 1:61; Sdei Chemed (Beis 102). 21 Divrei Chayim 2:57 and other poskim quoted in Darchei Teshuvah 116:51. 22 See Chasam Sofer Y.D. 102. 23 Kaf ha-Chayim 116:85. 24 See Sdei Chemed (Beis 102). 25 Yaavetz 1:76; Minchas Shelomo 2:97-3 and Yeshurun, vol. 15, pg. 155. 26 Darchei Teshuvah 116:51. 27 Shevet ha-Levi 6:112-4, who reports that this is the custom. 28 Chasam Sofer Y.D. 102; Meishiv Davar 2:56. There are several points involved in this procedure. See also Yaavetz 1:76, who allows cutting down a fruit tree for any reason if the tree will be replanted elsewhere, but many poskim do not agree with this leniency; see Shevet ha-Levi 2:47 and 5:95. 29 Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 6:10 as understood by most authorities. Some Rishonim, however, hold that bal tashchis on any item is Biblically forbidden; see Tosafos Avodah Zarah 11a and Bava Metzia 32b. See also Sefer ha-Chinuch 529 and Rambam, Sefer ha-Mitzvos 57. 30 Except water; O.C. 170:22. See Da'as Torah Y.D. 116:5. 31 Even if it worth only pennies; Rabbeinu Yonah in Sha'arei Teshuvah 3:82. 32 Shulchan Aruch Harav (Shemiras Guf v'Nefesh 14). 33 Shevu Yaakov 3:71 and other poskim. 34 Mishnah Berurah 560:9. 35 Mishnah Berurah 15:3. 36 Chochmas Adam 86:16. 37 Mishnah Berurah 501:28.

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Feeding the Birds

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Those who prefer, please substitute the word man for the English word manna.

Question #1: Was Mom Wrong?

"My mother always shook out crumbs in our backyard on parshas Beshalach. Although she was from her whole life, she had little formal Jewish education, and all of her Yiddishkeit was what she picked up from her home. I discovered recently that Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah prohibits this practice. So how could my mother have done this?"

Question #2: Dog Next Door

"We have an excellent relationship with our next door neighbor, who happens not to be Jewish, although I am not sure if that affects the question. They are going away on vacation and have asked us to feed their pets while they are away. May I do so on Shabbos?"

Question #3: In the Zoo

"How are zoo animals fed on Shabbos?"

Introduction:

Many people have the custom of scattering wheat or breadcrumbs for the birds to enjoy as their seudas Shabbos on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, which is called Shabbos Shirah. This practice, which we know goes back hundreds of years, has engendered halachic discussion as to whether it is actually permitted. I will first explain the reasons for the custom and then the halachic issues and discussion, which we can trace from the earliest commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch to the recent authorities. I am also assuming that there is no problem of carrying – in other words, we are discussing scattering food within an area enclosed by an eruv.

Manna on Shabbos

To explain the reason for this practice that my mother taught me and that my mother-in-law taught my wife, we need to first look at our parsha. Moshe informed Bnei Yisroel that no manna would fall on Shabbos morning, and that the double portion received on Friday would suffice for two days. The Torah teaches that some Jews went to look for manna anyway on Shabbos morning, but did not find any.

According to the traditional story, Dason and Aviram took some of their own leftover manna from Friday, which means that they went a bit hungry that day. They placed this manna outside the Jewish camp, and in the morning they informed the people that manna had fallen. Their attempt to discredit the miracle failed when the people went to look and found nothing there. This was because some birds had arrived to eat the manna before the people would find it. To reward the birds for preventing a chillul Hashem, people spread food for the birds to eat.

Like the birds

I saw another reason for this practice, also related to the falling of the manna. According to this reason, placing feed for birds is to remind us that Hashem provided food for us in the desert, similar to the way birds readily find their food without any difficulty.

