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**Weekly Parsha BESHALACH**  
**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

The centerpiece of this week's parsha is naturally the great song of Moses and of the Jewish people after their moment of deliverance from Pharaoh and the flooding sea. This song of Moses and of Israel is repeated daily throughout the centuries of Jewish life in our morning prayer service.

The exultation of the moment is still retained and felt many generations later in the unmatched prose and poetry written in the Torah. What makes this song unique is that there is no reference to human bravery, to the courage of the Jewish people in plunging into the sea or to the leadership of Moses and Aaron in shepherding the Jewish people through this

crisis. Rather, the entire poem/song is a paean of praise and appreciation dedicated to the God of Israel.

God operates, so to speak, through human beings and world events. Many times His presence is hidden from our sight. Sometimes it is even willfully ignored. In later victories and triumphs of the Jewish people and of Israel, it is the human element that helps fashion those victories and triumphs that is acknowledged and celebrated.

But here in the song of Moses and Israel we have an acknowledgement of God's great hand without ascribing any credit to human beings and natural and social forces. I think that this is perhaps the one facet that makes this song so unique. Compare it to the song of Deborah, which forms the haftora to this week's parsha. In that song the prophetess assigns a great deal of credit to the armed forces of Israel, to Barak its general, and even to Deborah herself, a fact that does not escape the notice of the rabbis of the Talmud. No such self-aggrandizement appears in the song of Moses and Israel at Yam Suf.

This is completely in line with the character of Moses who is described in the Torah as being the most humble and self-effacing of all human beings. There is no question that without Moses there would not have been an exodus from Egypt nor salvation of Israel on the shores of the Yam Suf. But it would be completely out of character for Moses to assign any of the credit for these enormous and miraculous achievements to himself or his actions and leadership.

Thus, the greatest of leaders and the most gifted of prophets attains that championship of leadership and prophecy by downplaying his role. Moses is well aware of his greatness and his unique relationship with the God of Israel. He is not naïve enough to think of himself as a plain ordinary human being. To do so would really be a form of ersatz humility. But he is wise enough to realize that this exalted status that he has attained is little more than a gift that God has bestowed upon him. From the beginning of his leadership career, when he attempted to refuse becoming the leader of Israel till his last days on earth, he retains this innate humility, which allows him to be the strongest of leaders and most courageous of prophets. There is a lesson in this for all later generations and for all of us that aspire to positions of leadership and importance. That is why this song of Moses and Israel is repeated daily in Jewish life.

Shabbat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy <[info@rabbisacks.org](mailto:info@rabbisacks.org)>

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l**

**The Power of Ruach**

**BESHALLACH**

In September 2010, BBC, Reuters, and other news agencies reported on a sensational scientific discovery. Researchers at

the US National Center for Atmospheric Research and the University of Colorado were able to show – through computer simulation – how the division of the Red Sea may have taken place.

Using sophisticated modelling, they demonstrated how a strong east wind, blowing overnight, could have pushed water back at a bend where an ancient river is believed to have merged with a coastal lagoon. The water would have been guided into the two waterways, and a land bridge would have opened at the bend, allowing people to walk across the exposed mudflats. As soon as the wind died down, the waters would have rushed back in. As the leader of the project said when the report was published, “The simulations match fairly closely with the account in Exodus.”

This is how the Cambridge University physicist Colin Humphreys puts it in his *The Miracles of Exodus*:

Wind tides are well known to oceanographers. For example, a strong wind blowing along Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes, has produced water elevation differences of as much as sixteen feet between Toledo, Ohio, on the west, and Buffalo, New York, on the east... There are reports that Napoleon was almost killed by a “sudden high tide” while he was crossing shallow water near the head of the Gulf of Suez.

Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus*

To me, though, the real issue is what the biblical account actually is. Because it is right here that we have one of the most fascinating features of the way the Torah tells its stories. Here is the key passage:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind all night, turning it into dry land and dividing the water. So the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land. To their right and left, the water was like a wall.

Ex. 14:21-22

The passage can be read two ways. The first is that what happened was a suspension of the laws of nature. It was a supernatural event. The waters stood, literally, like two walls. The second is that what happened was miraculous, but not because the laws of nature were suspended. To the contrary, as the computer simulation shows, the exposure of dry land at a particular point in the Red Sea was a natural outcome of the strong east wind. What made it miraculous is that it happened just there, just then, when the Israelites seemed trapped, unable to go forward because of the sea, unable to turn back because of the Egyptian army pursuing them.

There is a significant difference between these two interpretations. The first appeals to our sense of wonder. How extraordinary that the laws of nature should be suspended to allow an escaping people to go free. It is a story to appeal to the imagination of a child.

But the naturalistic explanation is wondrous at another level entirely. Here the Torah is using the device of irony. What

made the Egyptians of the time of Rameses so formidable was the fact that they possessed the latest and most powerful form of military technology, the horse-drawn chariot. It made them unbeatable in battle, and fearsome.

What happens at the sea is poetic justice of the most exquisite kind. There is only one circumstance in which a group of people travelling by foot can escape a highly trained army of charioteers, namely when the route passes through a muddy seabed. The people can walk across, but the chariot wheels get stuck in the mud. The Egyptian army can neither advance nor retreat. The wind drops. The water returns. The powerful are now powerless, while the powerless have made their way to freedom.

This second narrative has a moral depth that the first does not; and it resonates with the message of the book of Psalms:

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,

Nor His delight in the legs of the warrior;

The Lord delights in those who fear Him,

Who put their hope in His unfailing love.

Psalm 147:10-11

In *Bereishit Rabbah*, it is indicated that the division of the sea was, as it were, programmed into Creation from the outset. It was less a suspension of nature than an event written into nature from the beginning, to be triggered at the appropriate moment in the unfolding of history.

Rabbi Jonathan said: The Holy One, blessed be He, made a condition with the sea [at the beginning of creation], that it should split asunder for the Israelites. That is the meaning of “the sea went back to its full flow” – [read not *le-eitano* but *letenao*], “the condition” that God had earlier stipulated.

*Bereishit Rabbah* 5:5

A miracle is not necessarily something that suspends natural law. It is, rather, an event for which there may be a natural explanation, but which – happening when, where, and how it did – evokes wonder, such that even the most hardened sceptic senses that God has intervened in history. The weak are saved; those in danger, delivered. More significant still is the moral message such an event conveys: that hubris is punished by nemesis; that the proud are humbled and the humble given pride; that there is justice in history, often hidden but sometimes gloriously revealed.

The elegantly simple way in which the division of the Red Sea is described in the Torah so that it can be read at two quite different levels, one as a supernatural miracle, the other as a moral tale about the limits of technology when it comes to the real strength of nations: that to me is what is most striking. It is a text quite deliberately written so that our understanding of it can deepen as we mature, and we are no longer so interested in the mechanics of miracles, and more interested in how freedom is won or lost.

To be clear, it's good to know how the division of the sea happened, but there remains a depth to the biblical story that

can never be exhausted by computer simulations and other historical or scientific evidence and depends instead on being sensitive to its deliberate and delicate ambiguity.

Just as ruach, a physical wind, can part waters and expose land beneath, so too ruach, the human spirit, can expose, beneath the surface of a story, a deeper meaning beneath.

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date: Jan 24, 2024, 8:31 AM

subject: Rav Frand - **"Thanks for the Suffering" – A  
Profound Teaching of the Beis HaLevi**

Parshas Beshalach

"Thanks for the Suffering" – A Profound Teaching of the Beis HaLevi

The Medrash Rabbah in Parshas Beshalach comments on the pasuk "Then ('Az') Moshe sang..." (Shemos 15:1), saying that Moshe remarked: I sinned with the word "az" when I said "And from then (m'az) that I came to speak to Pharaoh in Your Name he made matters worse for the nation and You have not saved Your Nation" (Shemos 5:23), and so now I will recite shirah (song) with the word 'az'.

According to this Medrash, Moshe Rabbeinu had a special intent by starting his shirah with the word "az" (then). Moshe now looks back at the whole process of Yetzias Mitzraim (the Exodus) and recognizes that he previously sinned terribly by using that word. Moshe had been frustrated when his initial attempt to speak to Pharaoh in Hashem's name caused a deterioration of the status of the Jewish slaves. Previously, Pharaoh had at least provided them with straw to make bricks. After hearing Moshe's message from Hashem, Pharaoh stopped providing the straw, but still demanded the same quota of bricks be made every day.

At the beginning of Parshas Vaera, Chazal mention that Hashem had a complaint about Moshe. The Avos never complained to Him when things went bad. Moshe's strong words of protest to the Almighty were seen as disrespectful. Moshe Rabbeinu remarks: "Now I need to do Teshuva." What is his Teshuva? He takes the same word with which he complained, and now uses it in a song of praise to the Almighty!

This use of "az" – "az", once in a complaint and once in a song of praise seems like a strange "gezeirah shavah" (common Biblical word that teaches a lesson). There must be something deeper implicit in this Medrash. What does it mean?

The Beis HaLevi in this week's parsha says a very important principle: There are two types of shevach v'ho'da'ah (praise and thanksgiving) that we give to the Ribono shel Olam. The typical situation, lo olaynu, is for example if a person was very sick, perhaps even deathly ill, and then he gets better, so he gives shevach v'ho'da'ah to the Ribono shel Olam that he has

been cured from the disease. However, had he been given the choice of not having had the disease in the first place and thus not needing to be cured from it, that would have been his clear preference.

Then there is the less typical type of situation, where a person not only thanks the Almighty for being healed, but he even thanks Hashem for the original makka (plague) which necessitated the refuah (healing). Moshe Rabbeinu now looks back at what happened when he went to Pharaoh, resulting in Pharaoh making it worse. The fact that Pharaoh made it worse, in the end, turned out to be good for Klal Yisrael. Because of the intensification of the enslavement, their decreed period of enslavement in Mitzraim was reduced from 400 years to 210 years.

