

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BESHALACH - 5764

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From Chaim Shulman crshulman@aol.com

Once again, I didn't have a chance to prepare a parsha sheet this week. So Efraim Goldstein let me use his parsha sheet. I added two pieces at the end. Also, I left out some op ed or news pieces that were in Efraim's parsha sheet.

From Efraim Goldstein HAMELAKET@hotmail.com

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet

Ohr Torah Stone By Shlomo Riskin

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Beshalach Exodus 13:17-17:16

Efrat, Israel - At the very opening of this weeks Torah portion, just as we've reached the climax of the ten plagues and the Israelites have been sent forth out of their Egyptian bondage, we find a fascinating throwback to a former heroic personality from the Book of Genesis: "And Moses brought the bones of Joseph with him, since (Joseph) had adjured the children of Israel to take an oath; (Joseph) had said, G-d will surely remember you; bring up my bones with you from this (place)" (Exodus 13:19).

Why interrupt the drama of the exodus with the detail of concern over Joseph's remains? From a certain narrative perspective, Joseph's name even evokes a jarring note at this moment of Israel's freedom. After all, Joseph may well be seen as the very antithesis of Moses: Joseph begins within the Family of Jacob-Israel, and moves outside of it as he rises to great heights in Egypt, whereas Moses begins as a Prince of Egypt and moves into the Family of Israel when he smites the Egyptians; Joseph is the one who brings the children of Jacob into Egypt whereas Moses takes them out;

Joseph gives all of his wisdom and energy to Egypt whereas Moses gives all of his wisdom and energy to the Israelites. It can even be argued that the very enslavement of the Israelites by the Egyptians was a punishment for Joseph's having enslaved the Egyptians to Pharaoh as part of the economic policy he implements. (Genesis 47:19-23) So why bring up the remains of Joseph at this point in the story?

The fact is that Joseph is a most complex and amazing personality, who very much stands at the crossroads of and makes a vital connection between the Books of Genesis and Exodus, Bereishit and Shemot. We have previously pointed out that the jealous enmity of the brothers towards Joseph was in no small way rooted in the grandiose ambition expressed in his dreams: sheaves of grain evoke Egyptian agriculture rather than Israeli shepherdry, and the bowing sun, moon and stars smack of cosmic domination. While yet in the Land of Israel, Joseph had apparently set his sights on the then super-power Egypt and the second dream suggests that Egypt is only a stepping stone for universal majesty.

But then, does not the Torah picture the Almighty as the Creator and Master of the entire world, and is it not Israel's mission to be a Kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation with the mandate of perfecting the world in the Kingship of the Divine? And with his very last breaths, in the closing lines of the Book of Genesis, does not Joseph profess absolute faith in G-d's eventual return of the Israelites to their homeland, at which time he makes his brothers swear that his remains will be taken home to Israel as well? The full picture of Joseph seems to depict a great-grandson of Abraham, who fully grasps the importance of the Land of Israel for his nation, but also recognizes the eventual necessity of their being a source of blessing for all the families of the earth, their mission of peace not just for the family but for the world! The midrash (Rabba and Mechilta ad loc) describes a fascinating scene. At the exact time when all of the Jews were occupied in gathering the booty of Egypt, Moses was occupied in gathering the bones of Joseph. Who informed Moses as to where Joseph was buried? Serah, the daughter of Asher, who was still living in that generation (of the exodus). She went and told Moses that Joseph had been buried in the River Nile, Moses said, Joseph, Joseph, the time of redemption has come, but the Divine Presence is holding it back. If you will show yourself, good. If not, I shall be freed of the oath which you made me swear. Immediately the coffin of Joseph rose to the surface of the Nile River... When (the Israelites) went forth from Egypt, there were two casks (aronot) which accompanied them for forty years in the desert: the cask of the Life of all worlds (the Divine Torah which they had up until that time) and the cask (casket) of Joseph. The nations of the world would ask, What is the nature of these two casks? Is it necessary for the cask of the dead to go together with the cask of eternal life? But in truth the one who is buried in this (cask) fulfilled whatever is written in that (cask).

Generally the midrash is understood to be saying that Joseph fulfilled the moral commandments already expressed in the Torah from the story of Creation up until and including the exodus. After all, Joseph was moral and upright even to the extent of rebuffing the enticements of the beautiful Mrs. Potiphar, thereby earning the appellation of the righteous. However, I would suggest an alternate interpretation: The Torah of the Book of Exodus encased in one-cask fulfilled the dreams, expectations and prophecies of Joseph buried in the other casket. Joseph foresaw an eventual exodus from Egypt and return to Israel. Joseph also foresaw a cosmic obeisance of the sun, moon and stars to the universal G-d of Justice and peace whom he represented. This too was fulfilled when the world was paralyzed at the force of the plagues, when the nations trembled at the destruction of Egypt and victory of the Israelites when the Red Sea split apart: Nations heard and shuddered, Terror gripped those who dwell in Philistia. Edoms chiefs then panicked, Moabs heroes were seized with trembling, Canaans residents melted away... G-d will reign supreme forever and ever (Exodus 15:14,15,18).

Yes, at the supreme triumphant moment of the Exodus, Moses stops to fulfil a vow and take the bones of Joseph (etzem is bone and etzem, atzmiyut, is essence), the essence of Joseph, out of Egypt and into Israel with the Israelites. Moses wanted the faith of Joseph, the universality of Joseph, the majesty of Joseph, the grandeur of Joseph, to accompany the Israelites throughout their sojourn in the desert. After all, the casket of Joseph imparted a crucial lesson: G-d's rule of justice, compassion and peace must capture the entire world, all despots must be seized with fear and trembling, all human beings must be free. May Joseph's eternal grave-site in Shechem be salvaged and re-sanctified as a beacon to Jewish faith in a world redeemed. Shabbat Shalom.

Weekly Parsha Feb 06 2004

BESHALACH Rabbi Berel Wein

People are hard to change. It is much easier to invent great technological innovations than to change people's minds, habits and attitudes. And since human behavior sets the tone of world society much more than does technological progress, very little has really changed in the story of human civilization over the past few thousand

years. War, violence, unreasoning hatreds, moral failings, both great and small, are all the stuff of our daily newspapers and media reporting. It seems that little has changed in the human condition since the world of our father, Avraham. All of the problems that he had to struggle against are apparently still present with us in our modern era. And this truth is brought home to us in the Torah reading of Beshalach.

One would think that after the blows and plagues that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people sustained in the campaign of Moshe and Aharon to free the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage, Pharaoh and the Egyptians would have learned their lesson. They should have been happy and relieved to be rid of the Jews and the blows and plagues associated with them. Then why do Pharaoh and the Egyptian army pursue them into the desert and attempt to return them to Egypt? What logic justifies such a suicidal policy? The answer is that it is habit, stubbornness, hubris and the refusal to allow facts and changing situations to affect one's decisions and attitudes. Pharaoh was determined to crush the Jewish people by slavery and pain. The Lord intervened in a clear and impressive fashion to block the plans of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Pharaoh and the Egyptians knew that the Lord prevented the actualization of their plans. Nevertheless, in spite of this clear situation, neither Pharaoh nor his people change their behavior, alter their goal, and admit their fatal error. Because people are stubborn and are not easily moved from their previously held opinions and plans, the facts of the matter rarely suffice to cause a change in behavior. Hence, Pharaoh's pursuit of Israel into the desert and his otherwise inexplicable headlong rush towards his own destruction.

This same rule of human nature applies toward the Jewish people as well. The Jewish people were and are notorious for being "stiff-necked." Ideas adopted by Jews, even when disproved by the facts of history and society are still not easily discarded in the Jewish world. God can split the Red Sea, rain down manna from heaven every day, preserve millions of people in a trackless desert, and there will always still be Jews who say "Let us turn our heads around and return to Egypt." Their minds are made up and they don't want to be discomfited by the facts of the situation. How else to explain that there are Jews in the world still committed to the Marxist dream, or who believe that Jewish continuity can be achieved by lowering all standards and requirements for Jewish marriage or conversion? The ideas of the Enlightenment, most of which have bankrupted in our time, the bloodiest of all human centuries, are still treasured by a large section of Jewry whose ancestors fell victim to its siren song over the last two centuries. It is as though much of the Jewish world has learned nothing from the events and crises that have befallen the Jewish world in this century.

All of the prattle of Secular Humanism, of the new and better world of discarded ritual and unnecessary tradition, of easy faith and feel-good religions, of immediately obsolescent relevance, of hootenanny, guitar-playing prayer services, is still promoted as effective Judaism even though it has all contributed to a mighty destruction of the people of Israel, both quantitatively and qualitatively. A large portion of the Jewish world yet insists, "Let us turn our heads around and return to Egypt."

