

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“R^eish Lakish said 'a woman is not matched up with a man except based on his actions.' Said Rabbi Yochanan, 'and it is as hard to match them up as the splitting the Sea [of Reeds].' The Talmud's comparison (Sotah 2a) of the difficulty in finding the right person to marry and the miraculous splitting of the sea is widely quoted, especially during speeches at celebrations before and after weddings. Once we get past the idea that matchmaking is a difficult process, the comparison begs for an explanation. First of all, is anything really "difficult" for the all-powerful Creator? Why is splitting the sea seen as being more difficult than anything else, even if we see other things as being "natural?" Is the creation and maintenance of the force of gravity, which keeps a body of water "together" any less miraculous than defying gravity by splitting it? Secondly, even if getting people to realize whom they should marry (and/or being convinced to do it) is "difficult" because of the free will of the individuals involved (see ShU"T Tashbatz 2:1), why is it compared specifically to the splitting of the sea? What parallels exist between matchmaking, bringing people together, and the separation of the waters by the Sea of Reeds?

After Rabbi Yochanan's statement that matchmaking is as difficult for G-d as it was for Him to split the sea, the Talmud asks if that is really so. Rashi understands the Talmud's question to be if people are really matched based on their actions, while others suggest that the Talmud is questioning whether it is really difficult for G-d to match spouses up in the first place. Since "40 days before a fetus is formed a divine voice proclaims whose daughter will marry whom," and at that point neither of them have made any choices yet (good or bad), how could the pairing be based on their actions? Or, alternatively, if the pairing has been decided before they were even born, how difficult could it be? Either way, the Talmud resolves this difficulty by saying that the divine proclamation before the future husband and wife were born, which is based on their "mazel" (see Rashi) only applies to a "first pairing," while the pairing based on their actions, which is as difficult as the splitting of the sea, is a different, "second pairing." Every person is born under a "mazel," with a certain personality-type (and set of things they like and

are drawn to and things they avoid) and to a certain type of family. It is not that difficult to match up people of similar, or complimentary, personalities and backgrounds. It would seem that this is the type of match we refer to when we say someone has found his or her "bashert." However, once they become adults, and can change their "mazel" through the choices they make, it becomes more and more difficult to make a perfect match. As individuals move away from their starting point (their "mazel"), there is a new "most appropriate match" at each stage of growth (or regression), and it can be said that this new, updated, "match" is their most current "bashert." Nevertheless, the nuances caused by each and every choice made by each individual make it more difficult to match them up. Evidently, it is only the "second pairing" that is "as difficult as the splitting of the sea," and, as Rashi explains, the comparison is based on both having changed from their original status. G-d had to change the laws of nature in order to split the sea, and as a result of individuals changing their own nature, it becomes more difficult to find the perfect match, which is also a change from the way it would have otherwise been.

We are still left wondering why this specific miracle was chosen for the comparison. Aren't all miracles a change from the laws of nature? What unique characteristic is there about the splitting of the sea that caused it to be chosen as the example of the difficulty of making these "second pairings?" Additionally, the comparison should be either in the nature of the change or in the difficulty in making the change. Based on our explanation of Rashi, we are not comparing the difficulty of changing the laws of nature to the difficulty in changing oneself, but with the difficulty of finding the right match after the changes were made. Yet we are comparing the process of matching people up with the splitting of the sea, not with how as a result of the splitting of the sea the Jews were saved while the Egyptians were killed.

The Meiri says that since the "second pairing" is based on the power of our free will to change who we are, it cannot refer only to a second marriage. The reason the Talmud uses terms that imply a "first" and "second" marriage is because (at least in those days) most first marriages occur when the couple are very young, and they have not yet had the chance to change who they are, to change their "mazel." By the second

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marriage, however, each has already had the opportunity to make choices that move them beyond the "mazel" they were born with, and so this "pairing" is based on their actions, their choices. Although the Meiri does not give a specific age that this opportunity to change takes place, it would seem that it would be at the same stage that we become responsible enough for our actions to be punished by the heavenly court, i.e. 20 years of age. Just as by then we can move beyond the environment we grew up in and are therefore responsible for all of our actions (whether we actually moved beyond it or not), so too can we move beyond our "mazel" by the time we reach 20. It is certainly possible to "go with the flow" and stay within one's original "mazel" indefinitely (and if both did, their "original pairing" would still be valid), but for those who use their free will to change, even if it is their first marriage it would be considered their "second pairing."