Not only that, says the Beis HaLevi, but the fact is that now when we look back, we can see that we were not only saved from Egyptian slavery, but we were the conduit of an extraordinary Kiddush Hashem. The Shiras HaYam is all about the fact that through the events of the Krias Yam Suf (Splitting of the Reed Sea) and Yetzias Mitzraim, the Ribono shel Olam's name was glorified. "People heard – they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Phillistia" (Shemos 15:14) – look at what we have accomplished!

Moshe Rabbeinu says that now we are not only giving praise to Hashem for being saved, but we are also giving praise for the entire process – m'az – from the time that I first came to Pharaoh. I originally complained about the trials and tribulations, but now I am giving praise about those very trials and tribulations – because by virtue of the enslavement and all of its associated difficulties, the geulah (redemption) from that enslavement becomes all the greater Kiddush Hashem (Sanctification of the Name of G-d), which is the mission statement of Klal Yisrael, namely, to be the vehicle of Kiddush Shem Shamayim in the world.

This was not merely a "Thanks for curing me of the illness" scenario. This was a case of "Thanks for the illness as well as for the cure."

It is very difficult for us to relate to this idea of "Thanks for the illness...", but I will tell you a true story:

Rav Baruch Sorotzkin, zt"l, was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland until the mid-1970s.

Unfortunately, he contracted cancer. He put up a valiant fight and went through a tremendous ordeal. He survived for some time, but he eventually succumbed to the disease. His Rebbetzin said that her husband had commented, "If someone would have asked me to pay him a million dollars before I went through this whole illness and treatment ordeal to avoid the misery, I would have been willing to pay it. However, after having experienced it, if someone would offer me a million dollars to not have experienced it, I would be unwilling to accept his offer."

Why?! He said that he grew tremendously from the whole experience. He saw the Hand of Hashem and he grew as a person. He gained in patience, endurance and emunah. That was worth more than a million dollars to him.

The truth is that sometimes I see this among ordinary people – who are not Roshei Yeshiva or great tzadikim. Sometimes people who experienced terrible sicknesses, at the end of the day, at the other side of those painful experiences, say that they would not trade the experience for anything, because of the personal growth they experienced along with the trauma and challenge of the ordeal. This is a lot easier said than done. I think it is far from a universal approach. But at times, people do talk like that and actually feel like that.

This is what Moshe Rabbeinu is saying over here: I complained with “az” because I thought “What is this about?” But now in hindsight, I am going to say shirah with the word “az”, giving praise and thanksgiving to the Ribono shel Olam for the entire ordeal.

In truth, we say this in Hallel: “I thank You for You have inflicted pain upon me...” (Tehillim 118:21) What do those words mean? I’m thanking Hashem because He tortured me?!? We should not need to experience such nisyonos (Divine tests), but it is possible for even “regular human beings” to experience an ordeal and say it was a positive growth experience, despite all the challenges.

By Spirituality, the More You Put In, the More You Take Out I saw the following Medrash (which I have never heard of before) brought down in a sefer called Ateres Duda'im by Rav Dovid Zucker of Chicago. He brings this Medrash from a sefer called Sefer Le'Hagid.

The pasuk says that the mann came down, each person gathered every morning what they needed for their daily consumption, and then the heat of the sun melted the (remaining) mann. (Shemos 16:21)

The Mechilta explains that the remaining mann turned into liquid, which flowed into the rivers. The deer would drink the water from those rivers. The gentile nations would hunt these deer, eat them, and thereby taste the mann. It was the best venison they ever tasted, and they thereby appreciated the elevated status of the Jews. That is what the Mechilta says. The Sefer Le'Hagid brings down the following incredible Medrash:

There was a young fellow who was bored being cooped up in the Jewish encampment in the Wilderness and left the encampment. He hiked over to the area where children of Amon lived. He was very hungry and they fed him deer that had drunk the water from the rivers containing melted mann. He tasted the deer and was overwhelmed by its outstanding taste. He returned to the Jewish camp and told his friends, “There is no need to stay here the whole time. I left, I visited Amon, and I tasted deer like I never tasted in my entire life.”

Moshe Rabbeinu noticed that this young fellow had a crowd around him and investigated what was going on. Moshe asked him to explain what was so special about the taste of the deer’s meat. The young fellow answered that he could not explain it, but it was the best taste he ever experienced in his life. Moshe told him, “I will tell you what was so special about that deer’s meat.” Moshe explained that the deer tasted so special because it drank water that contained the melted mann. Moshe told the young man that he was a fool. “Why do you seek merely a facsimile of mann when you can have the real thing?” That is the end of this Medrash.

There are two questions that can be asked about this Medrashic story: First, why was this fellow so impressed with the taste of the deer? Why did he not have that same out-of-this-world sensation when he tasted the mann itself? Second, what is the point of this Medrash? What is it trying to teach us?

Rav Zucker answered these questions by quoting a vort that Rav Shimon Schwab said over from the Chofetz Chaim. (Rav Schwab said this vort at the chanukas habayis (dedication) of the new Beis Medrash of Ner Israel in 1980.) Rav Schwab spent a single Shabbos in Radin with the Chofetz Chaim, from which he came away with a career’s worth of drashos (homiletic insights).

It was Parshas Beshalach. Rav Schwab asked the Chofetz Chaim about our Medrash, which said that the mann tasted like whatever the person who consumed it wanted it to taste. Rav Schwab asked the Chofetz Chaim, “What if a person is not thinking anything?” The Chofetz Chaim responded “Az mi tracht nisht; hut kin taam nisht.” (When you don’t think, it has no flavor.)

The mann was a spiritual type of food. By spirituality, the more you put in, the more you get out. If a person puts nothing in, he gets nothing out. Az mi tracht nisht – if someone does not want to grow from the experience of eating the mann, hut kin taam nisht – you get nothing out of it.

This is the way it is with all spiritual matters. A person can learn a blatt Gemara by mumbling or racing through it, and not get such a geshmak (pleasurable experience) from it. But when someone sweats over a piece of Gemara and puts all of his effort into understanding it, his experience will be totally different. Since it is a spiritual matter, the more a person puts in, the more he takes out.

This fellow was not thinking about anything when he ate the mann. Therefore, he got nothing out of it. A person who is involved in a davar ruchni (spiritual endeavor) needs to invest. Shabbos is great. Oneg Shabbos is a taste of the World to Come. But what a person gets out of Shabbos depends on what a person puts into a Shabbos. If a person puts nothing into a Shabbos, he gets nothing out of a Shabbos. The more a person puts into Shabbos, the more he takes out. That is the way it is with every davar ruchni.

When this fellow went to Amon and ate the deer, it was a *davar gashmi* (physical experience). It had a special flavor, but it was a *gashmi* flavor. By *gashmiyus* matters, it is easy come, easy go. It is instant gratification. Is it 'fun' to watch a football game? Is it 'fun' to play video games? Yes, it's 'fun'. You enjoy it, but how long does it last? It is ephemeral. A person can sit there for hours and watch the game, but what does he gain from the experience? However, in spiritual matters, there is no instant gratification. If we want to accomplish a *davar ruchni*, we must invest – thought and effort. *Az mi tracht nisht; hut min gornisht!*

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from: **Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>  
date: Jan 25, 2024, 3:26 PM  
subject: Elkana Vizel's Last Letter - New Beshalach Essay by Rabbi YY

Elkana Vizel's Last Letter

Jewish History Is a Study of the Future: "Moses and the Children of Israel Will Sing"

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Elkanah Vizel

Before heading into battle, Master Sgt. Elkana Vizel, 35, penned a letter for his loved ones. At his funeral this week, his widow read the letter.

The father of four young children, Rabbi Elkana Vizel was among 21 reservists killed last Monday night in Northern Gaza.

Despite sustaining injuries in Operation Protective Edge and having the choice to stay out of combat service, Elkana opted to enlist in the reserves, dedicating himself to defending his people. In his heartfelt letter to his loved ones, he expressed unwavering conviction in his decision to return to the frontlines. Here is what he wrote:

If you are reading these words, something must have happened to me. If I was kidnapped, I demand that no deal be made for the release of any terrorist to release me. Our overwhelming victory is more important than anything, so please continue to work with all your might so that the victory is as overwhelming as possible.

Maybe I fell in battle. When a soldier falls in battle, it is sad, but I ask you to be happy. Don't be sad when you part with me. Touch hearts, hold each other's hands, and strengthen each other. We have so much to be proud and happy about.

We are writing the most significant moments in the history of our nation and the entire world. So please, be happy, be optimistic, keep choosing life all the time. Spread love, light, and optimism. Look at your loved ones in the whites of their

eyes and remind them that everything we go through in this life is worth it and we have something to live for.

Don't stop the power of life for a moment. I was already wounded in Operation Tzuk Eitan, but I do not regret that I returned to fight. This is the best decision I ever made. We have no words to describe the nobility, love, purity and holiness of our soldiers and our brothers and sisters fighting for their life. Elkana's letter brought back a story and message that transpired 80 years ago, in one of the darkest moments of our history.

Future Tense

"That day, G-d saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians . . . The Israelites saw the great power G-d had displayed against the Egyptians, and the people were in awe of G-d. They believed in G-d and in his servant Moses. Moses and the Israelites then sang this song, saying..."[1]

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

Yet, as is often the case, the English translation does not capture all of the nuances. In the original text, the Torah states: Then Moses and the children of Israel will sing this song to the Lord, and they spoke, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for very exalted is He; a horse and its rider He cast into the sea.

בשלח טו, א: אָז יִשְׂרָאֵל-מִשֶּׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַיהוָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ:  
לְאֵלֶיךָ אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי־גָאֹה גָאֹה כּוֹס וַיִּרְבְּבוּ רַגְלֵהּ בְּהִים:

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

The sages, quoted by Rashi, offer a fascinating insight:

סנהדרין צא, ב: תניא אמר רבי מאיר מניין לתחיית המתים מן התורה שנאמר (שמות טו, א) אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת לה', שר לא נאמר אלא ישיר מכאן לתחיית המתים מן התורה.