Birds sing

Others cite a different basis for the practice. According to this version, the reason for feeding the birds on this Shabbos is because on Shabbos Shirah, we commemorate the Jews singing praise to Hashem after being saved at the Yam Suf. According to this reason, the birds also sang shirah at the Yam Suf, and we feed them to commemorate the event (Tosafos Shabbos 324:17, and several later authorities who quote him). As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word tzipor is based on the Aramaic word tzafra, which means morning, and expresses the concept that birds sing praise to Hashem every morning (see Ramban, Vayikra 14:4).

There is a fascinating account transmitted verbally from the Tzemach Tzedek of Lubavitch, who heard from his grandfather, the Ba'al HaTanya, that their ancestor, the Maharal of Prague, would do the following on Shabbos Shirah: First, he told the rabbei'im of the schools and the fathers to bring the children to the shul courtyard. He then instructed the rabbei'im to relate to the children the story of Keri'as Yam Suf, how the birds sang and danced while Moshe and the Bnei Yisroel sang Az Yashir, and that the children crossing Yam Suf took fruits from trees growing there and afterward fed them to the birds that sang.

No local songbirds

Although I have not yet explained the halachic controversy surrounding this custom, I will share a difference in practical halacha that might result from the dispute between the different reasons. According to the first two reasons, one would spread food for the birds, even if one lives in an area where the bird population includes no songbirds. According to the third approach, in such a place there would be no reason to observe the practice.

Questionable practice

Notwithstanding that Jews have been observing the custom of spreading food for birds on Shabbos Shirah for several hundred years, there is a major halachic controversy about its observance. This is based on a Mishnah and a passage of the Gemara that discuss whether on Shabbos one may provide water and food for birds and other creatures that are not dependent on man for their daily bread or birdseed. The reason for this prohibition is, apparently, because this type of activity, being unnecessary for one's observance of Shabbos, is viewed as a tircha yeseirah. I will explain this as "distracting exertion," meaning that Chazal did not want us involving ourselves in what they determined to be unnecessary activities, since this detracts from the sanctity of the Shabbos day.

I have seen much discussion about the custom of feeding birds on Shabbos Shirah, but virtually all in Ashkenazic sources. It seems to me that this custom is either predominantly or exclusively an Ashkenazic practice. The only Sephardic authority I have found who mentions the practice is the Kaf Hachayim, who lived in the twentieth century, and whose work predominantly anthologizes earlier commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch. Therefore, his reporting the Ashkenazic authorities who discuss the custom does not necessarily reflect that any Sefardic communities observed this practice.

At this point, we need to discuss the background to the halachic question about the practice of feeding the birds on Shabbos Shirah.

The original source

The Mishnah (Shabbos 155b) rules that one may not place water before bees or doves that live in cotes, but one may do so before geese, chickens and Hardisian doves.

What type of dove?

There are actually three different texts of this Mishnah. According to one version, one is prohibited to water "Hardisian" doves (Rashi), which refers to a geographic location where they raised doves similarly to the way ducks or geese are raised as livestock. A second version prohibits providing water to "Herodian" doves (Rambam, Bartenura). This text refers to a variety of domesticated bird developed by Herod, or, more likely,

by his bird keepers. (The Melech Shelomoh cites a third text, which is not pertinent to our discussion.)

In a passage of Gemara relevant to the mitzvah of shiluach hakein, the prohibition against taking the mother bird and her eggs or young offspring, the Gemara (Chullin 139b) provides two texts and explanations as to which of these two types of birds, Hardisian doves or Herodian doves, is excluded from the prohibition. In the context of shiluach hakein, the prohibition is dependent on the birds being ownerless, and both Hardisian and Herodian doves have owners. (From the Gemara's description, it appears that Herodian doves may have been a variety of parrot or other talking bird. We have no mesorah that parrots are a kosher species of bird, which is one of the halachic requirements for the mitzvah of shiluach hakein, but that does not preclude understanding the Gemara this way.)

In either instance, it is permitted to take both the mother and the offspring of both Hardisian and Herodian birds, because the Torah prohibits doing so only when the birds are hefker, ownerless, which these birds are not. The Gemara describes the large numbers of these birds that were raised, something that today's breeders of chickens can only envy.

Although these varieties of birds were well known at the time of the Mishnah, by the time of the Gemara, these varieties were heading toward extinction.