The Meiri says that this "second pairing" is based on their actions from a "reward and punishment" perspective, as it would be inappropriate for a righteous person to be stuck with a not-so-righteous person. Therefore, it would seem that it is not based on the new personality-types that developed as a result of their choices, and it becomes likely that very divergent personalities can become the most appropriate matches for each other. The difficulty of making this "second pairing" is compounded by the need to have their shared level of righteousness overcome their personality differences. In general, as individuals mature they develop their own idiosyncrasies, and the later two people start building their life together, the harder it is to merge the two more fully-developed personalities into one unit.

The Mechilta is one of many sources that describe how, when the Jews were caught between the waters of the Sea of Reeds and the Egyptians, there were four different groups that responded to the situation in a different way. The Sefer Hayashar breaks these four groups into tribes: Reuvain, Shimon and Yisachar were so distraught over the situation that they wanted to throw themselves into the sea; Zevulun, Binyamin and Naftali wanted to return to Egypt and resume the slavery rather than confronting their oppressors; Yehuda, Dan and Yosef wanted to fight against them; and Levi, Gad and Asher didn't want to

actually fight a war against them, but wanted to try to confuse them by screaming and making a lot of noise. Moshe therefore responded to each of these groups (Shemos 14:13-4) telling them "not to worry" or become distraught, and not to throw themselves into the sea, but to "stay where they are and watch G-d's salvation;" not to return to Egypt because after G-d is finished with them "you won't see them anymore forever;" not to start a war with them, "for G-d will wage for you;" and not to try distracting them by making noise, but instead to "remain quiet."

What should they do? G-d told Moshe to "speak to the Children of Israel," i.e. all of them, all four groups, "and travel" (14:15). Even though each group had a different way of responding and reacting to the same set of circumstances, they were all supposed to do the same thing. Some had to overcome their fear and distress in order to summon up enough strength to continue on, some had to overcome their desire to have things return to the previous status quo, and some had to overcome their desire to confront the Egyptians themselves. But they all had to be convinced to get ready to move forward, despite the raging sea before them. Perhaps it was the difficulty of bringing these four very different groups together that is being compared to bringing two different people, who have moved beyond their "mazel," together. It is specifically the miracle of the splitting of the sea, where different personalities had to merge into one cohesive unit, which is compared to matchmaking. Not because splitting the sea or determining which match is most appropriate is difficult for G-d, but because getting them to overcome their differences and join together on a shared mission is.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Victories and triumphs inevitably are followed by letdowns, frustrations and sometimes even disappointments. The high point of the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt is recorded in this week's parsha with the eternal song of Moshe and Israel at the Reed Sea.

The exultation of Israel at seeing its hated oppressors destroyed at its feet knew no bounds. It is as though its wildest dreams of success and achievement were now fulfilled and realized. However, almost immediately the people of Israel, faced with the problems of the real world which seemingly never disappear no matter how great the previous euphoria may have been, turn sullen and rebellious.

Food, water, shelter all are lacking. And even when Moshe provides for them the necessary miracles that are required for minimum sustenance in the desert of Sinai, their mood of foreboding and pessimism is not easily dispelled.

And this mood is heightened by the sudden unprovoked attack of Amalek against the people of Israel. Again, Amalek is defeated by Yehoshua and Moshe but the mere fact that such an attack occurred so soon after the events of the Exodus has a disheartening effect upon the people.

The moment of absolute physical triumph is not to be repeated again in the story of Israel in the Sinai desert. But physically speaking, the experience of the desert of Sinai will hardly be a thrilling one for Israel. So it is with all human and national victories. Once the euphoria settles down, the problems and frustrations begin.