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

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

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

After the War

The following story happened on this very Shabbos, 80 years ago.[2]

One of the great rabbis of Pre-war Europe was Rabbi Aharon Rokeach (1880 – 1957), the fourth Rebbe of the Belz Chasidic dynasty (Belz is a city in Galicia, Poland.) He led the movement from 1926 until his death in 1957.

Known for his piety and saintliness, Reb Aharon of Belz was called the "Wonder Rabbi" by Jews and gentiles alike for the miracles he performed. He barely ate or slept. He was made of "spiritual stuff." (The Lubavitcher Rebbe once visited him in Berlin, and described him as "tzurah bli chomer," energy without matter.)

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

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

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

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

#### The First Shabbos

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

During the Shabbos, he held a "tisch," a formal Chassidic gathering, in which Chassidim sing, dance, and share words of inspiration and Torah. The Belzer Rebbe quickly realized that the Holocaust survivors present, who had endured

indescribable suffering and had lost virtually everything they had, were in no mood of singing. The Rebbe decided to address himself and his few broken Chassidim who had survived.

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

He gave this chilling answer. When the Jewish people sang the Song of the Sea, much of the nation was not present. How many people did not survive the enslavement of Egypt? How many Jewish children were drowned in the Nile? How many Jews never lived to see the day of the Exodus? How many refused to embark on a journey into the unknown?

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

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

#### Future and Past

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

With this, the Belzer Rebbe inspired his students to begin singing yet again as they arrived at the soil of the Holy Land, on Shabbos Beshalach 1944, 80 years ago.

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

#### Sunrise

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

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

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

And the singing can begin now. We will see Moshiach very very soon -- may it be NOW!

[1] Exodus 14:15. [2] The story is recorded in the book “B’kdushaso Shel Aaron,” page 436. [3] Mechilta and Rashi Exodus 13:2

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<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/a-wise-heart/2024/01/25/>

### **A Wise Heart**

**By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser** - 15 Shevat 5784 – January 25, 2024 0

“Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him ...” (Shemos 13:19) The Talmud (Sotah 13a) notes: How beloved were the mitzvot to Moshe Rabbeinu. At the time that all the Jewish people were involved in taking the spoils from Egypt, Moshe was involved in the performance of mitzvot, as it says (Mishlei 10:8), “The wise heart will take mitzvot.”

Moshe Rabbeinu was occupied with bringing up the bones of Yosef from the Nile. He was only doing that one mitzvah.

Why do we refer to Moshe performing many mitzvot?

R’ Yosef of Salant explains that the words “chacham lev – a wise heart” imply a superior wisdom in being able to see the future, as the Talmud (Tamid 32a) states, “Who is wise? One who can foresee the consequences of his actions.” What was Moshe Rabbeinu able to anticipate?

The Medrash tells us that when the sea saw the bier containing Yosef’s bones “it fled.” The Red Sea split allowing the Jewish nation to walk on dry land, which strengthened their emunah in Hashem. It also sanctified the Name of Hashem throughout the world. A wise heart perceives the domino effect from one good deed that leads to many mitzvot.

The Medrash Devarim Rabbah concludes that Hashem told Moshe that not only was his attention to the bones of Yosef a very meaningful kindness in and of itself, he had also performed a significant act of kindness with all of the Jewish people by virtue of all the good that followed, i.e. the sea split and the emunah of the Jewish people in Hashem and Moshe was reinforced.

The Be’er Yosef relates that for many years when Yerushalayim was not under the control of Israel, many of the burial sites and matzeivos on Har HaZeisim were destroyed by the enemies. Bones were disinterred and lay about on the

ground, which the Chevra Kadisha of Yerushalayim tried valiantly to retrieve and properly re-inter. One erev Rosh Chodesh Adar in 5728, the Chevra Kaddisha proclaimed an official day for gathering the bones. Thousands of people came to appropriately honor these bones that had been profaned by the enemy, which they collected and reburied.

Among the words of hesped that day, the Talmud in Makkos (23b) was introduced. R’ Samlai taught that 613 mitzvot were stated to Moshe, consisting of 365 prohibitions corresponding to the number of days in the solar year, and 248 positive commandments corresponding to the number of limbs that a person has.

R’ Chaim Vital writes in Shaarei Kedusha that the spiritual nourishment of the soul is derived through the fulfillment of the entire Torah. Each one of the 248 limbs draws its sustenance from the specific mitzvah that is relative to that limb. When an individual lacks in the performance of a distinct mitzvah, then the corresponding limb will be lacking its nourishment and can weaken.

We say in our tefillos “kadsheinu b’mitzvosecha – sanctify us with Your mitzvot,” for with every mitzvah that a person does he adds holiness to himself, and particularly to that limb that corresponds to the mitzvah. The speaker expounded that although the bones that had been collected appear like lifeless dry bones, they were in fact filled with the essence of hundreds of thousands of mitzvot that had been performed in their lifetime. This is as it says in Tehillim (35:10), “All my limbs will declare: Hashem, who is like You?”

Thus, the words of Mishlei, “The wise heart will take mitzvot,” can be understood that all of Bnei Yisrael were involved in taking the spoils of Mitzrayim but Moshe Rabbeinu, by ensuring the proper burial of Yosef’s bones, was “taking the mitzvot” that Yosef HaTzaddik had accrued in his lifetime.

A poor couple came to the Belzer Rebbe. Their son had been declining spiritually for a long time, and now he wanted to marry the non-Jewish daughter of a wealthy man.

The Rebbe asked, “You have not thrown him out of the house, have you?”

The couple said that, as the Rebbe had instructed, the boy remained in their home, and they still maintained a good relationship with him.

“I am glad to hear it,” said the Belzer Rebbe. “Please convince him to come see me.”

“He will never agree to come,” they said, “because he knows you will try to dissuade him from marrying the girl.”

“I will not do that,” promised the Rebbe. “Please just get him to come in to see me.”

When their son came home that night, the mother told him that they had gone to see the Belzer Rebbe.

The boy said, “He will not convince me not to marry this girl.”

“We told him that,” said the mother, “but he requested that he would still like to see you.”

The young man was conflicted. Since he did not observe any of the mitzvot, he really didn’t want to see the Rebbe. On the other hand, he did have some warm childhood feelings and respect for the Rebbe. After some thought, he agreed to see the Rebbe alone.

He put on a yarmulke before going into the Rebbe, and the Rebbe greeted him warmly. “I hear that you are planning to get married,” he said.

The young man nodded.

“There are dangerous people in the world today,” said the Rebbe, “and one day you may find yourself in a precarious situation. Can you do me a favor?” he asked.

“Perhaps,” said the young man.

The Rebbe took out a pair of tzitzis from his drawer. He then requested the young man to wear them, and begged him not to remove the tzitzis under any circumstances.

The young man hesitated for a minute, and then stretched out his hand for the tzitzis. He promised to wear the tzitzis, and – as he left the room – the Belzer Rebbe closed his eyes and recited a heartfelt prayer.

The day of the wedding was a week later. The groom wore his tzitzis, and outwardly he looked like everyone else at the wedding, but within he was enveloped with the signet ring of Hashem. As the celebration continued, it became very warm in the hall. Many of the participants began to get drunk and began to remove their jackets and shirts. Finally, the groom himself found himself perspiring heavily and removed his shirt as well. Suddenly everyone came to a standstill. The music stopped playing, and not a sound could be heard. Everyone was staring at the groom wearing tzitzis, until one by one the jeering started. “Those are the fringes the Jews wear.” “He’s a Jew.” “He’s a demon!” The drunk men began roughing him up. Fearful for his life, the groom removed the tzitzis and ran home to his family. The door was unlocked; he had finally come home. Over the next months the young man slowly progressed in his return to Yiddishkeit. The precious mitzvah of tzitzis had saved him!

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, a prominent rav and Torah personality, is a daily radio commentator who has authored over a dozen books, and a renowned speaker recognized for his exceptional ability to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

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<https://jewishlink.news/did-we-cross-the-yam-suf/>

## **Did We Cross the Yam Suf?**

**By Rabbi Dov Kramer**

January 25, 2024

A simple understanding of the crossing of the Yam Suf would be that this body of water was in between Egypt and Eretz Yisroel (and/or Mt. Sinai), and had to be crossed — from one

side to the other side — in order to get from one to the other. (That the Yam Suf is the Red Sea is indisputable, even if some try to suggest otherwise. Suffice it to say that the Yam Suf is given as an eastern boundary of Eretz Yisroel (Shemos 23:31; see Melachim I 9:26 and Rashi on Shemos 10:19), referring to the eastern fork of the Red Sea, i.e. the Gulf of Aqaba. We crossed the Gulf of Suez (the western fork), as evidenced by our coming out in *מדבר שור* (Shemos 15:22), which “faces Egypt” (Bereishis 25:18), southwest of Eretz Yisroel.) Several Rishonim (early commentators) are of the opinion that we never crossed the Yam Suf from end to end, but came out on the same side we entered, traveling in a semicircle (or three sides of a rectangle). And there were valid reasons why they thought so.

The Talmud (Arachin 15a) says that the Children of Israel were concerned that just as they had emerged from the sea on this side, the Egyptians had emerged (alive) on the other side, and could continue to chase them. Tosfos asks why they were concerned, since the Egyptians were stuck on the other side! Did they think God would perform a miracle for the Egyptians too, so that they could cross the sea? Additionally, several stops after crossing the sea, the Children of Israel were back at the Yam Suf (Bamidbar 33:10). Why did they go back to the sea they had just crossed?

To answer these questions, Tosfos suggests that the Yam Suf was south of both Eretz Yisroel and Egypt (and not between the two), and went from the west (near Egypt) to the east (south of Edom and Moav). The Children of Israel entered the sea on its northern side (near Egypt) and emerged on the same side farther east. They were concerned that the Egyptians had emerged elsewhere on the northern side of the sea, so could still chase them. As they traveled farther east — parallel to the sea on its northern side — they ended up on the coast once again. (Tosfos actually includes a map. However, the map is not the same in all editions of the Talmud; even the same publishers have “updated” the map over the years.)