Watering birds

Returning to the Mishnah in Shabbos, according to either text, "Hardisian" or "Herodian," one may provide these birds with water on Shabbos. Our first question is why the Mishnah permits one to water geese, chickens and these doves, but not bees nor doves that reside in cotes. The Gemara provides two answers to explain why there is a difference.

The first answer is that bees and most doves are not dependent on mankind for their sustenance, whereas geese, chickens, and these varieties of domesticated doves are. The Gemara then provides a second answer that limits the prohibition to water, since it is readily available without human assistance. According to the second answer, there is no prohibition against feeding birds on Shabbos. The prohibition is only that one should not provide water to those birds and insects that can easily get their hydration on their own.

Feeding on Yom Tov

According to some rishonim, we find a similar discussion regarding providing food for animals on Yom Tov (Rashi, Beitzah 23b).

Dogs versus pigs

In the same discussion of Gemara, it quotes a beraisa (a teaching dating back to the era of the Mishnah) that permits feeding dogs on Shabbos, but prohibits feeding pigs. The beraisa itself asks why there is a difference, and explains that the sustenance of one's dogs is dependent on the owner, but the sustenance of his pigs is not.

This leads to an obvious question: Both of these species are non-kosher, yet the beraisa does not prohibit feeding one's dogs. It also does not say that it depends on whether he owns them or not. Rashi explains that since a curse was placed on any Jew who raises pigs (see Sotah 49b), Jews should not be responsible for feeding them, and therefore Chazal prohibited doing so. Although pigs are often domesticated by people who are not concerned about observing the halacha that prohibits raising them (Sotah 49b), Chazal expanded this prohibition and ruled that, even should someone own a pig, he may not feed it on Shabbos since the sustenance of a pig should not be dependent on a Jew (see Rashi, Shabbos ad locum; Magen Avraham, Machatzis Hashekel). On the other hand, one may feed dogs on Shabbos, since it is permitted to own a dog, particularly in a farm setting, where dogs are useful for herding sheep and other activities.

Only my dog?

In relation to this question, we find a dispute among early acharonim. The Magen Avraham, one of the greatest of the early commentaries on the Shulchan Aruch, rules that you may feed any non-dangerous dog on Shabbos, whether you own it or not. He understands that the Gemara meant that you may feed any animals that are dependent on man, and you may feed all dogs, but you may not feed any pigs, even when they are dependent on man, since a Jew is not supposed to raise pigs (Machatzis Hashekel).

On the other hand, other authorities rule that one may feed a dog only when it is dependent on a Jew for food (see Elyah Rabbah 324:11).

The halachic authorities note that there are a few instances in which it is permitted for a Jew to own a pig. One situation is when he received it as payment of a debt; another is that he inherited it from someone not observant. The halacha is that he is permitted to sell it, and that he may wait until he is offered a market value price for it. In the interim, he is permitted to feed it, even on Shabbos, since it is dependent on him for food (Machatzis Hashekel).

Based on this analysis, the geonim permitted feeding silkworms on Shabbos (Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 324:12). Similarly, some authorities explain that the Gemara's discussion is only about feeding animals that one does as a matter of

course, but that one may and should provide food to any animal that is hungry (Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim 324:2).

Which way do we rule?

The authorities dispute which answer of the Gemara we follow. The Rif, the Rambam (21:36) and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 324:11) conclude that we follow the stricter approach, whereas the Ran and the Olas Shabbos conclude that the more lenient approach may be followed. Thus, according to the Shulchan Aruch's conclusion, one may not provide either food or water on Shabbos to bees, doves or any other creature that is not dependent on man, while according to the Ran, one may provide them with food but not water. It should be noted that, in situations where it is permitted to feed the animals, one may even put food directly in their mouths (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 324:10).

Nextdoor dog

At this point, we can mention the last of our opening questions. "We have an excellent relationship with our next door neighbor, who is not Jewish, although I am not sure if that affects the question. They are going away on vacation and have asked us to feed their pets while they are away. May I do so on Shabbos?" "How are zoo animals fed on Shabbos?"