In relating the miracle of the sweetening of the waters at Marah, the Torah teaches us that "there did the Lord place before them laws and justice and there did He test them." There are many interpretations in Midrash, Talmud and rabbinic literature as to what those "laws and justice" actually were.

But it is certainly correct to say that the main "laws and justice" that were taught to Israel at Marah was that the problems of life go on even after miraculous victories and great achievements. Victories bring high if sometimes unrealistic expectations. Measured realistic response and realistic assessments are necessary in order to harvest the fruits of such victories.

The less grandiose our expectations are the less painful our disappointments become. The generation of the descendants of those who left Egypt, who were now accustomed to the grueling challenges of the desert and who had not shared in the euphoria of the destruction of the Egyptian oppressor, were much better equipped to deal with the realities entailed in conquering the Land of Israel and establishing Jewish sovereignty and society there.

Our times have also witnessed great and unforeseen accomplishments here in Israel. But because of that very success, we are often given over to disappointment and frustration at the current unsolved problems that still face us. We would all wish to sing a great song of exultation and triumph over our enemies and problems.

With G-d's help we may yet be able to do so. Yet until then we would be wise to attempt to deal with our realities and problems in a moderate, practical and wise fashion. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

An examination of the first time Jews praised G-d after leaving Egypt offers an understanding of two distinct models of approaching G-d. In the song

after the splitting of the sea, the Jews proclaimed: "This is my G-d and I will glorify him ve-anveihu; the G-d of my father and I will exalt him, va-aromemenhu." (Exodus 15:2)

One approach to G-d is that of "Elokei avee, the G-d of my father," to believe simply because of my inherited history, to believe because my parents believe. Hence, the text states va-aromemenhu; from the root rum meaning "above." In other words, although G-d is above me and I have little personal relationship with Him, nonetheless, I accept G-d because my parents accepted Him.

A second approach is implicit in the first part of the sentence. Here the Jews proclaimed, "This is my G-d, zeh Kei-lee," the G-d with whom I have a very personal relationship.

Hence, the modifying term ve-anveihu (and I will glorify Him). Anveihu is a compound of ani-Hu. This is what Martin Buber referred to as the most intense of relationships, that of the I-Thou. This points to one who has a personal relationship with G-d, and believes because he or she has been closely touched by the Almighty.

Which approach is more meaningful and more critical? Since both are mentioned, each has truth. Indeed, when reciting the amidah, we similarly state that, "G-d is our G-d Elokeinu" and, "G-d is the G-d of our ancestors Elokei Avoteinu, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." Note the inclusion of both a personal relationship and a belief in G-d because He was the G-d of our patriarchs. The sequence of these terms in both the biblical text and in the amidah shows us which approach has the most significance. In both instances, G-d is first described as being a personal G-d.

An important educational lesson can be learnt here: It is not enough for parents to expect their children to believe simply because they believe. Transmission of a belief in G-d to our youngsters is not automatic. What is most necessary is an atmosphere wherein a child comes to experience belief through sincere strivings and actions; not merely through rote approaches to prayer and ritual.

Such children are in the best position to maintain their belief and to transmit it to their children and they to their children until the end of time. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

Pharaoh had finally agreed to let the Jewish people leave Egypt. G-d then led the Jews to Israel on the longest route out of Egypt. G-d knew that if He took them out on the shortest route, the Jews would encounter a war along the way. And G-d

said..."Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt" (Exodus, 13:17). Even though the Jewish people had just personally witnessed an awesome series of miracles, G-d knew that at the first sign of trouble they would want to return to Egypt and back to their lives of slavery.

How many times have you set a goal for yourself and the moment something didn't go as smoothly as you had planned, you immediately experienced self-doubt and seriously questioned your ability, worthiness, and even the goal itself? And the dream that you were so certain you wanted ends up slowly drifting into the large sea of the other unaccomplished goals and dreams you had in the past. Isn't it amazing that on Monday you knew exactly what you wanted with crystal clear clarity and had a solid game plan to achieve it, and by Wednesday you're about to give up?