Ibn Ezra (Shemos 14:17), Chizkuni (Shemos 14:22) and Radak (Tehillim 136:13, see also Shoftim 11:16), point out that we were in *מדבר אהם* before we crossed the sea (Shemos 13:20 and Bamidbar 33:6) and after we crossed it (Bamidbar 33:8; please note that *מדבר אהם* and *מדבר שור* are one and the same, see Ibn Ezra on Shemos 15:22). How could we have been in the same desert both before and after crossing the sea? Well, if we entered and exited on the same side, this is not an issue.

(We can add Rambam (Avos 5:4) to the list of Rishonim who say we crossed the Yam Suf in a semicircle rather than from end to end, but keep in mind that he wrote his commentary on the Mishna earlier in his life, before he moved to Israel and then Egypt, so might have changed his mind.)

Despite these strong arguments, because we now know that the Yam Suf surrounds the Sinai Peninsula, there’s no need to say we didn’t cross it. [Bear in mind that G-d instructed us to make



an about face (Shemos 14:2), going back to where we had previously been, in order to trick Pharaoh (14:3).] Our route can now be explained very simply: we traveled east past the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez (between the gulf and the Great Bitter Lake) into מדבר אהם before turning around, traveling west back to the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez (or beyond it), where we became “trapped” between the Egyptians and the Yam Suf. After crossing the sea — back to the eastern bank of the Gulf of Suez — we were in מדבר אהם once again, but concerned that the Egyptians may have emerged where they had entered and could still chase us by traveling north of the gulf (as we had previously done). As far as why we were back at the Yam Suf a few stops later, we traveled south along the eastern coast of the Gulf of Suez to get to Mt. Sinai, which is in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula, or — for those who think Mt. Sinai is in Saudi Arabia — traveled across the Sinai Peninsula to the Gulf of Aqaba before moving past it. You may have noticed that I suggested we return to the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez, rather than to the western side of the gulf; allow me to explain why. We were camped by Pi Hachiros before entering the sea (Bamidbar 33:8), called “Pi Hachiros” because it was the gateway to freedom for those trying to escape from Egypt (Midrash Lekach Tov and Midrash Seichel Tov). It makes more sense for this “gateway to freedom” to be north of the gulf; if it was on its western bank, one would still need to go around the northern tip before being free. (It would also explain why the deity located there was called “Baal Tz’fon” — the Baal (deity) of the north — as it was near the northernmost part of the gulf.) Since we were camped “before Pi Hachiros,” we would have been on the shore of the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez, and crossed the sea from the north to the east (diagonally, moving southeast), emerging back at מדבר אהם. Please note, though, that even if we went back to the western bank of the Gulf of Suez, the issues raised by the Rishonim have still been fully addressed, and we could have crossed the Yam Suf from one side to the other side.

Rabbi Dov Kramer is convinced that Midbar Shur is referred to as the desert of Eisam in order to highlight the fact that we were on the eastern side of the Gulf of Suez both before we crossed the Yam Suf and after we crossed it.

### **The Enduring Gifts of Our Fallen, Hy"d by Jonathan Rosenblum**

Mishpacha Magazine

The pride I feel in being part of a very special people has only grown and grown since October 7

Two longtime chavrusas, Yakir Hexter and David Schwartz Hashem yinkom damam, learned together and died together. The loss of any Jewish life is a loss for all of us. That is not just a platitude to which we give lip service, but a feeling that we should live with. Indeed, part of the impetus for my

recently published collection, Ordinary Greatness, was to bring that point home.

But if that is true for every Jewish life lost, how much more so when that life was lost defending us from threat. As the late Mirrer rosh yeshivah Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz famously said in a shmues during wartime, "Anyone who does not feel hakaras hatov to Israeli soldiers has no place in this beis medrash."

That is why for the last three months I have forced myself to begin the morning by looking at the photos of the IDF soldiers whose deaths were announced since the previous day. I think that every Jew in the world should be doing the same, not just those of us who live in Israel.

Admittedly, I have a strong bias for Jewish faces, and those killed in combat strike me as uniformly handsome. But what stands out more than the physical beauty is the seriousness and depth one sees in their faces — reminiscent of photos on the walls of Acco Prison of the young Irgun members executed by the British.

Nearly 50 percent of the casualties to date are religious soldiers, many of them reservists with wives and children. On a recent segment of the Halacha Headlines radio show, Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, rav of Gush Etzion, rosh yeshivah of Machon Lev, and the author of numerous halachic seforim, used the sh'eilos asked of him by soldiers in combat to convey his own awe at the quality of those serving in the IDF. One soldier asked whether he could charge his cell phone in a Palestinian home — i.e., whether the home's electricity is permitted shalal (booty). Another group of soldiers wondered about lighting Chanukah candles when doing so might alert Hamas forces to their location.

Not all the halachic queries came from the soldiers themselves. The wife of one of the fighters, who was still childless after a number of years of marriage, asked Rabbi Rimon whether she could inform her husband of a positive pregnancy test. Her question was based upon a Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 7:15) stating that a soldier in a commanded war should not distract himself with thoughts of his wife or children.

These soldiers were not just religious, but serious lomdei Torah. Rabbi Ari Wasserman, the host of the aforementioned Halacha Headlines show, read an email from one soldier in which he described how his unit was about to make a siyum on Megillah. Another asked whether he could be maavir sedra with Targum a week early, in case he was in combat the entire following week and had no opportunity.

Reb Ari, who is a close friend and once-a-week chavrusa, dedicated one week's show to two longtime chavrusas from Yeshivat Har Tzion, Reb Yakir Hexter and Reb David Schwartz, who were killed together earlier in the week. They were friends from high school, through yeshivah, army, and officer training.

My friend Rabbi Moshe Taragin, a ram at the yeshivah, eulogized them in the Jerusalem Post last Friday. Yakir Hexter,

he wrote, was at once immensely driven, holding himself to the extremely high standards of Mesillas Yesharim, and tolerant of those who couldn't or wouldn't meet his exacting standards. David Schwartz, despite being raised in the national-religious world and institutions, was drawn to chassidus, to rebbes and tishen, and prevailed upon Rabbi Taragin to give a weekly shiur in chassidus.

Yakir was the son of Reb Ari's very-early-morning chavrusa of more than a decade. Just a few days earlier, Reb Ari had met Yakir at a chasunah and asked him whether he was nervous. He replied that he was not, as they were doing what had to be done.

At the Hexter family shivah house, which I went to together with Rabbi Wasserman, I listened as Yakir's father describe his son's eagerness to help others and his unusual sensitivity.

Yakir always wore a suit and tie for Shabbos, a notable departure from the normal Shabbos attire at his yeshivah. The only exception was when his father — himself an alumnus of Yeshivat Har Tzion — came for a parents' shabbaton. Yakir knew that his father (and chavrusa for learning Mesillas Yesharim) would not be wearing a tie, so he did not either.

THE PRIDE I FEEL in being part of a very special people has only grown and grown since October 7, and I would guess that feeling is almost universal among identified Jews. Though I have focused until now primarily on religious Jews, that pride is not confined to them. Historian Michael Oren's description of Israeli society as the strongest and most resilient in the world, upon the hundredth day of the war, strikes me as true. What other country could continue to function with hundreds of thousands of citizens uprooted from their homes on the northern and southern borders indefinitely, and hundreds of thousands more reservists away from their families and jobs for that entire time? One hundred percent of reservists answered their call-up notices, including tens of thousands who returned immediately from abroad. And in many units, 50 percent more than the number of those called up reported for duty, which they knew in advance would be dangerous and arduous.

The amount of private philanthropy and volunteerism needed to maintain some modicum of normalcy has been remarkable. One of my daughters-in-law shared with me yesterday the inspiration she had from preparing meals together with Mrs. Devorah Ebbing and Mrs. Laiky Lehrfeld, her neighbors from Ramat Beit Shemesh. Since just after Simchas Torah, their Mazon Campaign has been sending approximately 300 gourmet meals a week, made from whatever ingredients are on sale, to soldiers stationed on the northern and southern borders. Recently, their meals added to the joy of a siyum held by a unit in Gaza itself.

For the numerous volunteers who do the shopping and make the meals (including special vegan ones upon request), for the neighborhood children who pack the special containers that

ensure the meals arrive still piping hot, and for the senior citizen who drives to the furthest borders to deliver them three times a week, "doing something good is their means of retaining some equilibrium." Their reward is the excitement of the soldiers who feel the love and support in each meal that replaces their usual army rations.

And I am describing only one of thousands such private initiatives around Israel.

I keep coming back to the nearly unfathomable emunah of the fallen and their families. David Schwartz had three handwritten messages, based on the words of Chazal or pesukim, above his bed so they would be the last things he saw at night before going to sleep: 1) Hakol bidei Shamayim; 2) Haboteiach b'Hashem chesed yisovevenu — One who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him (Tehillim 32:10); and 3) Ani b'chasdecha batachti — But as for me, I trust in Your kindness (Tehillim 13:6).

That is typical of the way emunah and bitachon are constant subjects in the Hesder yeshivot. On an overnight stay in Mitzpeh Rimon last winter, I davened Shacharis in the local Hesder yeshivah. One thing that struck me was that the private bookshelves on each desk were uniformly filled with sifrei hashkafah, both contemporary and the classics.

By now, I presume most readers have viewed at least once the six-minute clip of Hadas Lowenstern speaking of her late husband, Rabbi Elisha Lowenstern, who was killed when his tank was hit while trying to rescue wounded soldiers. Not once in the video does a smile leave her face, as she talks about her 13 years together with "the love of my life" and their six children, ranging in age from ten months to 12. She chooses to speak more about her husband's learning sederim, Rambam yomis, translating Gemara into English, Mishnayos, his morning run before the haneitz minyan, than about the circumstances of his death.