Stubbornness can be a positive trait. It is the very fact that the Jewish people are stiff-necked that has preserved us through the long night of our exile and difficulties. Jews did not convert nor give up their faith because their powers of tenacity and stubbornness stood them in good stead. But stubbornness for the sake of stubbornness is wrong and usually purposeless. The lessons of past failures, of fallen gods and glittering but false ideologies, should serve to instruct us and allow us to leave the bondage of Egypt and its culture, and all of the other Egypts and their cultures, permanently. The miracles and hand of God in history should not be ignored because of misplaced stubbornness. Shabat Shalom.

TORAH WEEKLY

For the week ending 7 February 2004 / 15 Shevat 5764

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Parshat Beshalach

INSIGHTS - Burning Bridges

"G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near..." (13:17)

It's very difficult to change things we don't like about ourselves. We are all creatures of habit.

One of the hardest aspects of modifying negative behavior is breaking the patterns that we weave for ourselves. How long do our "New Year's resolutions" last? A day? A week? Not through lack of resolution, but because resolution is no match for habit.

Resolution is not the solution. To succeed, we must do something much more fundamental.

When G-d took the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt, He did not take them the quickest and easiest and most direct route from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael: northeast along the coast of the Mediterranean through what is today Gaza. Rather, He took them a long, difficult, and tortuous path across a sea and through a major desert. Why?

As the saying goes, easy come, easy go. When the Jewish People left Egypt they had not entirely freed themselves from the clutches of the negative drive, the yetzer hara. If G-d had brought them the easy way, they would have been in danger of being lured back to the constricting but comfortable life of slavery in the fleshpots of Egypt. G-d, as it were, burned their bridges. He made it virtually impossible to return to Egypt. Which was just as well. For, as we see, when the going got tough in the wilderness, the Jewish People were more than willing to return to Egypt. Had that been an easy option, the history of the Jewish people might have been very different.

Ostensibly, then, when faced with trying to escape the clutches of our negative drive, we must burn our bridges. If we want to separate from bad company, we must be prepared to leave and move to a different neighborhood. If we have a serious weight problem, we must put a lock on the fridge and entrust the key to our spouse (unless he's/she's trying to lose weight as well).

However, in Parshat Vaera (8:23), the Torah itself presents a contradiction to this logic. When Moshe tells Pharaoh that the Jewish People are leaving, he talks of "only a three-day journey." Moshe knew full well that once they were out, they weren't coming back, so why did he tell Pharaoh it was for only three days?

Part of Moshe's intention was to appease the latent negative drive still lingering in the hearts of the Jewish People. Leaving for three days is a far less daunting prospect than leaving forever. The Jewish People thus felt they had a get-out clause, if they needed it, and were prepared to go along with Moshe. For three days at least.

But was this bridge-burning?

The Exodus was effected then both through a bribe to the negative drive, the lure of a three-day round-trip ticket on the one hand, and on the other, an iron-fisted scorched earth policy of no return.

When we wish to leave our own personal Egypts, our personal prisons that the negative drive constructs for us, which is the correct course to follow?

The answer is we need both. For someone who smokes 40 cigarettes a day, the idea of going cold turkey is pretty horrendous. But tell him that if after two weeks and he's not happy he can go back to smoking like a chimney, you'll see a different picture.

Seduction and bribery are our opening guns against the negative drive. Afterwards we have to follow up by burning our bridges. It was the lure of a round-trip ticket that got the Jewish People as far as the edge of the water, but it was only Nachson ben Amiadav who jumped headlong into the sea and showed that there was no turning back that made the waters divide.

Source: based on Rabbi E. E. Dessler and Lekach Tov

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

PARSHAS BESHALACH

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him. (13:19)

Chazal emphasize Moshe Rabbeinu's great love for mitzvos in the Talmud Sotah 13a, "Come and see how beloved mitzvos were to Moshe." When all of Klal Yisrael were involved with gathering the Egyptian booty, Moshe occupied himself with the mitzvah of retrieving Yosef's coffin. He epitomized the pasuk in Mishlei 10:8, Chacham lev yikach mitzvos, "The wise of heart will seize mitzvos." The Mechilta adds, "Moshe's act of accessing Yosef's coffin demonstrated his wisdom and piety. When all of the Jews were busy with collecting the Egyptian spoils, Moshe was occupied with carrying out Yosef's bones." Why do both Midrashim place emphasis not only on Moshe's piety, but also on his wisdom? First of all, the people of Klal Yisrael were also involved in performing a mitzvah. Hashem instructed them to empty out Egypt. This was a command; even though it was enjoyable, it was a command no less. Moshe Rabbeinu was also involved in carrying out a command. Perhaps his command was not as geshmack, pleasant, as gathering the Egyptian wealth, but it does not indicate his great wisdom.

Although he evidenced great piety and devotion, his actions do not seem to exhibit wisdom. Furthermore, relinquishing great wealth in order to perform an act of chesed shel emes, true kindness, is an act of great piety, but one can hardly refer to it as wisdom. Indeed, one who is pious is not necessarily one who is "streetsmart." The two do not necessarily accompany one another.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, gives us a practical answer and teaches us an important lesson in life and its priorities. Chazal teach us that at first, when the sea saw the Jewish People coming towards it pursued by the Egyptians, it did not want to split. Hashem instructed Moshe to lift up his hand. The sea still did not split until it saw the Arono shel Yosef, the coffin of Yosef. Then it split. While the commentators offer a number of possibilities to explain why the sea split in response to Yosef's coffin, one thing is clear: the coffin motivated the sea to split. If Moshe had occupied himself with the Egyptian booty in the same manner as his fellow coreligionists, then they would have spent all of their wealth at the bottom of the sea! It would not have split. It was Moshe's foresight, his act of piety, that represented incredibly practical wisdom. The coffin of Yosef catalyzed the splitting of the red sea. Was Moshe a tzaddik or a chacham? Moshe's practical wisdom, coupled with his piety, made the difference that day, but he was no less wise than he was pious.

Rav Pam suggests that this concept has significant practical application. Let us take a moment to focus on that wonderful, sought after vocation - Torah chinuch, Jewish education. While many people agree that those who devote their lives to Torah dissemination - to assuring that our heritage is transmitted to our children in its pristine, unadulterated form, in an environment of sanctity and morality - exemplify piety, are they chachamim?

Does a career choice in Jewish education indicate one's wisdom, or inability to do anything else? After all, one who is talented, whose incisive mind can plumb the depths of the intricacies of Talmud and Jewish law is certainly capable of rising to the apex of the fields of medicine, law or commerce. Therefore, an individual who abdicates the opportunity for a financially lucrative career to become an educator, is to be viewed as pious. Is such a choice, however, to be viewed from a practical sense as sound? Does such a decision indicate practical wisdom, when one takes into account the modest financial remuneration?

Rav Pam emphatically responds in the affirmative. While it is certainly true that a professional secular career will reap greater financial gain, should this be the only barometer for determining success? There is more to life than making money. There is sipuk hanefesh, self-satisfaction, knowing that one is molding and shaping the future of Klal Yisrael, realizing that his toil will be recognized for generations to come. A Torah educator spends his work day in an atmosphere that is wholesome, un sullied, ethical and moral, among highly idealistic people with lofty spiritual goals in life, a reality that cannot necessarily be asserted for any other profession. It goes without saying that the spiritual rewards for this endeavor far overshadow anything else that one may do.

I must add that this thesis in no way is meant to undermine the wonderful efforts of those who devote themselves to the service of humanity, such as the fields of medicine, sciences and social services. It is only to underscore the significance of the much-maligned field of Torah chinuch. A career in Torah chinuch is a career in the service of the Almighty. It is the ultimate implementation of practical wisdom and piety. It is not simply a career; it is a noble calling!

In way of a postscript, I must add that chinuch is not for everyone. Those that are not appropriate for it - or for whatever reason are unqualified - should stay away. They will do more harm than good. Not every ben Torah will make a suitable rebbe. However, many wonderful and talented bnei Torah shun the field due to reasons that are, at best, nonsensical. The loss to Klal Yisrael of this wonderful reservoir of talent is inestimable. Imagine, if our rebbeim would have felt this way, where would we be today?

Pharaoh will say of Bnei Yisrael, "They are locked in the land, the Wilderness has locked them in. (14:3)

The prefix "I" before Bnei Yisrael, I'Bnei Yisrael, usually means to Bnei Yisrael, which, of course, is not textually correct. Rashi, therefore, interprets the prefix to mean "al" about Bnei Yisrael. The Targum Yonasan, however, contends that Pharaoh did speak to two members of Bnei Yisrael, Dassan and Aviram, Moshe Rabbeinu's nemeses throughout his reign as leader. It was to them that Pharaoh commented about the Jewish People's seeming inability to escape the wilderness. This evokes a glaring question. We are aware that during the three days of the plague of darkness, all of those Jews who were evil - those who refused to leave Egypt and be liberated from its bondage and decadent culture - died. Why did not these two rogues also perish? Why were they allowed to continue to remain with the nation throughout the wilderness only to do nothing but undermine Moshe at every juncture, to disparage the Almighty and to sabotage every spiritual inspiration with their negativity and evil?