The reason for all of this is due to two internal, distinct and powerful drives that G-d gave as a gift to all of us. One drive wants to change the world, climb the highest mountains, and leave the planet in a radically and more improved place than it now exists. The other drive will then challenge, question, and doubt every part of this journey and try with all its might to prevent you from never accomplishing anything.

Why would G-d, who loves us more than words could ever express, give us a desire not to grow, succeed, or experience the pleasure of great accomplishments?

The answer is simple: Only through struggle and fighting the burning desire to quit can we ever have the unbelievable joy and ecstasy that comes from achievement. If G-d knew the Jews would want to run back to slavery at the first challenge they encountered after just witnessing all of the miracles that He preformed for them, then clearly the drive to quit and retreat is alive and well within all of us. It doesn't matter how big, great, or strong you are-this force will always be there.

Knowledge is power and by knowing that this "drive to quit" was designed by G-d to actually make you great will now give you the ability to see it for what it is: A test. Will you recognize that this drive's only purpose is to get you NOT to change the world and then fight through the urge to run away, or do you stop in your tracks and question your very existence?

Every time you begin a project, start an exercise program, want to launch a new career, or go towards any meaningful goal, you must know that you will encounter a war. This war might be disguised as the people who tell you that cannot succeed, or the rejection you face, or the obstacles you'll inevitably encounter. Remember, you were "pre-designed" by G-d to have a burning urge to retreat to Egypt. Make no mistake about it, you will be tested.

Great men and women have all faced the exact same tests and they have doubted themselves and all had the urge to quit. But for them, going back to Egypt was not an option. So they instead kept their eye on the ball and kicked their self-doubt in its shin's and went on to greatness. And people look at their great success stories and bemoan to all who'll listen that they too would have achieved greatest if they had the same circumstances. And that's the great irony-their circumstances aren't just the same, but identical. The circumstance was the desire to quit. Great men and women blast through it, while others reconsider when they see a war and return to Egypt.

So, while having a good plan is important, not giving up on it is everything. And sometimes even after you choose to fight the war, you might not win. But take much comfort in knowing that it's completely up to G-d whether or not you'll have the strength and ability to win the war. But that was never the point. Because the purpose of the test was to just fight the war and refuse to retreat to Egypt. And since we're all designed for greatness, it's only through choosing to fight and march on that we'll inevitably experience the ecstasy of success. So the next time you want to become better in some way tomorrow than you are today, know that the great men and women of history who've achieved so much are no different than you and I. They just hung around for the war. © 2008 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.ocm

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

After Bnei Yisrael had already left, it would have been reasonable to assume that they would not meet the Egyptians any more on their way to the Promised Land. However, as we know, the Almighty organized things differently: He commanded Bnei Yisrael to retrace their steps so that the Egyptians would think that the people were "trapped in the land" [Shemot 14:3], in order that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened and he would pursue them. The purpose was for G-d "to be glorified through Pharaoh and his army, so that Egypt will know that I am G-d" [14:4]. However, Ibn Ezra finds that the passage is difficult to understand. "If one asks why G-d commanded Yisrael to return, it is useless to search for an answer" [14:8]. Evidently, Ibn Ezra's difficulty stems from the fact that G-d could have caused Pharaoh's heart to be heavy without any relation to the events. In fact, the wording of the passage does not imply any link between the fact that Bnei Yisrael returned and Pharaoh's chase. Why then were they commanded to return?

Evidently the answer lies in the following verse: "And G-d strengthened the heart of Pharaoh the King of Egypt, and he pursued Bnei Yisrael. And Bnei Yisrael left with a high hand." [14:8]. What does the phrase "with a high hand" mean? Rashi explains, "With well

publicized and high level courage." But this is not so simple, since right after this verse we are told about the nation's great fear when they saw the Egyptians pursuing them (see Rashbam). Perhaps another explanation is possible.