"To me, his death is beside the point," she says. "He only died once, but I can speak about his life. I'm alive. Our six kids are alive. And this is our plan. We plan on living such a wonderful life that our enemies could never imagine. We will live here in Eretz Yisrael; we will study Torah; we will perform mitzvos. We will be a happy Jewish family. And this is true victory, in my eyes at least."

She is filled with her consciousness of herself as part of the Jewish People, and relates how she is strengthened by her awareness "of all those davening for us, not speaking lashon hara for us," and how all Jews will rejoice together in Jerusalem with the coming of Mashiach.

Professor Joshua Berman describes, in a blog post at Times of Israel, a new Israeli ritual of reading at the shivah for fallen soldiers the letters they left behind only to be opened in case they did not return from combat. I first became aware of this phenomenon during the 2014 Operation Pillar of Fire. At the time, I was astounded how even seemingly secular soldiers

wrote of their joy in having fallen while protecting the Jewish People, with the Jewish People preceding even loved ones and the homeland.

What takes away the breath from the letters quoted by Professor Berman is the calm, even happiness, with which the soldiers contemplate their own deaths, which are no abstraction as they head into battle. Some are only on the cusp of adulthood, not yet having been zocheh to marriage and children, and others already in their mid-forties and fathers of large families, like Rabbi Yossi HersHKovitz, a prominent national-religious educator in Jerusalem.

The best-known such letter for English-speakers is likely that of Binyamin Sussman, as there is a clip of his parents and grandmother reading the letter aloud. On the eve of his death, he wrote, "No one is more content right now than I am. I am about to fulfill my life dream... to defend our beautiful land and the people of Israel." On multiple occasions, he adjured his parents that if he were to be captured, they should not permit him to be exchanged for a single terrorist.

"I don't regret for a second that I chose to serve in a combat unit," Itai Yehudah wrote his parents. "This is the best thing I ever did."

Captain Liron Snir's last words to his loved ones were, "I'm happy about the life I lived, what I did, what I was, on behalf of my people."

Shai Aroussi assured his parents that his life was "not a waste" and his death "entirely worth it," because he was doing what he had always wanted to do since he was a little boy: "saving people and protecting the country."

High school principal Rabbi Yossi HersHKovitz thanked his parents for "show[ing] me a path through life where the question is not 'what do I have coming to me,' but how at every moment I can give more for the people and for the country."

THE MORE THE JEWS of Israel have learned about themselves and each other over the past three months, the closer and more united they have become. I'm haunted by the clip of a soldier in a wheelchair, with his leg amputated, and after three months lying in hospital, nevertheless saying, "We sacrificed for one thing — to see Am Yisrael united and going on kiddush Hashem." If there is one lesson from the time of Moshe Rabbeinu, "it is that if we are not united, there is no hope." And if this war was the means of bringing about unity, he says, "it was worth losing my leg."

Eldad Yaniv, one of the leaders of the demonstrations against judicial reform, spoke for many: "I was in Tel Aviv, in my milieu, and I didn't know these people [the national-religious]. You listen to an interview with this amazing woman [perhaps Hadas Lowenstern]; you speak to the families of the fallen; you read the letters of the soldiers, and you think, 'Such a great part of our nation I didn't know.'

"And I'm happy to know them now. I'm moved by knowing them. And I'm klopping Al Cheit on the fact that I did not know them until now."

May none of us ever have to klop Al Cheit again over the fact that we did not know or appreciate the greatness of our fellow Jews.

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<https://jewishlink.news/beshalach-united-by-action-not-words/>

## **Beshalach: United by Action, Not Words**

**By Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

January 25, 2024

One word is on everyone's mind. During the past year, Israeli society was plagued by corrosive social rifts and vitriolic political disagreements. October 7 changed everything, and the ensuing war left us little choice but to unite in defense of our lives. Unity has been involuntarily thrust upon us. The atmosphere of unity in Israel has suffused across the Jewish world. The entire Jewish nation, across many continents and across all denominations, has banded together to defend our people and its homeland. The word "achdut," or unity, has become a motto: yachad ninatzeiach (together we will triumph).

We have all considered the pressing question: what will the "day after" look like in Gaza? What political arrangement in Gaza can provide Palestinian stability without threatening Israel. A different, but equally important version of this question is: what will the "day after" look like within our society? Will we revert back to division and discord or will we preserve our current condition of unity. We are all in search of a magic solution to preserve our resuscitated national solidarity.

Typically, we articulate unity in broad ideological terms. We envision ways to bridge the differences between ourselves and those who possess different religious or political views. By celebrating the common ideas or values which unite us, rather than accentuating the values which divide us, we coexist with people whose lifestyles differ from our own. We bridge ideological chasms by stressing shared values and common narratives.

Unlike ideological achdut which is achieved through common ideas, a more powerful version of unity, which can be termed "social achdut" is achieved by common experiences. We are deeply interconnected when we step outside our social standings and professional titles and perform common ordinary tasks. Action is always more compelling than thinking. Acting together yields deeper solidarity than merely thinking about common values.

Moshe the Pallbearer

Parshat Beshalach portrays the triumphant liberation of our people from Egyptian persecution. After two centuries of humiliation and dehumanization, we victoriously marched out of Egypt with our eyes set upon the promised land. Leaving in

breakneck speed, we furiously darted around Egypt, organizing our families and livestock for the journey. It was a chaotic scene, with little time to remember an ancient promise to a long-forgotten grandfather. Everyone was far too busy to extract Yosef's remains from his Egyptian crypt. On this day of mayhem, no one had the time or presence of mind for this chore. No one, except Moshe Rabbeinu, arguably, the busiest man on Earth. Preoccupied with an entire nation, Moshe still found the time to personally excavate Yosef's coffin from Egypt. More impressively, during the entire forty-year desert trek, Moshe never delegated this menial task to others, but instead, kept the coffin in his constant presence. He didn't view this assignment as beneath his dignity or unfit for his lofty station. This man, who humbled a tyrant, split the seas, and scaled the heavens, didn't regard towing a coffin as undignified.

Moshe Rabbeinu refused to erect social barriers between himself and the common people. By performing common and ordinary duties, he experienced social unity, not allowing himself to be locked into a specific profile based upon his professional standing. Unlike the bones of Yosef, Moshe refused to be put into a box.

#### War Is a Leveler

Over the past few months, the war in Israel has helped us step outside our own boxes and, through common experience, achieve social unity. Our soldiers are fighting side-by-side, regardless of socio-economic status or professional occupation. War is a great leveler as everyone, regardless of social status or rank, performs the exact same tasks and missions. Previous status in civilian life doesn't affect wartime assignments. Students are fighting alongside lawyers, while hi-tech entrepreneurs are sitting in tanks next to farmers and fishermen. IT specialists next to factory managers. New fathers next to grandfathers. Newly married husbands next to grizzled war veterans. In the battlefield, everyone is equal.

A middle-aged rabbinic colleague of mine (name withheld for privacy reasons) is a brilliant Talmudic scholar, as well as a revered community rabbi in Israel. He was drafted into a reserve tank unit and has spent the past 100 days in active combat. During this period, in his spare time, he published an advanced Torah essay in memory of a student who was killed in battle. During those 100 days he was an ordinary soldier, no different from the younger or less educated members of his unit.

This week, his entire platoon was released, and he received the award of "ot hitztaynut pelugatit" honoring him for being the most diligent and hardworking soldier of the entire 50-member platoon. I am inspired that someone of his caliber didn't allow his professional profile to stand in the way of working hard, alongside many younger soldiers. This is just one of many examples of how war has erased the social and professional boxes which often define us and limit us.

#### Taxi Drivers

This home front or the "oref" has also leveled us. We have been pressed into emergency service, stepping outside our typical comfort zones to perform tasks and errands which were never part of our normal routines. Over the past few months, in addition to being a rabbi and teacher, I have become a taxi driver, food deliverer, babysitter and stand-in parent for my grandchildren, whose own parents have been drafted. We have tried not to let our titles and social standing impede our wartime assistance. No tasks are too high or too low.

One vivid story perfectly captures this home front unity.

During the war, out of security concerns, the yeshiva's Arab kitchen staff was barred entry. Facing this manpower shortage, students volunteered for kitchen detail. A month ago, on a day that no students were available, our executive director volunteered for kitchen duty. To everyone's astonishment, he was quickly joined by Rav Meidan, our 73-year-old rosh yeshiva, who himself was preoccupied both with yeshiva obligations, as well as with dealing with his own son's serious battlefield injuries. For Rav Meidan, washing dirty dishes was never viewed as beneath his dignity or unfit for his title.

True leadership does not mean influencing others through loud announcements or through popular social media posts. True leaders set quiet examples of self-sacrifice as they role-model core values of life. Watching the rosh yeshiva donning an apron, I immediately thought of Moshe hauling a coffin out of Egypt. Nobility has little to do with the wallet or with clothing. True nobility lies in our spirit, and can surface while performing any task, high or low, honorable or menial. Life on the battlefield, as well as on the home front has helped us step out of our narrow profiles, allowing us to share common tasks and common experiences. I feel more unified with my people when we all perform the exact same tasks and chores, regardless of any professional profile or social standing. It is refreshing to be ordinary and to be common. I feel this unity more viscerally and more authentically than ideological unity, which is built upon common values and our ideals. Experience is always more powerful than ideas. Unity of experience will always be more powerful than unity of ideas.

Experiencing social unity, I don't just respect other people's opinions, but I act as they act. They act as I act. In this, we are one.

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from: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>

date: Jan 25, 2024, 7:00 PM

**Tidbits - Klal Gavoah in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz Z"L**

Shabbos Parashas Beshalach is often referred to as Shabbos Shirah, as the Parashah contains the Shiras HaYam (Az Yashir etc.). In many shuls, the pesukim of the Shirah that contain Hashem's name are read with a special tune. Some have the custom to stand during this leining. In some congregations, the Shiras HaYam at the end of Pesukei d'Zimra is read aloud verse by verse.