The Marahil Diskin, zl, explains that they had one great merit which protected them: they were shotrim, foremen, who oversaw the Jewish labor crews in Egypt. They were among those who saw to it that the workload was not overwhelming. When the quota was not met, they were the ones who were beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters. The beatings and consequent wounds caused their bodies to emit an offensive odor. No one can harm any Jewish person who suffers for another Jew and empathizes with his pain and anguish, not even - the Angel of Death or the Red Sea! In Hashem's eyes one who suffers for another Jew will merit the greatest reward, even if he himself is an intrinsically evil person.

In the hesped, eulogy, rendered by Horav Shmuel Auerbach, Shlita, for his father, Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl, he emphasized his father's overwhelming compassion and empathy for his fellow man. He related that his father would often recount an incident concerning the saintly Horav Baruch Frankel Teumim, zl, the Baruch Taam, whose son entered into a shidduch, matrimonial match, with the daughter of a well-known wealthy man. It happened that during that time the town's water-carrier became ill. The Baruch Taam was distraught over the man's illness. He could not eat. He prayed incessantly for him to return to good health. He was so overcome with concern for this man's welfare that he personally became visibly transformed. His mechtanim, parents of his future daughter-in-law, came to town for a visit and were taken aback by his changed appearance. The first thing that came to their mind was that he had regrets regarding the shidduch, match. The parents of the girl asked, "Perhaps the rav is unhappy with the shidduch and would like to retract?"

The family responded that this was not the case. The distress was the result of his concern for the water-carrier. When the girl's mother heard this, she approached the Baruch Taam and said, "I can understand that the rav is concerned about the water-carrier, but is this not a bit too much? It is hurting the rav's health."

When the Baruch Taam heard these words, he immediately nullified the shidduch saying, "If this woman has no compassion and does not

empathize with another Jew's pain, then it is not a suitable family with which to make a shidduch."

Rav Shlomo Zalmen exemplified empathy for all Jews. He once heard that a young woman in the United States was widowed and left with six young orphans. Bereft of her husband, the woman was broken-hearted and left to fend for herself, to be mother and father to her children. Rav Shlomo Zalmen called her up, and after introducing himself, comforted her in her grief and then asked to speak to each of her children. Indeed, every Erev Yom Tov, he would call a number of widows and wish them Gut Yom Tov.

I recently read an incredible story about empathy for another Jew in Rabbi Yechiel Spero's book, *Touched by a Story*. Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski, zl, was the preeminent Torah leader of pre-World War II Europe. As rav of the prestigious city of Vilna, he had his hand on the pulse of European Jewry. His shiurim, lectures, which enthralled his students, were brilliant masterpieces which covered the breadth of the sea of Talmud and penetrated its depth. He would customarily walk home from the yeshiva accompanied by a throng of students, eager to hear his every word.

It was a bitter winter day, a blustery arctic wind exacerbated the already sub-zero temperatures. The old Rosh Hayeshivah was trudging along the streets of Vilna, accompanied by his students. A young man approached Rav Chaim Ozer and waited to ask a question. Rav Chaim Ozer turned to the young man, whom he did not recognize, and asked him, "How can I help you?"

The young man, not more than fifteen years old, answered with a terrible stutter that he sought a certain street. The young man's speech defect was magnified by nervousness in the presence of the rav. Although Rav Chaim Ozer was practically home already, he turned around and, together with his students, walked the young man to his destination.

Twenty-five minutes later, frozen with cold, Rav Chaim Ozer and his students turned around and began the trek home. The students could not figure out their rebbe. This was a man that never wasted a moment. His poor health and advanced age did not permit him to be out in the cold longer than was absolutely necessary. Yet, he walked the young man to his destination when he could have simply given him verbal directions. Why? The worst that would have happened is that the young man would have had to ask someone else along the way to confirm the directions.

Sensing his students' query, the Rosh Hayeshivah looked at them and said, "This boy clearly had a stuttering problem. He was obviously embarrassed by his impediment. If I had simply given him directions, he would have had to ask others along the way to confirm the directions to the obscure street. I did not want to cause a Jew further humiliation. Therefore, I walked him to his destination to spare him the discomfort. Is that so bad?" This is a paradigm of empathy for another Jew.

Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim. (17:8)

Rashi cites a fascinating Midrash that behooves each of us to stop and ask ourselves whether we are guilty of this oversight. Chazal tell us that the pasuk which deals with Amalek's attacking Klal Yisrael is juxtaposed upon the previous pasuk in which the Jews tested Hashem, asking, "Is Hashem in our midst?" Hashem responded, "I am always in your midst. I never leave your side. Yet, you ask such a question! I swear by your lives that as a lesson, the dog, Amalek, will come and bite you. Then you will cry out to Me and realize where I am."

Chazal compare this to a man who placed his son upon his shoulder and set forth on a journey. Whenever the boy would see an object that caught his fancy, he would ask his father for it, and the father would oblige. This happened a number of times. They later encountered a man, at which point the son asked the man, "Have you seen my father?" Hearing this, the father said to his son, "Do you not know where I am?" He immediately cast his son off his shoulders, and a dog came and bit him.

The analogy is very apropos to us. Hashem is there for us all of the time. Whenever we ask, He responds. The answer may not always

appeal to us, but there is always a response. Do we thank Him when we are happy with the response, or do we just complain when things do not go our way? Regrettably, some of us wait until the dog bites us before we look up to acknowledge Hashem.

Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Choose men from us and go out, do battle with Amalek. (17:9)

Why was Yehoshua selected to lead Klal Yisrael into battle against Amalek? The Midrash explains that Moshe told Yehoshua, "Your grandfather [Yosef Hatzaddik] said, [to Potiphar's wife], 'I fear G-d,' (Bereishis 42:48), and concerning this one [Amalek] it is written (Devarim 25:18), 'And (he) did not fear G-d.'" Let the grandson of he who said he fears Hashem come and punish the one about whom it is said that he does not fear Hashem. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, derives a noteworthy lesson from Chazal. The agent that Hashem selects to bring about salvation must personally be undefiled and faultless of any taint of impropriety with regard to the sin which catalyzed the punishment. During every generation, Hashem has prepared a tzaddik, righteous Torah leader, through whom the salvation will be realized. He has the power to battle against the Amalek of every generation, because he is inculpable and free of any vestige of the sin that characterizes the enemy of Torah and the Jewish People. To triumph, one must know his enemy, recognize his shortcomings and understand who is best suited for vanquishing him.

Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand. (17:9)

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, zl, explains that Amalek's objective in battling with Klal Yisrael was to undermine the concepts of mitzvah, command, and chovah, obligation. He sought to destroy the Jew's enthusiasm and passion to perform a mitzvah, transforming mitzvah and chovah into reshus, a discretionary endeavor. These three concepts are represented by the letters mem, ches, and raish, which spell machar. Moshe Rabbeinu was intimating to the people that machar he would stand on the top of the hill, meaning that he would address the incursion into the spiritual fabric of Klal Yisrael that Amalek was bent on destroying. He would save the machar and see to it that the people would maintain their obligatory allegiance to Hashem.

Pinchas was the antithesis of Amalek. The Torah tells us that he took a romach, spear - which also contains the letters raish, mem, and ches - and zealously defended Hashem's honor. He accomplished the opposite of Amalek by transforming the reshus, discretionary endeavor, into a mitzvah and the mitzvah into a chovah, obligation.

Va'ani Tefillah - Bircas Elokai Neshamah - the blessing of the Restoration of the Soul.

In the brachah, Asher Yatzar, we thank Hashem for the wonders of our body and the blessing of physical health. In the brachah, Elokai Neshamah, we recognize the significance of our spiritual dimension and offer our gratitude to Hashem for the daily restoration of our soul. Let us focus on the meaning of neshamah tehorah shenosatah bi, "the pure soul that You gave me." We believe that the neshamah within each Jew is a chelek Elokai mi'Maal, a part of Hashem Above. It is essentially pure, having been breathed into us from Hashem. The Zohar Hakadosh on the pasuk in Bereishis 2:7, "He (Hashem) blew into his (Adam's) nostrils a living soul," says, "If one blows into another, he breathes something of himself into him." Therefore, we must be acutely aware that the neshamah within our bodies is a part of Hashem that is with us always. The neshamah is created distinct from the body, and, therefore, survives it. The soul is eternal and basically represents the essence of a human being. It descends to its physical repository, so that it may fulfill mitzvos. The body gives up the soul at the end of human life, and the soul returns to its source. It must then give a reckoning of its accomplishments - or lack thereof - on this world. This is the story of life, a story that repeats itself "nightly" when we go to sleep. These are the ideas that should go through our minds when we say Elokai Neshamah.