In comparing different places in the Torah where the phrase "a high hand" appears, it is clear that it is a negative expression, implying exaggerated pride and a criticism of G-d. For example, here is how the Torah describes a person who intentionally commits a sin: "And the soul which does something with a high hand" [Bamidbar 15:30]. In the poetic epic of Ha'azinu it is written that G-d will redeem Yisrael to ward off the audacity of the Gentiles, who would attribute their victory to themselves and not to the Almighty. "Lest they say our hand is high, and G-d did not accomplish all of this" [Devarim 32:27]. Thus, in our case too, the verse implies that Bnei Yisrael left Egypt with a feeling of pride, almost as if they were to be given the credit for the redemption. And to counteract this feeling, it was necessary for them to be pursued by Egypt. The point was not only for G-d to be glorified by the victory over Pharaoh but also as a way to counteract the exaggerated pride of Bnei Yisrael.

Indeed, immediately after these events, the feeling of a "high hand" left the people, replaced by fear. "And they were very afraid, and Bnei Yisrael cried out to G-d" [Shemot 14:10]. In order for Bnei Yisrael to correctly understand their dependence on the Almighty, the "high hand" is replaced by another hand (note that the word "hand" appears seven times in the passage). Moshe waves his hand over the sea (see 14:16, 14:21, 14:26, 14:27), while the water splits at first and then returns to cover the Egyptians. At the end of the passage, it is emphasized that the hand that controlled all of the events is merely a symbol for the real hand that was in charge: "And Yisrael saw the great hand that G-d fashioned in Egypt, and they feared G-d, and they believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe" [14:30].

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Freedom at last! As this week's portion opens, the Jewish people, three million strong, march out of Egypt in triumph. The mighty hand of Hashem has smashed the chains that enslaved them, but they are not quite rid of their former taskmasters. They are not yet "out of the woods." They flee through the desert, pursued by the fearsome chariots of the Egyptians, their minds and hearts churning with fear, hope, faith and the intoxication of their newfound freedom.

The Torah describes in great detail how, by Hashem's command, the Jewish people wheeled around to face their pursuers, pitching their camp "before Pi Hachiros, between the tower and the sea, in front of Baal Tzephon." Pi Hachiros was actually an Egyptian city to which they now gave this Hebrew

name, meaning "the Gateway to Freedom." What was this place, and why did they consider it the gateway to freedom? Rashi explains that the city they chose to rename in commemoration of their emancipation was the border city of Pithom.

Pithom! As in "Pithom and Ramses"? How can it be? Earlier, the Torah records that this very city, Pithom, had been built with the backbreaking labor of the enslaved Jewish people. Its soil was soaked with their blood, sweat and tears, its very air full to bursting with the echoes of their groans and cries. If anything, this city was a monument to slavery and oppression. How could the Jewish people view it as "the Gateway to Freedom"?

The commentators explain that the spectacular display of miracles that accompanied the Exodus caused the Jewish people to reevaluate their experiences in Egypt. New thoughts began to germinate in their minds. Surely, the G-d who was making a mockery of natural law for their sake, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, could not have "forgotten" them. Surely, the G-d who was now displaying such boundless love for them would not have allowed them to languish for centuries in the misery of Egypt for no purpose. Surely, G-d's unseen Presence had been beside them during all their pain and suffering. Unknown to them, He had guided them through the "iron crucible," as our Sages characterized Egypt, refining them and cleansing them of their baser elements, purifying the core of the people who would stand at Mount Sinai and receive His holy Torah.

Everything they had experienced suddenly had meaning and purpose. In retrospect, the darkest moments of exile were illuminated by their present knowledge. In retrospect, they saw everything as a gateway to freedom. Even the city of Pithom, invested with so much Jewish pain and suffering, became one of the greatest symbols of their ultimate freedom. And thus, they renamed it Pi Hachiros, "the Gateway to Freedom."

A young orphan was invited to live with his uncle in a distant city. The boy arrived on a stormy winter day, and an old servant asked him to wait in a drafty parlor. Night fell, and his uncle had still not appeared. The boy was given a few hard crusts of bread and some water and shown to a bed which had been prepared for him in a hayloft.

The next morning, he was awakened early and given a long list of difficult chores to do, but by nightfall the boy had still not seen his uncle. For many weeks, the boy was forced to endure the cold, the hunger and the aching muscles in his back.