There is a minhag to put out food for birds (according to many Poskim this may not be done on Shabbos itself). One reason for this is based on a tradition that birds sang Shiras HaYam along with the B'nei Yisrael. Another explanation is that the birds consumed the mahn that Dasan and Aviram left to be found on Shabbos in their attempt to embarrass Moshe.

This is the fourth week of Shovavim (TaT).

As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim or performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael 'in travail and captivity'.

Daf Yomi - Friday: Bavli: Bava Kamma 85 • Yerushalmi: Terumos 24 • Mishnah Yomis: Kesubos 7:4-5 • Oraysa: Next week is Yoma 56b-58b.

“זֶה קִלִּי וְאֶנְהוּ” “This is my G-d and I will exalt Him” (Shemos 15:2)

Rashi states that during Kerias Yam Suf there was a remarkable revelation of Hashem, and every Jew was able to sense His presence, point a finger and say “this is my G-d.” Rashi continues that at this moment even a simple maidservant saw what Yechezkel Hanavi, one of the greatest nevi'im, did not merit to witness in his spiritual revelation of the Maaseh Merkava. One may question that the revelation at the Maaseh Merkava was an indescribable event in a spiritual realm. How can this be compared to the physical phenomenon of the Splitting of the Sea?

Rav Yeruchem Levovitz zt"l (Daas Torah) explains that miracles do not occur merely to facilitate salvation but are a revelation of Hashem in this world. The revelation to Yechezkel of the Maaseh HaMerkava was an actual revelation of Hashem's Presence and His spiritual omnipresence. Nevertheless, the revelation at the splitting of the sea was so strong that Hashem's presence was just as obvious.

It is perhaps for this reason that during Kerias Hatorah of the Shiras HaYam, only the verses containing the name of Hashem are sung with a special niggun, as the recognition of Hashem is the ultimate purpose of this event. Often, stories and instances of hashgacha pratis (divine providence) engender feelings of amazement and awe. These instances should be recognized as a revelation of Hashem giving us a glimpse of His Presence in our lives, to further enhance our emunah and bitachon.

<https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/wearing-a-smartwatch-on-shabbat/>  
**Wearing a Smartwatch on Shabbat**

**Rabbi Ike Sultan - January 20, 2019**

A. The Question

One of the new gadgets that has become popular over the last few years is the smartwatch; a popular brand at the forefront of the industry is the Fitbit. At first, the Fitbit watch was a fancy pedometer designed to count a person's steps, number of floors climbed, heart rate, pulse, and sleep cycle. Nowadays, though, the newer smartwatches include features that replicate the smartphone, such as a phone, bluetooth, voice recognition, text messaging, email, internet, and more. What is the status of the Fitbit with regard to possible use on Shabbat? Modern poskim agree that using communication features such as phone calls, text messages, and email are forbidden.[1] They also agree that using the ambient display feature, which uses a proximity sensor to turn on or brighten the dim screen when it is being looked at or used, is also forbidden, unless the display is set to stay on (which might drain the battery). But assuming the communication and notification features are turned off and the screen is set to remain on, may one wear a smartwatch on Shabbat and utilize its health monitoring features? This article will begin by introducing generally the prohibition of using electricity on Shabbat, addressing the question of modifying the amplitude of a current on Shabbat, and exploring the responsibility a person has for actions that unintentionally cause a violation of Shabbat. Building upon those principles, the article then discusses the permissibility of the smartwatch on Shabbat.

B. Electricity on Shabbat

Why is closing an electrical circuit forbidden on Shabbat in the first place? Famously, the Hazon Ish (O.H. 50:9) asserts that completing a circuit is a Biblical prohibition of boneh, constructing, and makeh be-patish, completing a vessel. Boneh is violated when one constructs a permanent structure, such as hammering a few boards of wood together to create a cabinet. Makeh be-patish is violated by performing the finishing step in the completion of a vessel or article; for example, smoothing the sides of a stone after it was chiseled out of the ground is makeh be-patish. The Hazon Ish holds that when one completes a circuit, in effect he/she is doing boneh by making a structure that could last forever; this act of completion can also be considered makeh be-patish. Most poskim[2] disagree with the Hazon Ish and hold that electricity on Shabbat is only a rabbinic prohibition.

One notable contemporary posek who thinks that completing an electric circuit is a Biblical violation of makeh be-patish is Rav Asher Weiss (Minhat Asher 1:30). His explanation is not that closing a circuit fits the standard definition of makeh be-patish as laid out by the rishonim, but rather that makeh be-patish is the catch-all for any action which is clearly a melakhah, a prohibited act on Shabbat, despite not fitting any category.

On the other hand, many poskim hold that completing a circuit is only a rabbinic violation of makeh be-patish. Rav Hershel Schachter[3] explains that completing a circuit is similar to the case of Ketubot 60a, which says that a clogged pipe can be fixed for the purposes of promoting kevod ha-beriyot, human dignity. A clogged pipe is not broken, but simply is not functioning and must be fixed. Fixing it is therefore an act which would only be rabbinically categorized as makeh be-patish, (which is why there is greater latitude for leniency in the case of kevod ha-beriyot). Similarly, rewinding a watch on Shabbat is characterized by the Tiferet Yisrael (Kalkelet ha-Shabbat, no. 38) as rabbinic makeh be-patish, since the watch was always a utensil though it was temporarily nonfunctional.

Others explain the prohibition of closing an electrical circuit differently. In the late nineteenth century, Rabbi Yitzhak Shmelkes of Lemberg (Beit Yitzhak, Y.D. 2:31) wrote that completing an electric circuit is a violation of the rabbinic prohibition of molid. Molid is a rabbinic restriction on creating something that appears to be a new creation. For example, Hazal forbade infusing a nice smell in a garment by placing it over incense since doing so “creates” a new feature in the garment. Similarly, closing a circuit introduces a current into that circuit, thereby giving the impression of a new creation within that wire. Although Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minhat Shlomo 1:9) suggests that perhaps we cannot add to the category of molid as was established by Hazal, he takes the opinion of Rabbi Shmelkes into account and concludes that closing a circuit is a rabbinic prohibition.[4]

In summary, all poskim agree that closing a circuit on Shabbat is forbidden, though opinions differ as to whether it is a Biblical or rabbinic prohibition. Rav Asher Weiss commented that since there is a unanimous conclusion of the gedolim, it is as though a heavenly voice declared in the beit midrash of the previous generation that using electricity on Shabbat is forbidden.

#### C. Changing a Current

According to the Hazon Ish, changing the amplitude of the current in a circuit is also forbidden, potentially even on a Biblical level (as understood by Rav Elyashiv; *Kedushat ha-Shabbat* 7:7, p. 23). Increasing or decreasing the current in a circuit makes the electric device useful and, so to speak, imbues it with life, therefore violating the Biblical prohibition of *makeh be-patish*. Rav Asher Weiss (*Minhat Asher* 1:31) seems to concur that it is a Biblical prohibition even to increase a current.

However, according to Rav Shmelkes and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, there is no technical issue with changing the amount of energy in a circuit. Closing a circuit is forbidden only when it introduces a new feature in the wire; increasing what the wire previously had, however, is not *molid*. An analogous case in the *Maharil* (*Dinei Etrog*, no. 15) may serve as a precedent: He explained that if a person took an etrog out of a wool cloth on Yom Tov, he can return it to the wool on Yom Tov even though the wool will become scented because of its contact with the etrog, since the wool was already scented beforehand. It is only *molid* to introduce a smell, not to increase the potency of a preexistent one.<sup>[5]</sup>

Nonetheless, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach cautions that altering an electric current could be forbidden if the ramifications of that change are inappropriate for Shabbat. For example, it is forbidden to speak into a telephone that is already off the hook or a microphone that was turned on before Shabbat, or to turn up a radio that is already on. These actions, despite not creating any new electrical current, are all forbidden since they are inappropriate for a Shabbat atmosphere. He compares it to the prohibition of leaving one's watermill running on Shabbat even though it was set up beforehand. Shabbat 18a forbids doing so since the mill's loud noise is in and of itself a *zilzul* Shabbat, a desecration of Shabbat.<sup>[6]</sup> Yet, Rav Shlomo Zalman (cited by *Sha'arim Metzuyim be-Halachah* v. 2 p. 137 80:39:5) held that using and even adjusting a hearing aid on Shabbat is permitted and considered to be within the spirit of Shabbat since only the person who is wearing the hearing aid can hear the noises produced by the appliance. To clarify, according to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, from the perspective of *melakhah* there is no problem with using a microphone, phone, or radio that is already on; they are prohibited only because of *zilzul* Shabbat.

Interestingly, Rav Schachter—who holds that completing a circuit is a rabbinic violation of *makeh be-patish*—nonetheless agrees with Rav Shlomo Zalman that adjusting the voltage in a circuit is permitted, although for a different reason. *Makeh be-patish* is only violated when completing a utensil, whereas adjusting the voltage to make the appliance useful is considered using an already complete utensil.

To summarize, there are three approaches to electricity on Shabbat: one holds completing a circuit is a Biblical violation of *boneh* or *makeh be-patish*; another holds it is a rabbinic version of *makeh be-patish*; a third approach considers it to be the rabbinic prohibition of *molid*. The first approach would forbid changing the amplitude of an existent current, while the latter two approaches hold that the permissibility of a change in a current depends on the results it creates.