In honor of the birth of our granddaughter Esther Glikla Sheffey by Marilyn & Sheldon David

Bar-Ilan University's Parashat Hashavua Study Center
Parashat Be-Shalah 5764/February 7, 2004
"And Miriam chanted for them" – Kol Isha?
Dr. Admiel Kosman - Department of Talmud

From the plain sense of the text we can deduce that women used to sing in the presence of men and occasionally even along with them, as is evident from Scripture's account of the Song of Miriam in this week's reading: "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her in dance with timbrels. And Miriam chanted for them (masculine suffix): Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea" (Ex. 15:20-21). Also Deborah sang a victory song with Barak for vanquishing Sisera and his army: "On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang: ..." (Judges 5:1).[1] Likewise we find that women sang and danced before King Saul after David slew Goliath: "the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing to greet King Saul with timbrels, shouting and sistrums" (I Sam. 18:6). Ecclesiastes describes choral groups of "male and female singers" (Eccles. 2:6),[2] and the song of men and women is mentioned also in the farewell words of Barzillai the Gileadite to David (II Sam. 19:36). In the book of Ezra, as well, the list of those who returned to the land of Israel in the first immigration, following the license given by Cyrus, includes "200 male and female singers" (Ezra 4:65).

The picture presented by the Talmud, as we know, is quite different. There we find the statement, attributed to Samuel, that "a woman's voice is indecent" (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 24a). Indeed, not all communities have always interpreted this as a total prohibition against hearing female singing, but in actual practice, following various developments which we can not go into here at length,[3] later rabbinic rulings viewed this as a comprehensive proscription against hearing a woman's voice raised in song.[4] In this context one should bear in mind that also joint singing of men and women was not viewed with favor, following the words of Rav Joseph bar Hiyya, in the Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 48a, who stated:

If men sing and women respond [in song to the singing of the men], this is licentiousness; and if women sing and men respond [in song to the singing of the women], this is like setting fire to chaff, for it kindles desire like a flame set to linen.

Clearly the discrepancy between the implication of the biblical sources and the view cited above requires explanation. An attempt to cope with this discrepancy can be traced back as far as tannaitic literature, in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, Be-Shalah (Horowitz-Rabin ed., p. 152): "And Miriam chanted for them:

Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea.' Scripture tells that just as Moses recited the song for the men, so Miriam recited the song for the women, for it says, 'Sing to the Lord ...' This homily apparently takes the stand that Miriam sang only for the women, so her singing was not for the men, neither in itself nor as a choir of women singing with Moses' choir.[5]

Among traditional commentaries one can find other opinions which assert that in certain circumstances, one may hear in a woman's voice spirituality and that these circumstances pertained on the occasion of Miriam's song. For example, the Zohar, Numbers (Shelah 167b), says:

"Then Miriam the prophetess ... took a timbrel in her hand ..." All the righteous in the Garden of Eden listen to her[6] sweet voice, and several holy angels give thanks and praise along with her to the Holy Name. These commentaries, according to the thesis I shall present below, have in common what we might call a spiritual-utopian bent. Halakhically these commentators had no choice but to express the spiritual potential of the female voice in utopian terms. In other words, those commentators who sensed great spiritual potential in the female voice assumed that this could be shown only under conditions that would pertain in time to come, when there would no

longer be any evil inclination; at present the yetzer hara throws up a smokescreen of physical attraction that makes it impossible to sense the powerful spiritual vitality of the female voice.

For example, Rabbi Menahem Azaria of Pano[7] (1548-1620), having assumed that Miriam and the women who sang in chorus did indeed sing before men,[8] claimed:

Song was her intention, and one should not be strict [forbidding this] in any event, since the evil inclination does not exist in that world.[9] In other words, Rabbi Menahem Azaria assumed that the moment of spiritual elation in which Miriam and the women sang before the men on the shore of the Red Sea was an exceptional moment in which the quality of the World to Come penetrated into this world, making it possible to deviate from the general rule forbidding women to sing before men. Hence the female voice at that special moment was both prophetic and divine, enabling the men to attain special spiritual elation.[10] This is apparently what he meant in saying "Song was her intention," namely song in the sense of the spiritual revelation that enabled this singing. Moreover, it should be noted that Rabbi Menahem Azariah was not referring here to a quality of song which was specific to women, rather to the general prophetic quality of song, which could be male or female. In fact, in such song the distinction between male and female disappears altogether, since it is altogether divine.

Another possibility suggested by Rabbi Menahem Azariah is that only Miriam sang before the men, the rest of the women joining her only with musical accompaniment of various instruments but not with their voices raised in song. Why was Miriam's singing here considered permissible? His explanation is that the other women were ordinary people, incapable of "directing their minds to the atika,"[11] whereas Miriam was a prophetess and as hence could know that at this precise moment it was the will of G-d that a woman [she, herself] should sing before the men, even though the halakhah generally forbade this. The last possibility, the most remarkable of those offered by Rabbi Menahem Azariah, is that behind every single woman stood an "angel" to whom Miriam turned when she requested to be joined in song, and it was these angels who sang along with Miriam, not the rest of the women. Perhaps this can be viewed as an interesting reflection of the notion that when an "angel" stands behind a "woman" then her song is inspired singing, so that even men can become spiritually elated by it.

A different approach to this problem was taken by Rabbi Ephraim of Luntshitz, author of Kli Yakar on the Torah (d. 1619). He maintained that the status of women's singing changed in this week's Torah portion because the women themselves changed for a brief moment, climbing to the spiritual level of men in their "receptiveness of prophecy," and in any event at this specific moment the men were presumably in no danger of becoming excited by the women's voices. Rabbi Ephraim's interpretation is based on a grammatical "error" which he found in the scriptural text: Miriam turned to the women, asking them to join her in song, in the following words, "And Miriam chanted for them (Heb. la-hem, masc.):

Sing to the Lord..." (Ex. 15:21), but the text ought to have read, "Miriam chanted for them (Heb. la-hen), using the feminine form, since she was addressing the women. Hence Rabbi Ephraim concluded, "At the Red Sea the women attained the level of men in their receptiveness of prophecy, therefore Scriptures says la-hem, as if talking to men; and indeed of the end of days it is said, 'A woman shall court a man'[12] (Jer. 31:22)."[13] The principle difference between the approaches of these two rabbis regarding a woman's voice can be summarized as follows: Rabbi Menahem Azariah emphasized the change that occurred at this specific, miraculous moment in the inner world of the men, rising to a level of spirituality at which they could sense the spirituality of the female voice; whereas Rabbi Ephraim of Luntshitz viewed the change as having occurred within the women themselves, rising to greater spiritual heights (which, as he said explicitly, was the level of men), and in any event the element in their voices which could entice men into sinful thoughts would disappear.[14]

[1] Ralbag wrote on Judges 4:25: "Over the miracle that the Holy One, blessed be He, wrought for Israel through the hand of Deborah, she sang; and the mention of Barak does not mean that he assisted her in making the song, for she herself composed it; rather, Barak is mentioned along with her the same as 'Then Moses sang'." In other words, in Ralbag's opinion, the prophetess Deborah composed the song herself and was assisted by Barak only in the performance of the song, just as in our parsha it says, "Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song," which, here too, should be understood as Moses having composed the song and the Israelites only assisting him in singing it (see Yehezkel Kaufmann, , Jerusalem 1962, p. 133, commentary on v. 1).

[2] The Zohar compares this chorus with Miriam's chorus of women at the Red Sea:

"Rabbi Jose said: For it is written, 'singing [fem.],' as it is said , 'And Miriam chanted for them' (Ex. 15:20)" (Zohar, Exodus, 19a). [3] Saul J. Berman, "Kol Isha" in: Leo Landman (ed.), Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein Memorial Volume, New York 1980, pp. 45-66.

[4] See the summary of opinions presented in Rabbi Yehiel Michael Epstein's Arukh ha-Shulhan, Hilkhot Ishut, Even ha-Ezer 21.3. It should be noted that several later posekim took a more lenient stand, some permitting mixed singing of sacred songs by men and women together in certain circumstances. For example, see the ruling by Rabbi Yehiel Jacob Weinberg, Resp. Seridei Esh, Part II, par. 8. Also cf. Joel B. Wolowelsky, "Modern Orthodoxy and Women's Self-Perception," Tradition 22 (1986), 65-81.

[5] According to Philo's understanding in Life of Moses, II.256 (Susan Daniel-Nataf ed., II, Mossad Bialik, Jerusalem 1991, p. 321). It should also be noted that Zayit Ra'anon on the Mekhilta gives a gloss on the Mekhilta, maintaining that the reading should be that Miriam sang the "song for two [li-shnayim]" instead of "song for women [le-nashim]," in other words, that Miriam sang with two women who responded in chorus after her. Other commentators attempted to explain this difficulty by claiming that Miriam took the timbrel in her hand not so it could serve as an accompaniment to the pleasing song of the women, but on the contrary, so it would spoil this beauty, the sound of the timbrel interfering in the men's hearing the women's voices. On this subject, cf. Rabbi Issachar Eilenburg, , comments on Ex. 15:20 (Jerusalem: Hadrat Yerushalayim, 1998), p. 82; Rabbi Jacob Kuli, , Exodus, Be-Shalah (Jerusalem: 1967), p. 360. Rabbi Joseph Rosen held that Miriam and the women who accompanied her only played instruments but did not sing. See Menahem M. Kasher (ed.), Jerusalem 1961, p. 10.