One day, the uncle summoned the boy. With tears in his eyes, he hugged his nephew and kissed him. "You must be wondering why I have put you through all this," he said. "I will explain it to you. Tomorrow, I am leaving this place and traveling to the

Holy Land, and I am taking you with me. It is going to be a very difficult journey. You may have to endure all sorts of hardship, and you must be prepared. These last few weeks have toughened you. They have given you the strength to complete the journey that lies ahead of you."

In the journeys of our own lives, we all have our difficult stretches, times of pain, suffering and sorrow, our daily adversities and challenges. Sometimes, we may find it takes all our energies just to cope with what life throws at us, and we cannot even begin to think about living inspired and seeking personal growth. But if we realize G-d is with us always, that He never "forgets" us, we can look beyond the frustrations of the moment. We can draw strength from the thought that one day we will look back on these times with the wisdom of hindsight and see them as the gateways to our freedom. © 2008 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

It was February 1981, and we had just celebrated the laying of the cornerstone for the first buildings - a mikveh (ritualarium) and yeshiva building (Neveh Shmuel High School for boys) on the empty hill of land slated to be the newly emerging city of Efrat. The area was verdant with trees and grapevines, and as the brilliant winter sun spread its golden hue over the majestic hill, I truly felt as though we were being warmly embraced by the loving Shekhina above.

That day we planted trees and with the planting, there were blessings. It was the 15th of Shvat (Tu b'Shvat), the one day of the Jewish year when almost every school child in Israel gets down on his or her hands and knees and plants. It was, for us, an extremely moving moment: taking a young sapling by the hand, clearing some earth and freeing the roots of the young plant to make sure that when we placed it into the soil it would merge with the very soil which hid in its recesses Jewish memories which were thousands of years old.

But why should Tu b'Shvat have become almost synonymous with planting? The first Mishna in Rosh HaShana speaks of four different "New Years," with the First of Tishrei being the New Year for the reckoning of years and for the planting of trees! The New Year for fruit trees, which according to the Academy of Hillel is the 15th of Shvat (Tu b'Shvat), is the cut-off date for the giving of tithes for that year, in effect, the Jewish Dec. 31st for the purposes of paying taxes, as it were, on our fruits. But this has nothing to do with planting trees?! And what was originally thought to have been the significance of the fifteenth of Shvat?

According to R. Eleazar ben Oshaia, by the time Shvat arrives, the majority of the rains have already fallen, and from an Israeli agricultural perspective the essence of winter is rain. (B.T. Rosh

Hashanah 14a). Hence Tu B'Shvat signals the end of the major part of the winter when we can begin to look forward to the next season of spring. And since the love song between G-d and Israel, Song of Songs, is replete with references to the spring as symbolizing the beginning of our redemption, our engagement to the Divine, it is no wonder that we find in a collection of Ashkenazic customs, published in 1590 by Simon ben Yehuda Halevi Ginsberg, an early record that special fruits associated with the land of Israel were eaten on Tu B'Shvat in order to strengthen the relationship between the Jews in the Exile and the land of their eventual redemption.

Similarly, in the 16th century work of Safed Kabbalists, Pri Etz Hadar, we find recorded a unique ceremony centered around the drinking of four goblets of wine on Tu b'Shvat-an end of winter seder. First, a cup of white wine; then a mixture of mostly white and some red wine; third, a cup of mostly red and a little white and, finally, a cup of only red wine. This custom of creating a rainbow from white to red was intended to evoke the unique spring in the land of Israel, where the first flowers that blossom are almond buds, a vast spread of white loveliness always appearing very close to the 15th of Shvat. Soon, other flowers blossom and the colors change, but the final splash in the fields belongs to the brilliant red anemones, kalaniyot in Hebrew, dotting the landscape wherever the hills and valleys are wild and free. And, in order to strengthen the tie with Israel to an even greater degree, a custom emerged of eating the different fruits with which the land of Israel is blessed within the Tu B'Shvat seder between the cups of wine: grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates (Deut.8:8).

During the years of the Second Aliyah, the religious lovers of Zion realized that yearning from a distance was not enough. More needed to be done, a kinyan (purchase) had to be made. We dare not be satisfied with praying (or distance eating) alone; if we truly care about Israel, we must acquire a real relationship with the land. And what better way can this be done than by the planting of trees?