Turning to the smartwatch, although no circuits are noticeably being opened and closed, the inner workings of the silicon chip involve opening and closing circuits constantly. On the silicon chip inside the smartwatch, as is the case of a smartphone and computer, are thousands or millions of tiny transistors and circuits that are constantly being changed in order to enable different processes and apps. Some of the activities in the smartwatch are purely pre-programmed—such as checking for pulse every five seconds—as was the case in older health trackers. In such a case, although the computer chip is opening and closing circuits, since they run automatically they are not an issue for Shabbat, just like it is permitted to pre-program a timer before

Shabbat. However, most of the health monitoring is dynamically personalized and respond to the wearer's activity. For example, during workouts, the Fitbit Alta switches from checking heart rate every five seconds to checking every one second. Another example are the sleep cycle alarm apps which wake up the wearer within a half hour window based on the wearer's depth of sleep. The functionality to change modes dynamically exists in practically every smartwatch app. Therefore, wearing a smartwatch that monitors a person's health on Shabbat more than just alters a current; it closes and opens circuits in response to the wearer's actions.<sup>[7]</sup>

#### D. Triggering an Electronic Sensor

One smartwatch feature is automatic sensors that adjust their functionality according to the need. For example, as mentioned above, when the wearer exercises, he/she triggers sensors which cause the watch to increase how often it checks his/her pulse. Can these sensors be used on Shabbat? More broadly, in the digital age, the cutting-edge questions of electricity on Shabbat are no longer of changing a current but often revolve around inevitable non-observable reactions. To illustrate and to shed light on our question about smartwatches we will use the analogy of security cameras. Because of their ubiquity it is nearly impossible to walk the streets of New York City today and not trigger some electric device or sensor, whether it be a security camera or automatic door.<sup>[8]</sup> Using the example of security cameras we can examine the *halakhot* regarding a person's responsibility for the inevitable consequences of their actions.

When a person walks in front of a house or store with surveillance cameras, their image appears on a digital screen and is recorded for a short period of time. According to many poskim,<sup>[9]</sup> having one's image appear on a screen is a violation of *kotev*, writing, since making the image appear is considered like drawing, which is a subcategory of writing. Nonetheless, most poskim, as will be outlined shortly, agree that it is still permitted to walk in an area that is monitored by security cameras, including the Kotel Plaza. There are two major approaches as to why this is permitted.

Rav Ovadia Yosef (*Yabia Omer* O.C. 9:35) explains that walking in front of a security camera is permitted because of the confluence of two factors: 1. Creating a temporary drawing is only rabbinic. 2. Since one does not intend to produce the drawing, it is considered a *pesik reisha de-lo niha leih*, where the prohibited consequence is unintended and non-beneficial. Generally, a case of *pesik reisha* occurs when one does a permitted act that is inevitably accompanied by a *melakhah*. The influential opinion of the *Arukh*, the Italian eleventh century lexicographer and Talmudist, is that *pesik reisha* is only forbidden if it is beneficial to a person; otherwise it is permitted. While *Tosafot* disagree with the opinion of *Arukh*, they do agree in certain cases where the gravity of the prohibition is only rabbinic. Therefore, Rav Yosef concludes that we can rely on those who permit a *pesik reisha de-lo niha leih* for a rabbinic prohibition to walk in front of a security camera on Shabbat. Many poskim, including Rav Elyashiv (*Or haShabbat* v. 25 p. 157) and Rav Mordechai Willig, accept this approach.

Fundamentally in line with this first approach, Rav Schachter adds a nuance to permit walking before a security camera if one does not intend to have one's picture drawn on the digital screen. Based on the *Avnei Nezer* O.C. 194, he explains that a *pesik reisha* is only forbidden if the result is physically connected to the actions one takes, but if the *melakhah* occurs in a disconnected, distant location it is permitted. For our discussion, both of the above explanations assume that a *melakhah* is taking place, but it is still permitted because it is unintentional and non-beneficial or distant.

In trailblazing a second approach, Rav Shmuel Wosner (*Shevet ha-Levi* 1:47, 3:41, 3:97, 9:68, and 9:69) holds that it is permitted to walk in front of a security camera since one is not adding any action or effort to cause the drawing on the camera. In fact, one is walking just as one would have walked had the camera been off or absent. When a person drags a heavy bench and the legs dig a furrow, part of his energy is spent transporting the bench, but some of his energy is expended upon digging the furrow with the bench. A *pesik reisha* is only forbidden if one does an action where some of his energy and efforts are spent on the forbidden *melakhah*. However, when

a person walks and is simultaneously being videoed, he expends no energy for the videoing to occur. The fact that his walking was the basis for the actions of another being or device is irrelevant to his own actions, and thus the melakhah is not understood to have taken place at all.

An interesting precedent can be drawn from Rashba (Responsa, 4:74) which would challenge Rav Vosner's approach. The Rashba was asked whether it was permitted to carry a silkworm on one's body on Shabbat if due to one's body heat it will continue to create silk, which it would not have done had it been situated elsewhere. He answered that putting the silkworm on one's body with the intention that it will create silk is considered a melakhah. Seemingly if a person did this unintentionally it would be considered a pesik reisha, even though the person wearing the silkworm did not expend any effort to have the worm function. Rav Vosner answered that the Rashba only said it was a melakhah since it was intentional, otherwise it would not be considered a melakhah or pesik reisha at all. In any event, it is noteworthy that a significant group of poskim do not follow Rav Vosner's approach.[10] Therefore, almost all poskim agree that it is permitted to walk in front of a security camera. Some permitted it based on the classical principles that focus on the fact that the melakhah was unintended and non-beneficial, and others based on the premise that it isn't considered melakhah at all. Both approaches agree that if a person's action cause a result that is not intentional and not beneficial it is permitted. They only disagree if it is not intentional but is slightly beneficial. The classical poskim are strict when it is beneficial since the leniency of pesik reisha de-lo niha leih is inapplicable. On the other hand, Rav Vosner is lenient even if there is a slight benefit because it is not considered a melakhah at all when one doesn't add any effort for the melakhah to occur.[11]

Now let's apply these principles to wearing a Fitbit which monitors one's health. According to the first approach there is no basis for leniency, since the Fitbit's monitoring is beneficial. As such, wearing it and thereby allowing it to compute and record bits of information is considered a pesik reisha and is forbidden. Based on the second approach, it is reasonable to argue that wearing a Fitbit which monitors one's health is permitted, since one did not have any specific intention for the sensors to monitor his actions, one did not expend any effort for that to occur, and the benefit is minimal and delayed.

#### E. Insignificant Digital Results:

The key part of the smartwatch is the digital chip on which computer operations are processed and results are recorded. If we are to answer the question whether one may wear a smartwatch on Shabbat, given that it will make digital recordings of his/her health, understanding the functionality of the digital chip is critical. To this effect, we will draw upon a parallel discussion about digital refrigerators.

Among the halakhically challenging and complex issues in contemporary technology is the digital refrigerator. These refrigerators have a computer chip that records the temperature, when and how long the door is open, and computes calculations regarding when a defrost is necessary. Although resolving the various questions involved with using such a refrigerator on Shabbat is beyond the scope of this article, there are two approaches with respect to the digital recordings of the computer chip that further our above analysis.

Many poskim, including Rav Shlomo Miller and Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky (cited by Or ha-Shabbat v. 27 p. 201), permit causing the computer chip to make these recordings. This is because one does not really care that they are recorded, as the refrigerator could just as well work on a periodic schedule of defrost (although with less energy efficiency). In technical terms, this adds up to a pesik reisha de-lo niha leih of a rabbinic restriction of using electricity, which results in it being permitted, as described in the previous section. This assumes that there is no prohibition of kotev in having the information recorded in a computer chip, since it is not considered writing in any intelligible language. Alternatively, if one assumes that the concern about recording is makeh be-patish, it could be permitted according to a position of the Maggid Mishnah (Hilkhos Shabbat 12:2) that it is only

possible to violate makeh be-patish while intentionally trying to create a utensil. An unintentional creation of a "utensil," as in our case, is not considered the creation of a "utensil" at all.

However, Rav Schachter takes issue with this approach and its consideration of these elements as unintentional or not to one's benefit. If the system is functioning properly one benefits from the efficient and intelligent design of its makers. Therefore, it is to be considered a pesik reisha de-niha leih, an unintended beneficial consequence, and is forbidden.

Yet, other poskim hold that this feature of the digital refrigerators is permitted since the results are unobservable and unintentional. Rav Heinemann (cited in Or ha-Shabbat ibid.) holds that a melakhah is defined by something which has a tangible result that can be perceived with one of the five senses. Since the results of the computer chip are unintentional and unobservable to any human being, they are completely insignificant halakhically and do not violate the prohibition of using electricity on Shabbat. Furthermore, if one assumes that the issue with electricity is makeh be-patish, it is permitted since the result of the actions is unobservable and thus halakhically inconsequential. In fact, that is also the opinion of Rav Asher Weiss (Minhat Asher 1:31). In a sense, this is reminiscent of Rav Vosner's approach to security cameras—that the electrical sensor reacting to one's actions is not considered one's halakhic responsibility at all.

To recap our analysis, for both the case of walking in front of a security camera and the case of the computer chip in digital refrigerators, we had two approaches as to why it is permitted; in each case, one position argued that triggering electronic sensors on Shabbat could be permitted if it is unintentional and one didn't do anything for the results to occur or they are unobservable and insignificant. This approach is important to consider for wearing a Fitbit on Shabbat.

#### F. Kinetic Watches

Before returning to smartwatches, let us consider the interesting halakhic query of self-charging kinetic watches. While the classic automatic watch winds itself by capturing the energy of the wearer's movements using a system of mechanical springs and gears, the newer kinetic watch uses the wearer's movements to recharge its electric battery. An automatic quartz also charges itself by movements but stores the energy in crystal oscillations. Can a person wear such a self-winding watch on Shabbat?

Regarding wearing automatic mechanical watches, Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 6:35) outlines numerous reasons to be lenient. Firstly, he points out that it is a dispute whether winding a watch that completely stopped on Shabbat is considered makeh be-patish Biblically or only rabbinically. The Hayyei Adam holds that winding it would be a Biblical violation of makeh be-patish, since that is the finishing touch which makes the watch functional. Many poskim including the Tiferet Yisrael disagree, since a stopped watch is only temporarily unusable, but is still a complete utensil. Winding it is considered its regular use rather than its completion. Nonetheless, the Tiferet Yisrael concedes that there is a rabbinic prohibition to wind a stopped watch. Yet, if the watch is still running, winding it to prevent it from breaking would be permitted. Accordingly, wearing a self-winding watch on Shabbat is permitted.