[6] Apparently Jochebed's. Cf. loc. cit.

[7] Rabbi Menahem Azariah of Pano, Lemberg 1884, Part IV, par. 36.99b. These remarks by Rabbi Menahem Azariah are better known from the other source in which they are cited: Yalkut Hareuveni on Exodus, Warsaw 1884, Parshat Be-Shalah, p. 78, on the verse, "And Miriam chanted for them." This anthology was redacted by Rabbi Abraham Reuben Ha-Cohen Sofer, who lived in Poland in the 17th century. It should be noted that in his citation Rabbi Sofer distorted the original reason given by Rabbi Menahem, preferring this explanation over the one which preceded it. In the original source, Rabbi Menahem argued that the former explanation was preferable since the Torah says Miriam addressed the women, commanding them, "Sing," and it does not appear that the women were merely a passive chorus responding to the men, rather they were a central vocal ensemble that sang before the men.

[8] As a second possibility. The first one, he maintained, was that the women who joined Miriam did so only as a secondary voice, responding to the central male voice sung by Moses and his fellows. According to the words of Rabbi Joseph, Babylonian Talmud, Sotah, cited above, this is not strictly forbidden but is merely viewed as "licentious" behavior (of which they were not extremely wary).

[9] Meaning the spiritual world. Compare with the remarks attributed to Abraham's servant Eliezer in the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 58a: "It is well-known that desire does not exist in that world [the World to Come]." [10] A similar interpretation to the verse at hand was given by Rabbi Issachar Eilenburg in Tzedah la-Derekh.

[11] Atika Kadisha is the epithet given in mysticism for the One G-d, Himself alone. See Judah Liebes, Torat ha-Yetzira shel Sefer Yetzira, Jerusalem 2001, p. 51.

[12] Rabbi Ephraim assumes this verse to be saying that in time to come women will rise to the level of men. This position is evidenced repeatedly by Rabbi Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, in various places in his works. For example, cf. "Nahal Kedumim le-Parashat Be-Shalah," par. 21 (Jerusalem 1976). [13] In this connection, it is worth noting Rabbenu Bahya's comment on the verse at hand: "One ought not to wonder that prophecy should come to a woman, for she is of human kind, and is called man, as it is said: 'He ... called them Man' (Gen. 5:2)." Rabbenu Bahya proceeded to list quite a number of women who, according to tradition, received prophecy, and several

tenets of the faith that according to the midrash were revealed by women. He concluded, "All this indicates that womankind is not totally vapid, but has substance" (Rabbenu Bahya, Be'ur al ha-Torah, ed Rabbi Hayyim Dov Chavel, II, Jerusalem 1994, p. 135.) [14] Also cf. Tovah Cohen, "Yihudah shel Miriam ke-Manhigah," , Bar-Ilan Parasha page Beshalah 5760.

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Amaleik, Kaddish, and the Unity of G-d's Name

Rabbi Yaakov Haber – torahweb

"Ki yad 'al keis kah milchama laShem ba'Amaleik midor dor," "for a Hand is raised on the throne of G-d - an eternal battle of G-d with 'Amaleik from generation to generation." With these concluding words of our parasha, Hashem declares an eternal war with 'Amaleik and all the Evil that this nation, along with its physical and spiritual successors, represents throughout the millennia. Rashi, quoting from the Midrash, comments on the usage of incomplete words in this passage. Instead of the more frequent four-letter ineffable name of G-d, the two-letter name "K-H" is used. Instead of the word "KiSAI" for throne, the abbreviated form "KaiS" is employed. This teaches that neither the throne of G-d nor His name are complete until the destruction of 'Amaleik is achieved. The prophet Zecharia (14:9) underscores this concept with the famous statement, "bayom hahu yih'ye Hashem Echad u'Shmo Echad," "on that day, the day of the redemption, when all the forces of evil are eradicated, G-d will be One and His Name One." (See Avudraham in his commentary to Kaddish for a fascinating further allusion to this concept.)

The theme of Hashem's name becoming One is highlighted not only in the 'Aleinu prayer recited three times a day which concludes with the above passage from Zecharia but appears as well in the Kaddish prayer recited so often as part of Jewish liturgy. Tosfos (B'rachot 3a, s.v. "v'onin") quotes the Machzor Vitri in his explanation of the central response of kaddish: "Y'hei ShMEI rabba m'varach" The word "ShMEI," in his opinion, should be read as a composite word consisting of the two words "SheiM" and "K-H" or the name "Kah" of G-d. The meaning of the entire passage then is: "May the name K-H of G-d become enlarged (rabba) (and) be blessed." In other words, may it become the four-letter ineffable name of G-d. When 'Amaleik is destroyed, G-d's name grows great and becomes complete as indicated in the above-mentioned Rashi. Even Tosfos themselves who read "ShMEI" as merely the Aramaic equivalent of "ShMO," or His Name, would seemingly agree that Kaddish is a prayer for redemption and the destruction of Evil which is a part of that process. Avudraham and Tur note that the opening phrase of Kaddish, "Yisgadal v'Yiskadash," is a paraphrase of the passage in Yechezkel (38:23) dealing with the sanctification of Hashem's name occurring after victory over the forces of Gog u'Magog, an event to take place as part of the process of Redemption. The Sefardic nusach of Kaddish includes the passage of "v'yatzmach purkaneiv vikareiv m'shichei" - "may His salvation sprout forth, and may He hasten His mashiach," a clear reference to Ge'ula. Presumably, what the Ashkenazic rite assumes implicitly, the Sefardic rite makes explicit. Finally, the phrase "l'olam u'lolmei 'olmaya" - "forever and ever" is strikingly similar to the passage recited in k'dusha - "Yimloch Hashem l'olam 'Elokayich tzion ...," "may Hashem reign forever," another reference to Redemption. The Gemara in B'rachot (ibid.), on which the above-mentioned Tosfos comment, also ties in the response "yehei shmei rabba m'vorach" to Redemption.

Rav C. Y. Goldwicht z"l, the founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, offered a profound insight into the meaning of Hashem's name becoming complete after the eradication of 'Amaleik. The Talmud teaches us at the end of Masechta B'rachot that on good tidings, we praise G-d as "Hatov V'HaMeitiv," the Good One who bestows good; on evil news or events, we declare that Hashem is the "Dayan Emet," the True Judge, recognizing G-d's justice as ultimately fair and just even if it transcends our comprehension. However, in the future world of redemption, we will recite "Hatov V'HaMeitiv" on both good and evil events. Why should we not recite "Hatov V'HaMeitiv" even on evil tidings since the religious personality has

confidence that all that G-d does in this world is ultimately for the Good? What the Gemara is informing us is that whereas it is axiomatic in prayer that we may only praise G-d's actions in the world in a manner in which we currently perceive them (see also Yoma 69b) and therefore in this World we may not recite "Hatov V'HaMeitiv" on evil events, in the World of Redemption, we will gain Divine insight into past history with all of its apparently awful, cruel, disastrous tragedies both individually and collectively and be able to see beneath the outer veneer and be able to comprehend Hashem's hidden merciful, just, and Good Hand throughout the centuries. This momentous event will be accompanied by the eradication of 'Amaleik, or those powers that represent Evil in this world. It is then, when Divine justice is enacted in full upon Evil, that those that embody concepts of Evil will cease to serve as a source of questioning Hashem's justice system, or, minimally, not comprehending it. As long as 'Amaleik exists, as long as Evil exists, however purposeful it is in the Divine grand scheme, the name or comprehension of G-d is incomplete, and when evil strikes we must be satisfied with a response of "Dayan Emet." G-d instructs us that this time of confusion and partial comprehension of His true beneficence will come to an end when His name will once again be complete and all events in the world will be recognized as being orchestrated by His always Good and Just Hand.

Rav Y. David shlita, Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Pachad Yitzchak, quoted another passage stressing this same idea. At the end of "Mizmor Shir Chanukas HaBayis L'Dovid" recited before "Baruch She'amar," the Psalmist declares, "I'ma'an y'zamercha chavod v'lo yidom, Hashem Elokai l'olam odeka" - "in order that my soul sing your praise forever and not be silent, Hashem, my G-d, I will praise you forever." When Aharon HaKohein suffers the terrible loss of his two sons, his response is to remain silent - "vayidom Aharon" (Sh'mini 10:3). He could not utter words of praise to G-d even while knowing fully that his sons' death was for just cause. We pray to Hashem for the "Chanukas HaBayis," the dedication of the Beit HaMikdash and the Redemption, the era when "v'lo yidom," we will not have to remain silent in the face of Divine Justice and will be able to offer words of praise to G-d, comprehending its true purpose. In the language of Yeshayahu HaNavi (12:1), "v'amarta bayom hahu: Od'cha Hashem ki 'anaf bi," "and you will state on that day (of Redemption), I will praise You, Hashem, (even for the times) when You were angry with me!"