The second question is easy to answer. Since these animals are in captivity, they are dependent on man for food, and one is not only permitted, but required, to make sure that they have adequate feed on Shabbos. The first question may be a bit more complicated. These animals generally are not dependent on the Jewish neighbor, but this Shabbos they will be. I refer those who want to analyze this question further to a short piece by Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, quoted in Shulchan Shelomoh (Chapter 324), in which he discusses a related topic.

The custom on Shabbos Shirah

At this point, we should discuss our opening question, whether it is indeed permitted to feed birds on Shabbos Shirah. The Magen Avraham (324:7) mentions the practice of providing grain for birds to eat on Shabbos Shirah, and states that the practice is in violation of the halacha. This approach is followed by most of the halachic commentaries, including the Elyah Rabbah, the Machatzis Hashekel, the Shulchan Aruch Harav, and the Mishnah Berurah. However, there are some authorities who justify the practice. For example, the Tosafos Shabbos suggests it is permitted, since we are doing it not to make sure the birds are fed but to perpetuate the minhag. Thus, he posits, the ethical and religious intent renders the activity permitted. A few of the later commentaries – those who, in general, strive to justify common practice – are lenient, either citing the reason of the Tosafos Shabbos, or similar approaches (Aruch Hashulchan 324:3; Daas Torah).

Muktzah

An interesting additional halachic side point is that the early authorities discuss scattering grains, or specifically wheat, to the birds. In earlier days, when people owned farm animals and used grains as feed, these grains were not muktzah on Shabbos. However, most of us do not own raw grain, and, since we can neither grind it nor cook it on Shabbos, and we do not eat it or feed it to animals as raw kernels, these grains are muktzah on Shabbos (see Aruch Hashulchan 517:2).

Shaking out the tablecloth

Even among the very late authorities, we find a dispute as to whether one may feed the birds on Shabbos Shirah. The sefer Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah (27:21) rules that one should not, following the approach of the Magen Avraham and the Mishnah Berurah. However, he suggests a way of fulfilling the custom without creating any halachic problem. His advice is to shake out the tablecloth after the meal in a place where the birds can eat the crumbs. He bases this on the ruling of the Eishel Avraham of Butchach (324:11 s.v. Gam), who says that, when throwing or discarding food, there is no requirement to make sure that one does not throw it in front of animals. The prohibition is doing extra work on behalf of animals that otherwise will be able to fend for themselves easily. Shaking out the tablecloth is not an unnecessary Shabbos activity. Another suggestion is to spread crumbs before Shabbos, which allows the birds to feast on them on Shabbos without involving any halachic question.

On the other hand, Rav Eliezer Yehudah Valdenberg contends that feeding birds on Shabbos Shirah has an old, venerated history – he notes that he remembers it being practiced in the households of many gedolei Yisroel, without anyone questioning whether one may. He mentions the different reasons cited above why one may be lenient (Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer, Vol. XIV, #28). In conclusion, I advise each reader to ask his or her own rav or posek whether to follow the practice.

Conclusion

We should not conclude from this discussion that halacha is opposed to our taking care of animals. The Tosefta (Bava Kama, end of Chapter 9) states, "Rabbi Yehudah said, in the name of Rabban Gamliel: 'Know this sign well: as long as you act with mercy, Hashem will have mercy on you.'" Sefer Chassidim #666 notes: If we are merciful to our animals, Hashem and others will be merciful to us.

The point is that when the animals can easily take care of themselves, we should be devoting Shabbos to our own personal growth and not become distracted from this goal. After all, Shabbos is our reminder that Hashem created the entire universe.

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Beshalach (Exodus 13:17 – 17:16)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Why do you cry out [in prayer] to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them move forward’” (Exodus 14:15)
Chapters 14 and 15 of the Book of Exodus are among the most significant in the Bible from a theological perspective, defining for us the fundamental difference between monotheism and idolatry. The first opens with God’s instructions that the Israelites: “Turn back and encamp in front of Pi-hahiroth [the gateway to the Temple of Horus] between Migdal and the sea, before the Baal [master] of the North...by the [Reed/Red] Sea.”(Ex. 14:1).