A final consideration upon which to base a lenient ruling is that winding the watch happens simultaneously with wearing it normally. The Ben Ish Hai claims that it is permitted to fix the permanent folds of one's turban while wearing it and it is not considered makeh be-patish. It is comparable to the permitted separating good from bad food immediately prior to eating. Rav Ovadia Yosef extrapolates based on this permissive position to allow wearing a self-winding watch, since the improvement of the watch is immediate. Although a similar argument is made by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited by Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah ch. 28 n. 57), this factor as well is subject to debate (c.f. Taz 340:2 and Hazon Ish O.C. 61). In any event, most poskim, including Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah, Rav Heinemann, and Rav Schachter, agree that it is permitted to wear a self-winding watch on Shabbat.

If we move from a mechanical to an electrical kinetic watch, other factors for leniency still apply: it is a *pesik reisha* of a rabbinic prohibition (if we assume using electricity is only a rabbinic concern), it might be abnormal, and it is winding while one is wearing it. Rabbi Yisrael Rozen and Rav Schachter take the position that it is permitted.

Based on the opinion of Rav Vosner regarding walking in front of security cameras and that of Rav Heinemann regarding the computer recordings in the digital refrigerators, we can suggest yet another reason to permit wearing an electrical kinetic watch. Just like a person walks without thinking about whether a security camera is observing him, so too a person walks without considering the swaying of his hand. As such, he is adding no effort to cause the charging of the watch and, according to Rav Vosner, the resultant charging is not his halakhic responsibility at all.

#### G. Smartwatches

Based on the above opinions outlined in our various modern day applications, we can suggest two main approaches for wearing a smartwatch that tracks a person's health on Shabbat. As mentioned, smartwatches today have sensors that alter their functionality based on the wearer's actions. The question is whether just having a device respond to one's activity is considered his/her halakhic responsibility. According to those poskim who look at a lack of intention and lack of benefit, the question would hinge on whether the results of the tracking are beneficial. According to those who look at the lack of intention and lack of effort expended on the *melakhah*, the question would hinge on whether one is intentionally triggering the sensors. Those poskim who applied the classic rules of *pesik reisha de-lo niha leih* for the security cameras, digital refrigerators, and kinetic watches consider whether the health tracking on a smartwatch is also unintentional and non-beneficial. Rav Hershel Schachter and Rav Mordechai Willig (oral communication, Jan 25, 2018) hold that the smartwatch monitoring is considered beneficial. Even if one will only look at the statistics after some time and out of curiosity, it is still considered beneficial that the information was recorded. If a person did not actually care about the information being picked up, they would simply wear another watch for Shabbat. Those who wear these watches often prefer them precisely because of their useful health monitors. Therefore, according to that approach, wearing such a watch is tantamount to plugging in an electrical device on Shabbat because the results are beneficial, an attitude which renders the action intentional. Additionally, they explain that by wearing the watch one is causing it to monitor one's health and record data in a computer chip which, in their opinion, is categorized under the *melakhah* of writing, erasing, or constructing. On the other hand, according to those poskim who discuss not being responsible for an inconsequential *melakhah*, there is more to analyze. According to Rav Vosner's approach, we can suggest that the recordings are a passive result of wearing the watch, not based on expending any extra effort to cause the monitoring to occur. Therefore, in a technical sense there is no violation of Shabbat since one isn't doing any action to cause the watch to take one's pulse or track one's steps and the benefit of the recordings is minimal. One is simply living normally, breathing, sleeping, and walking, and the watch is simply doing its job by monitoring that activity. While not all poskim accept Rav Vosner's novel position, as mentioned earlier, Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon extended his opinion to permit wearing a Fitbit that would track a person's health or sleep. It was unclear which watches he would not practically allow. Similarly, Rabbi Rozen[12] argues that since the health tracking is an unobservable result that isn't immediately retrievable for someone observing Shabbat, the digital recordings are considered not one's action at all. Therefore, in his opinion, it is technically permitted to wear a Fitbit on Shabbat; however, in practice it is highly discouraged since it isn't in the spirit of Shabbat.

#### H. Conclusion

Being that Halakhah is a vibrant and advanced system built upon principles of Torah and Hazal, it is always equipped to address and offer religious insights into the newest innovations of the world. In general, closing an electric circuit on Shabbat is forbidden either Biblically or rabbinically.

Changing the current in a circuit, which is relevant for speaking into a microphone that is already on or adjusting the volume on a hearing aid, is subject to a dispute. Even those who are lenient about altering a current would not permit it in cases where it would desecrate the sanctity of Shabbat. We discussed three scenarios where the unintentional and insignificant consequences of electrical appliances on Shabbat apply. All rabbis permit walking in front of a security camera on Shabbat, but they differ as to the reason; some are lenient since the writing caused on the screen is unintentional and non-beneficial to the walker, while others say that it is permitted, as the walker didn't expend any effort to cause that result. There was a similar discussion regarding the permissibility of causing computer chip recordings of digital refrigerators. The question hinged on whether unintentional and unobservable results were a person's responsibility at all. Then we discussed wearing an electrical self-winding watch on Shabbat. Some consider this permissible because it is unintentional and not considered fixing since it is a normal use of the watch; others say that the violation of Shabbat entailed is not attributable to the wearer, either because he didn't expend any effort for the results or because the results were unintentional and unobservable.

Based on these principles, we focused on the health tracking capabilities of the smartwatch, including tracking calories burnt, heart rate, pulse, and sleep cycle. Communication, notifications, and even having the screen display vary its brightness as per the proximity sensor are certainly not permitted on Shabbat. Regarding the health tracking, some poskim including Rav Schachter and Rav Willig think that wearing the smartwatch is rabbinically forbidden because one's actions cause the smartwatch to open and close circuits on Shabbat. In their opinion, the health monitoring is considered beneficial and therefore the Shabbat-violating action is attributed to the wearer. However, Rabbi Rozen held that technically it is permitted since the results of the tracking are unobservable and not immediately beneficial. Nonetheless, Rabbi Rozen agreed that one should not wear a smartwatch that has health monitoring since it is not appropriate for Shabbat. As evidenced above, the Halakhah carefully discerns between technology that threatens the sanctity of Shabbat, from those that enhance it. As the world continues to evolve we strive to continue to embrace modernity through the lens of Torah.

[1] For citation of poskim on the subject, see my Halachipedia article, "Communication on Shabbat."

[2] Beit Yitzhak, hashmatot to Y.D. 2:31; Yabia Omer 1:16; Menuhat Ahavah 24:2; Rav Hershel Schachter; Rabbi Michael Broyde's & Rabbi Howard Jachter's article "The Use of Electricity on Shabbat," n. 41.

[3] All poskim from Rav Schachter are based on his shiur at YUTorah on Electricity on Shabbat, as well as on oral communication (January 23, 2018).

[4] This was also the opinion of Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 1:19).

[5] This extrapolation is quoted by the Magen Avraham 511:11 and clarified further by the Shulhan Arukh ha-Rav 511:7.

[6] This is codified and generalized by the Rama 252:5 and Mishnah Berurah 252:48.

[7] See Be-Mareh ha-Bazak, v. 9, p. 44, which concludes that if the health tracker wristband does not react to a person's actions at all it is permitted to wear on Shabbat if one was already wearing it before Shabbat. However, those conclusions are outdated, since they were written in 2011, before the 2014 release of updated smartwatches which have sensors that do react to a person's actions.

[8] The opinion of Rabbi Nahum Rabinovich is that electricity is only considered inappropriate for Shabbat (*uvda de-hol*), while tripping an electrical sensor is permitted. However, his opinion is rejected and disregarded by the vast majority of Orthodox poskim (*Emunat Itecha*, v. 104, p. 70).

[9] This is the opinion of many of the poskim that discuss this topic including: *Orhot Shabbat* v. 1 ch. 15 n. 55 citing Rav Elyashiv, Rav Nissim Karelitz, Rav Shlomo Zalman, Rav Vosner; Yabia Omer O.C. 9:35; Rav Elyashiv cited in *Or ha-Shabbat*, v. 25 p. 157; *Shevet ha-Levi* 9:68; and Rav Schachter. See however, *Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhat*, ch. 23 n. 175, who



only considers it writing if the video is saved temporarily or permanently but not if it is simply projected on a screen.

[10] Besides the poskim cited in the above discussion who explicitly suggest alternatives to the Shevet ha-Levi, the Orhot Shabbat v. 3 p. 79 comments that the Shevet ha-Levi's approach is very nuanced and should not be extended without the approval of the gedolim. See Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hilkhatah, ch. 23 n. 176 who echoes the idea of the Shevet ha-Levi.

[11] Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon (presentation at Yeshiva University, November 7, 2018) explicitly clarified that Rav Vosner would permit, when one adds no personal effort, even if it is beneficial. This seems to be supported from Rav Vosner's treatment of the automatic security lights outside people's houses. He permits walking in a street at night when one's walking would turn on a security light in front of someone's house. He writes that it is not considered beneficial since it is possible to walk anyway. It is plausible that this too is slightly beneficial especially if the street is dark. Additionally, in discussing the automatic self-winding watch, even though having the watch wound with one's movements on Shabbat is slightly beneficial he is lenient. With respect to wearing it for a three-day Yom Tov or a case where without one's movements it would stop working he leaves the question unresolved. This last point implies, contra Rav Rimon, that Rav Vosner would agree if the result is completely beneficial he is strict and he is only lenient if it is only slightly beneficial. See the article by Rabbi Rif and Rabbi Dr. Fixler in Emunat Itakha v. 104 p. 63 who make similar inferences.

[12] The details were clarified by Rabbi Binyamin Zimmerman (written communication, Jan. 19, 2018) who worked with Rabbi Rozen at Zomet.