Our prayers, as especially highlighted in 'Aleinu and in Kaddish, serve as powerful tools to bring about this anxiously awaited event. The aforementioned passage in B'rachot indicates that when a tzibbur answers Kaddish, Hashem is aroused, so to speak, to bring about the Redemption. Tosfos (B'rachot, ibid.) even suggest that the Kaddish is recited in Aramaic so that the angels should not comprehend it and try to hinder the Redemption by highlighting K'lal Yisrael's shortcomings. As is often the case, recitation of fixed texts of prayers often tend to cause a loss of fervor and devotion in their recital. A deeper understanding of the themes of prayer is one of the proven methods of enhancing concentration during their recital. May our prayers for the eradication of 'Amaleik and the Redemption be answered speedily in our days!

Parshat B'shalach 5764 - Meaning in Mitzvot - OU.ORG

MEANING IN MITZVOT by Rabbi Asher Meir

Each week we discuss one familiar halakhic practice and try to show its beauty and meaning. The columns are based on Rabbi Meir's Meaning in Mitzvot on Kitzur Shulchan Arukh.

TU BiShvat & Shabbat Shira

Rav Natan of Breslav writes: "Tu BiShvat is always adjacent to Shabbat Shira, and sometimes it falls on Shabbat Shira itself" - as it does this year (and 30% of all years). Rav Natan explains this proximity in an involved Chasidic digression (Likutei Halachot Orla 3), based on a teaching of his Rebbe, Rav Nachman of Breslav (Likutei Moharan II 8). We will attempt to present the main elements of the

explanation here, including many illustrations from revealed sources that are not mentioned by these awesome Chasidic masters.

Our prayers are almost always requests for mercy, as the gemara states (Berakhot 20b), that prayer is "mercy". The natural world has its laws of nature, and the Torah has established laws of punishment "measure for measure", but in our prayers we ask that these laws be circumvented: We ask HaShem to send rain even if the forecast wouldn't predict it, or to be lenient with us even if we really did transgress. Prayers for justice, on the other hand, are extremely rare. The gemara warns, "Anyone who asks the judgment of his fellow man, he is punished first!" (RH 15b.) Rav Nachman writes that such a prayer is usually "eaten up" by the side of evil. It generally does not stem from the uplifting, idealistic side of man that inspires our other prayers, but rather from the small-mindedness and vindictiveness that are the usual fare of the evil impulse.

One who would pray for judgment needs extraordinary qualities. First of all, he must have unblemished righteousness; otherwise he will be punished first. Second of all, his request for judgment must itself stem from a recognition that ultimately such judgment is necessary in order for kindness to reign. We find for example, that the blessing asking for judgment on the "minim" could only be composed by Shmuel HaKatan who was known for his extreme self-effacement (see Sanhedrin 11a) and lack of vindictiveness (see Avot 4:19); furthermore, it was only introduced when it was clear that it was an absolute necessity to save the prayer service from malicious informers (Berakhot 28b). (Rav Nachman explains that such a necessity generally arises when mercy is distorted in order to protect and nurture wickedness and cruelty. Judaism reconciles itself to the need to be "cruel to be kind" only with difficulty, when the world considers it "kind to be cruel".)

Rav Nachman states that when such an extraordinary individual does arise and confronts such an extraordinary situation, he has immense power to subdue evil and to awaken to repentance those who have been caught in its grip. In fact, it is this exact trait that gives a person the ability to reprove others in an inspirational way that affirms their basic goodness (as we explained last week). Rav Nachman calls this a "voice" or a "song" which awakens the dormant good in wrongdoers and gives them a beautiful fragrance that nullifies the stench of sin.

Rav Nachman refers here, as he often does, to a "single, double, triple and quadruple song"; he explains that these four levels refer to different levels of Divine providence. The lowest level is completely according to natural law, without any Divine guidance (though of course the laws themselves are of Divine origin!); the highest level is completely according to Divine intervention, as the world will be guided in the time of the complete redemption.

We can explain that someone who has the most profound understanding of HaShem's ways is able to perceive that sin ultimately is also part of HaShem's plan. What is considered against HaShem's will at a lower level of providence is actually part of His greater blueprint at a higher level. A normal person is not capable of such a perspective; if you tell him that evil is part of G-d's plan, then he will feel no distress in the face of wickedness, whether his own or of others. If he understands that evil is against G-d's will, then he considers the sinner banished from G-d. Only a few, such as Moshe, are able to encompass all these songs; these individuals are able to fight evil with all their might, yet reprove wrongdoers with a perfect faith that they are still servants of G-d, involved in advancing His plan.

Rav Natan writes that one actual song that gives expression to this supernal song is the Song of the Sea. This song celebrates the judgment of Egypt. Normally this would be highly inappropriate; the Midrash states that the angels were forbidden to sing during the splitting of the sea (Yalkut Shimoni Beshalach). But Moshe, who led Israel in this song, had a perfect apprehension of how this judgment, with its awesome demonstration of HaShem's sovereignty and His election of Israel, was necessary for the establishment of G-d's kingdom among mankind. This song refers to natural phenomena; to

G-d's judgment and retribution; and ultimately to the final redemption: "HaShem will reign for ever and ever". Thus it encompasses all of the four levels of song.

We explained above that prayers for judgment are generally acceptable only for truly extraordinary individuals in truly extraordinary circumstances. Yet there is an exception: Rosh HaShana, the Day of Judgment. On this day, all of us pray for a favorable judgment: while we make pleas for leniency, ultimately we ask judgment to be done. Rav Natan explains that this special quality extends to all the New Years mentioned in the mishna, including Tu BiShvat, the New Year for trees. It seems that on these days all Israel merit a bit of the spiritual might which makes such a prayer acceptable. And on Shabbat Shira, all of us participate in the public recitation of the Song of the Sea; evidently on this day all Israel merit a dim apprehension of the "four levels of song". Since these two qualities are intimately connected, it is natural that Shabbat Shira and Tu BiShevat are always in close proximity.

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From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** [mailto:ryfrand@torah.org]

Sent: Wednesday, February 04, 2004 11:57 PM

To: ravfrand@torah.org

Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas B'Shalach

G-d Rules Even In A Period In Which We Fail To See It

The pasuk [verse] at the end of the Shirah [The song of thanks that the nation sang after crossing the Reed Sea] says, "Hashem will reign for all eternity" [Shmos 15:18]. There is an interesting Targum Onkelos on this pasuk. The Targum interprets the verb "Yimloch" (which we ordinarily translate as future tense -- "will reign") as "his Kingship is in existence" (malchusei kaim). It is not a statement about the future -- according to Onkelos -- it is a statement about the present.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody -- the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva -- explains a prayer that is recited daily (just before the Morning Shemoneh Esrei, Silent Prayer) based on this statement of the Targum: "With a new song the redeemed ones praised Your Name at the seashore, all of them in unison gave thanks, acknowledged Your sovereignty and said "Hashem Yimloch l'olam Va'ed" (our above-referenced pasuk). Why does our liturgy refer to this song of praise at the Reed Sea as a "new song"?

A different pasuk says about the Egyptians, "Deep waters covered them, they descended in the depths like stone (k'even)" [Shmos 15:5]. Rashi points out that we are taught elsewhere that the Egyptians sank like lead (tzalalu k'oferes) [15:10], and in still a third place that they were consumed like straw (yochleimo k'kash) [15:7]. Lead is a very heavy metal; it sinks more quickly than stone. Straw is a light material; it first floats on top and then sinks slowly. So these three verses apparently contradict each other.

Rashi explains that the pasukim [verses] are describing the fate of three different types of Egyptians. Some drowned slowly like straw. Others drowned more quickly, sinking like stone. Still others drowned almost immediately, sinking like lead. The slower the death, the more torture and pain were involved in the process. These three types of drowning deaths represented three different levels of wickedness found amongst the Egyptians. Their deaths corresponded with the way they treated the Jews during their slavery experience in Egypt.

We learn the following lesson from this Rashi. Even though during the Egyptian bondage it appeared to all the Jews that G-d had forsaken them, that was never so. Even in the period when G-d hid His Face (Hester Panim), He was still paying very close attention. He never forsakes His people, even in the time of their worst suffering. Even then, as it were, He sits in Heaven and 'keeps score'. He

remembers which Egyptians were horrible to the Jews, which were decent to them, and which were good to them. Although it may sometimes appear otherwise, G-d never abandons us. G-d is always very much interested in what happens to the Jewish people.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that the insight of this Rashi is the same as the interpretation of the Targum Onkelos mentioned earlier: When the Jews looked back after crossing the Reed Sea and they saw the Egyptians drowning -- some in a more painful fashion and some in a less painful fashion -- they suddenly 'got it'. They understood that Divine Justice was being administered. They understood that G-d was very much aware and very much in charge even in the darkest days of Egyptian bondage.