How strange that the description of their resting place – which will become a sacred shrine marking the most wondrous miracle of the Exodus, the splitting of the Sea – is associated with two major idols, Horus and Baal Zephon; to add insult to injury, the very same description is repeated only eight verses later! (Ex. 14:9).

I would argue that the Bible is here contrasting two different attitudes, one that is representative of idolatry and the other that refers to God’s miracles. The Israelites have just left Egyptian enslavement, but the slave mentality has not yet left the Hebrew psyche. They are just at Pi-Hahiroth, literally at the gateway to freedom (herut), but they are still engulfed in the paralysis engendered by the idolatrous Horus Temple and exceedingly close to the domain of the master-god of the North (Baal).

Idolatry, you see, enervates its adherents, renders them powerless before the gods whom they created in their own image; these gods are simply more powerful creatures, filled with foibles and failings of mortal beings – only on a grander scale. It is these gods who rule the world; the only thing that the human being can hope to do is to bribe or propitiate the gods to treat them kindly..

Moses is still at the beginning of his career; he has much more to learn about Jewish theology. Hence he tells the nation, frightened by the specter of pursuing Egyptians behind them and a raging sea in front of them, “Stand still and you shall see the salvation of the Lord... The Lord will do battle for you and you shall remain silent” (Ex. 14:13-14)

God then steps in, countermending Moses’s comforting words. “Why do you cry out in prayer at Me?” God asks, meaning: I, the omnipresent Lord of the Universe, empowered you by creating you in My image; I expect people to act, to journey forward, to take responsibility for human – Jewish – destiny. Now that they are at the cusp, or gateway to freedom, let the Israelites move ahead, either in fighting the Egyptians who came to force them back into Egyptian enslavement or by jumping into the Reed Sea.

God wants Moses and all of Israel to understand that He is not another idol, not even the greatest or most powerful of the idols, who renders humans powerless and awaits human gifts of propitiation and prayers. God is rather non-material Spirit, best described as Love (the four-letter name JHVH), Compassion, Freely-giving Grace, Long-suffering, Loving-Kindness and Truth (Ex. 34:6) who created human beings in His image, empowers them to act in history as His partners, expects them to develop His Divine traits of character and charges them to bring freedom and security to all the families of the earth.

The Israelites are learning this lesson as they stand at the gateway to freedom (pi-herut) and nationhood witnessing the splitting of the Re(e)d Sea. They dare not stand still and silent waiting for a deus ex machina to extricate them from a seemingly impossible situation. Remember herut derives from the Hebrew aharayut, responsibility. Freedom demands taking responsibility!

They must initiate the action.

And so God commands them to “move forward,” to jump into the waters, risking their lives for freedom; only then will they truly deserve to live as free human beings under God. Our Sages maintain that indeed they learned this lesson at the sea, when they sang out: “This is my God, ve’anvehu” (Ex. 15:2); even a maidservant at the sea saw what the later prophets did not see” (Rashi ad loc citing the Mekhilta.)

Apparently, their lesson is to be understood from the Hebrew word ve’anvehu. What does this word mean? Some commentaries suggest it means “I will glorify Him” either by building Him a Temple (Targum, naveh), or by singing His praises (Rashi) or by beautifying (na’eh) His commandments (a beautiful succa). But the Midrash Mekhilta renders the text as two words, Ani ve’hu, I will act together with Him, I will be Gods

partner in achieving freedom for the Israelites. Rashi explained it best: When Moses told the Israelites to “stand still and watch the salvation of the Lord; God will do battle for you, you remain silent”, and Moses prayed to God to “Bask him up”, Rashi interprets (ex14:15, Rashi ad loc); “this is not time for a lengthy prayer, when the Israelites are in difficult straits. Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to get moving!” God is telling the Israelites: When you were still slaves. I did the plagues to win the first stage of your freedom. Now that you are free, take responsibility, and get moving”. I am your God, and you must act together with me for your redemption!
Shabbat Shalom!