Therefore, they were able to express a new level of insight into their song (shirah chadasha). Usually we think of song as praise for the 'nice' things that G-d has done for us. However, the 'new' song was not only for the salvation, it involved praise to G-d that even in the worst times of enslavement, He was still caring about us. This praise was articulated by the words "Hashem Yimloch L'Olam Va'Ed". As Unkelos says, this does not mean G-d WILL rule forever. It means that right now in the present -- as bleak as the situation may seem -- G-d's Kingship is still ruling his world.

We think that while we are in Exile, the Divine Presence is hidden from us. The simple reading of our prayer is that we have confidence that in the future, G-d will rule and everyone will recognize His presence. The Targum is explaining the opposite insight into the prayer. Even now, we are firmly convinced that G-d is ruling and 'keeping intimate score' regarding all that happens.

Things May Improve At The Next Stop Down The Road

A related insight can be drawn from an incident that occurred later in the Parsha. The pasuk says, "And they came to Marah and they could not drink water from Marah because they were bitter, therefore they called the name of the place Marah (from the word 'mar' -- bitter)" [Shmos 15:23] The people complained that they had nothing to drink. Moshe solved the problem.

Then they traveled to Elim. In Elim they found twelve springs of water and seventy date palms and they camped there by the water. The Ibn Ezra says that they spent one day in Marah and 21 days in Elim. This can be comparable to going on a trip, where the accommodations are terrible at the first stop, while just down the road is a paradise. We are bound by time and space and literally do not know what is down the road or around the corner from us. Had they known that they were only going to be in Marah for one day and that down the road was a beautiful resting place where they would stay for an extended period of time, then their attitude would not have been the same. But part of the human condition is the inability to see beyond our noses.

So many times in life, when we experience hard times, the situation improves literally overnight and all returns to normal. But while we are in our current state of mind, a situation can appear darker than dark. The Jews in Egypt felt forsaken and abandoned. "G-d doesn't care. G-d died in Auschwitz." For those people who suffered during World War II, it was not one day of suffering. It was not three weeks. It was many hard years. Certainly, that was also the case for the generations who suffered in Egypt. The natural inclination is to say "we are abandoned."

But the Song by the Sea, as well as the story of Marah and Elim, remind us that sometimes the salvation is just down the road. There are situations in life are very difficult. But the salvation of G-d can come in the blink of an eye. Elim and Marah teach us that things can literally turn around on a dime.

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dhoffman@torah.org These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 359, Three Slices of Pizza - Must You Bench? Tapes or 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

From: Michael Hoenig [mailto:MHoenig@herzfeld-rubin.com]
Sent: February 02, 2004
THE MYSTERY OF PAROH'S ELITE CHARIOTS: OBSCURITY OR CLUE?
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Amidst the majestic, miraculous events that unfold in Parshas Beshalach - among them, the Exodus, parting of the Red Sea and utter destruction of pursuing Egyptian forces - it is easy to overlook an obscure, seemingly minor factual reference that, boldly stated once, then retires quietly to dangle in air without further ado. Though the mysterious event is very explicitly mentioned, and a significant act is performed, the reader is left hanging as to its true significance. The textual loop on the incident is never really closed, thereby raising some interesting questions.

Students of Biblical verse, accustomed to economy of scriptural language, know well that there is no wasted reference in Torah. Every sentence, word and letter has meaning, often beyond what is evident - a deeper nuance or purpose. This is particularly true when Torah mentions specific numbers, as it does in connection with Paroh's 600 elite chariots. [14:7] Let us zoom the analytical microscope in for a sharper, up-close focus on the curious text.

i) Beshalach (Shemos 13: 17-22) begins with the Bnai Yisrael's departure from Egypt and travel to the extremity of the desert where they encamp. Hashem appears to Moshe and directs that they move again, this time to camp by the Red Sea. Hashem announces that Paroh will calculate them to be trapped between the desert and the sea [14:1-3]. The Egyptian ruler's heart will be hardened and he will "pursue after them" [VeRadaf Achareihem] with "all his forces" [VeChol Chailo]. Defeat of the latter will bring honor to Hashem [14:4].

ii) Indeed, Paroh and his servants do have a turn of heart. They regret sending away the Bnai Yisrael [14:5]. The Egyptian King acts forcefully and resolutely: he readies his personal chariot [VaYeesor Es Richbo]; and takes his people with him [14:6]. Then, he also takes "600 chosen chariots," the elite of his chariotry [VaYikach Shesh Meos Rechev Bachur], together with "all the chariots of Egypt" [VeChol Rechev Mitzraim] and places fighting men in charge of the common folk [14:7].

iii) The foregoing terminology seems strange. It appears repetitive. It is both general and specific. On the posuk that Paroh took 600 "chosen" chariots, many of the commentators focus on the word "Bachur," i.e., "chosen," indicating that these were the elite of the chariots, the pride of his force. The implication is that Paroh meant nasty business. He assembled his best weaponry, the fearsome implements of imperial strength, swift and deadly military transport that would overtake the freed slaves and deal a decisive blow.

iv) The traditional Meforshim, however, do not comment upon the significance of why Torah text records the precise number of these elite chariots, i.e., 600 [Shesh Meos], or why the chosen chariots are mentioned at all. Indeed, the text in the very same Posuk amply tells us he took "ALL the chariots of Egypt" [14:7]. Does not this all-encompassing phrase suffice to include his elite chariots? If the text intends merely to emphasize the large size of the offensive force, why not describe it as "many" or "numerous"? Or provide the total number of all the chariots taken together - surely a much greater host? Why should the Torah state the precise number?

v) Stranger still, after providing this exquisite detail, the text never again mentions these elite, "chosen" chariots, whether by category or by number. They simply retire into the background, an unstated part of the mass of chariotry which finds a watery, Red Sea

grave. Yet, if they were important enough to specify earlier, why is there no mention of them later? Why do the 600 "Rechev Bachur" vanish into oblivion, seemingly an amorphous, unimportant historical footnote blended into the generality of destroyed military material? The textual loop opened by the earlier reference is never closed. Why?

vi) IMMEDIATELY AFTER the references to the 600 Rechev Bachur and "all the chariots of Egypt," the Biblical text advises that Paroh's heart was hardened, and "he PURSUED after" the Bnai Israel [VAYIRDOD Acharei Bnai Yisrael] [14:8]. The reader will note that this is the second reference in Beshalach to use the root word "pursuit" or "chase" (Redifa). [See 14:4 and 14:8]. The immediate next posuk again describes: "And the Egyptians PURSUED after them, all the horses and chariots of Paroh, and his horsemen, and his forces, and overtook them encamping by the sea ..." [VAYIRDEFU Mitzraim Achareihem VaYasigu Osam Chonim Al Hayam, Kol Sus Rechev Paroh Ufarashav VeChailo ...] [14:9]. This is the third reference in a short span of verses to "pursuit," or "chase," i.e., language of "Redifa." The reader readily will note that all the military forces are included by specific description, but the "600 Rechev Bachur" are not specifically mentioned.

vii) At that point, the Bnai Yisrael actually see Mitzraim's military force; they fear greatly; they cry out in prayer; they complain to Moshe: "Were there no burying places in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?" [14:11] The Egyptian threat is perceived as fatal. Death is the understood outcome. Death is mentioned by Bnai Yisrael again in the very next verse [MiMusenu Bamidbar] [14:12]. Moshe seeks to calm them; "fear not," he says, "for salvation will come; the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you shall see them again no more, forever." [14:13].

viii) Chariots repeatedly are mentioned a few verses later when Hashem states that he will be honored by the destruction of Paroh, his forces and his chariots [14:17,18]. But again, there is no mention of the 600 Rechev Bachur, only chariots generally.

ix) In Posuk 23, the text again speaks about "chase" or "pursuit," using the language of "Redifa": "And the Egyptians PURSUED ... and came after them to the midst of the sea, even all Paroh's horses, his CHARIOTS, and his horsemen." [VAYIRDEFU Mitzraim ...] [14:23]. Again, chariots are mentioned generally, "all chariots," but not the Rechev Bachur.

x) Posuk 25 says the "CHARIOT wheels were removed" [VaYosir Es Ofen Markevosov] [14:25], a reference only to chariots generally. Posuk 26 says that Moshe would beckon for the waters to return upon the Egyptians, upon their CHARIOTS, and upon their horsemen [14:26]. The added reference likewise is to chariots generally. Similarly, in Posuk 28: [VaYashuvu Hamayim VaYechasu Es HaRechev ...] [14:28], the reference is to all chariots generally.

xi) The victory song (Az Yashir) by Moshe and Bnai Yisrael also speaks to Paroh's chariots generally [Markevot Paroh] [15:4]. The language of Paroh's "pursuit," his "Redifa," is mentioned again [Amar Oye ERDOD Asig ...] [15:9]. Again, at verses 15:18 and 15:21, the CHARIOTS are mentioned, but only generally. There is no specific reference at all to the "600 Rechev Bachur" elaborated earlier.

xii) Clearly Torah does not waste text. Each reference has meaning. What should we make of these repeated references to language of "Redifa," i.e., chase or pursuit? Why not one or two mentions of Paroh's hot pursuit? The context of the chase is evident from the narrative in any event. Why multiple references? And what are we to make of the Shesh Meos Rechev Bachur? Why specify these special chariots initially when all the chariots were used? And why are they then subsumed within the general class of chariots?

xiii) One plausible hypothesis is that the reference to "Shesh Meos Rechev Bachur" is a Remez, a clue to something significant. The purpose of the explicit number is to signal a major ramification of the entire sequence of events. It appears only once because its true importance is not so much in the telling of the story but in what it signals, what it announces. The number 600, according to this thesis, is not coincidental; it is meaningful and purposeful. 1

xiv) Similarly, the multiple, repeated references to Paroh's and Mitzraim's frantic pursuit [Redifa] of Bnai Yisrael are not mere poetic license. These, too, are a Remez, a clue to something major. And, with respect, it appears that the references to 600 elite chariots and Redifa are very much related, parts of the same momentous equation. The chariots were more than incidental tools of war. They were material instrumentalities by which the hot pursuit, the Redifa, would be effected.

xv) But then what do these clues signify? The answer is both startling yet understandable in the context of unfolding events. Sefer HaChinuch lists and explains the Mitzvos by sequence.² Mitzvah number 600 entitled "Mitzvah LeHatzil HaNirdaf," is an affirmative precept (Mitzvas Eseh) stating THE DUTY TO SAVE A CHASED OR HUNTED PERSON FROM THE HAND OF A PURSUER WHO WISHES TO KILL HIM. The Chinuch describes Mitzvah 600 in terms of REDIFA. [SheNitzvavinu LeHatzil HaNirdaf Miyad Mi SheYirdefehu Lehorgo, VeAfilu BeNefesh HaRodef, Kelomar SheAnu Metzuvim Laharog HaRodef ...]. The RODEF with murderous intent is fair game to himself be killed in order to rescue the person being chased. The Chinuch explains that "Yishuv Haolam," settlement of the world, will endure by the rescue of the weak person from the hand of one who is stronger. Further, says the Chinuch, the "eyes and heart of a chased and hunted man [HaNirdaf] are always to the Eternal Lord, to deliver him from the hand of his pursuer." Citing Ecclesiastes 3:15, "And G-d seeks the pursued one," [VeHaElokim Yevakesh Es HaNirdaf], the Chinuch explains that "the one pursued seeks and beseeches G-d and implores mercy of Him. Therefore, He (blessed is He) commanded us to help him."

xvi) The Torah's reference to Paroh's 600 Rechev Bachur is a strong Remez to Paroh's and Mitzraim's unique status as evil pursuers and hunters with homicidal intent. By doing so, they forfeited their lives to those with power to rescue the victims. It is a Mitzvah to effect such a rescue and to kill the Rodef where necessary. The "600 Rechev Bachur" were elite vehicles, specially "chosen" to effect the speediest chase, to overtake the hunted, to deliver the fatal blow to the weaker. The number 600 thus is a Remez to Chinuch's Mitzvah number 600. The chosen chariots are mentioned once only because they primarily signify Paroh's evil intent - a level of culpability deserving of fatal retribution. They later blend into the background of all the chariots generally because their fate is the same - all the Rodfim are dealt with summarily.

xvii) Likewise, the Torah's painstaking multiple references to Paroh's and Mitzraim's status as Rodfim is set out. Paroh VeChol Chailo called the doom of the Rodef upon themselves. Hashem, through miracles and Moshe's signs, effects the rescue by killing the hunters. The classic conditions for such a result are present. The militarily strong pursue the weak. The Rodfim have murderous intent. The Bnai Yisrael turn their eyes and hearts to Hashem and pray not to be killed in the desert. Mitzvah number 600 is invoked.

xviii) It is also interesting to note that the reference to Paroh taking "Shesh Meos Rechev Bachur" [14:7] immediately follows Paroh's making ready his own personal chariot [14:6] - obviously an additional Rechev Bachur (601). Mitzvah number 601, according to the Chinuch, also is a Mitzvah related to the Rodef, i.e., not to have pity or mercy on a pursuer with intent to kill [Shelo Lachus Al HaRodef]. Says the Chinuch: "We are restricted from having pity on the life of a pursuer" [Shenimnanu MiLechamol Al Nefesh HaRodef]. It is readily seen that Paroh's royal chariot, taken together with the 600 Rechev Bachur, likewise ordained the retributive result visited upon the Rodfim. Now the dangling, one-time reference to the 600 "chosen" chariots seems clear. We can understand the Torah text's repeated description of the pursuing forces as Rodfim. What happened at the Red Sea was not only miraculous intervention, it was just judgment.

xix) Particularly interesting is the word "Bachur" used to describe the 600 elite chariots. BiGematria, the Hebrew letters of "Bachur" spell out "Charbo," i.e., "his sword." This is a further clue to Paroh's murderous intent, justifiably invoking the Din of a Rodef.

Significantly, the Az Yashir victory song specifically mentions Paroh's "sword" precisely in the context of a murderous Rodef: "The enemy said, I WILL PURSUE, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my soul shall be full of them; I WILL DRAW MY SWORD, my hand shall dispossess them." [Amar Oyev ERDOF Asig Achalek Shalal Timlaemo Nafshi ARIK CHARBI Torishemo Yadi].

xx) There is no superfluity in Torah. We must understand all scriptural references. The mystery of Paroh's Shesh Meos Rechev Bachur appears solved. The posuk is not a fortuity. It is a Remez, an important clue to understanding the Divine Justice that unfolded at the Red Sea.

ENDNOTES

1. A learned reviewer of this essay observed that the number 600 may have unique significance in the context of events unfolding in Beshalach quire apart from the hypothesis advanced here. Thus: (1) the Vilna Gaon explains the number of 600 elite chariots based on Devarim 32:30 (one could chase 1,000; 2 could chase 10,000). Since Paroh was unaware that only 20 percent of Bnai Yisrael left Egypt, he reasoned that some 3,000,000 had departed. Such a number would thereby require 600 chariots to destroy the multitude (i.e., 2 chariots sufficient to chase 10,000; 600 chariots sufficient to chase 3,000,000); (2) A Midrash suggests "Midah Keneged Midah." The Egyptians had set a daily requirement of 600 bricks to be made per Jewish slave. For each brick shy of the quota a Jewish slave was entombed in the walls being constructed. Thus, at the Red Sea the waters stood as a "wall" and, when the waters overwhelmed the Mitzrim and their chariots, Midah Keneged Midah was fulfilled; (3) Plausibly, the number 600 merely signifies a large magnitude as, for example, in the Midrash reciting that Rabbi Akiva taught 600 Halachos connected with a particular spot of leprosy; (4) Noach was 600 years old at the time of the Mabul, the great deluge, which connects to the Red Sea's fatal deluge of the Egyptian forces, i.e., a deadly Mabul to them. The hypothesis presented in this essay differs from but may supplement the foregoing nexes and relies instead upon a startling keshet based upon Sefer Hachinuch's Mitzvah number 600.

2. A learned reviewer of the instant essay incisively observed that the Chinuch's count of Mitzvos differs from that of other authorities. There are several ways of counting the Mitzvos, Chinuch's being only one among many. Thus, a valid question is raised as to why Torah text would supply a Remez or clue based on a number within only the Chinuch's reckoning, a system of counting Mitzvos not recorded in all of Jewish literature before the 14th century. Yet another scholarly reviewer of this essay, however, dismissed the question as presenting a fatal flaw. The Chinuch is an acknowledged and reputable authority deserving of some reliance. We deal here with an analytical tool possibly helpful in explaining Peshat on a Biblical reference that seems mysterious. That other authorities number Mitzvos differently does not preclude reliance upon one highly acceptable source to help explain an obscurity. It may be that Chinuch's numbering elucidates Peshat on this particular issue while others offer insights on still other questions. Torah commentary is replete with numerous discussions that elaborate according to one established Shitah though others may differ. Moreover, the Keshet, as developed in the essay, seems most striking and directly relevant, a fact perhaps too strong to attribute to mere coincidence. This essay's real purpose is to stimulate further thought about an obscurity. Reference to the reputable Chinuch for that purpose seems justifiably merited. To clarify, this essay makes no claim of an ultimate answer to the mystery of Paroh's 600 elite chariots. That task is left to those more worthy. The major point is that an answer should be found.