How fitting it is that this week's portion, Beshalach - the Biblical reading which deals with the splitting of the Reed Sea - generally corresponds to the week in which we celebrate Tu B'Shvat. Moses cried out to the people: "Stand firm and you will see what G-d will do to rescue you today G-d will fight for you, but you must remain silent." G-d, on the other hand, disagreed. "Why do you cry out before me? Speak to the Israelites that they start moving" (Exodus 14:13-15) Rashi (ad loc) even goes so far as to say, "This is not the time to pray extensively; this is the time to act," to 'start moving'."

Hence, our way of celebrating the dream of Jewish redemption is by planting trees in the soil of our homeland" And when the Bible tells us that our

Patriarch Isaac, the one patriarch who never left the land of Israel and therefore is most identified with the land, "went out la'suah in the fields" (Gen 24:63) when he was anticipating his first meeting with Rebecca, his betrothed. The Hebrew word "siah" can mean conversation, and therefore most commentaries explain that he was praying with G-d in the fields (Rashi, ad loc), or it can mean shrub, and so the S'forno suggests that he was planting in the fields. Perhaps both are correct: planting in the land of Israel is the best expression of prayer to bring about our redemption!

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RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

Tuesday, September 11, 2001, 8:46 AM. Hijacked jetliner, American Airlines Flight 11, bound from Boston to Los Angeles, deliberately crashes into the north tower of the World Trade Center. 9:03 AM, United Flight 175, crashes into the south tower. WTC collapses shortly thereafter. 3,100 dead. And, as was said over and over again, the world changed forever.

We will never forget the moment that we heard the catastrophic news and where we were when we heard it. But has the world really changed? Have we really changed?

This week's Torah portion contains an insight that is extremely relevant to the proper Jewish reaction to tragic events such as September 11. This is all the more purposeful years after the WTC/Pentagon attacks, when, except for longer lines at the security check in airports, life seems to have gone back to normal.

G-d has just performed perhaps the greatest miracle of all time in the Splitting of the Red Sea. G-d did this in order to save the Jewish People from the Egyptians, and the Jews were very appreciative, bursting forth in spontaneous song.

There is a curious section in the Song of the Sea which describes the reactions of other nations to the news of the Sea's splitting, then coming back and swallowing the might and army of the Egyptian empire.

"Nations heard-they are trembling. Terror gripped the dwellers of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom were confused; trembling gripped the leaders of Moab. All the inhabitants of Cannan melted." (Exodus 15:14-15)

It is true that the purpose of these verses is to show the impact of the great miracle upon the entire world, and the fear the nations had for the Jewish people. Still, there is more wisdom that can be gleaned from this segment of the Song of the Sea.

All of the nations of the world reacted with strong emotions to the destruction of the Egyptian empire and the salvation of the Jewish people. Some became angry, some became nervous, and some were

afraid that their nation would be the next victim of G-d's wrath.

But did they do anything about it? Did they actively pursue ways in which they could avert disaster for themselves? Perhaps they should have come to convert to Judaism as Yitro did in next week's portion. Maybe they should have sent ambassadors to offer peace so that they could secure the friendship of the Jews. We do not find any of that. They simply did nothing. They felt great, powerful feelings but they let it stop there.

When we heard of the nightmare that was September 11, we all had a mixture of emotions. Newsweek recently reported that President George W. Bush described his initial reaction as, "I was furious that this could happen." Didn't we all feel anger at the evil perpetrators? We also felt afraid and vulnerable, nervous and worried. How many of us had great trouble sleeping that night as the horrific images kept playing back again and again in our minds? Would it ever be safe in the world again?

But after we experienced so many ripe emotions, what did we do about it? What can we still do about it?

Yes, we sit around discussing politics and we all love being armchair presidents and prime ministers. Yet, we know that the hours we spend planning America's next moves against Al-Qaida, though it may make us feel good, do not usually accomplish much of anything.

It's like the guy who was telling his buddies the division of roles in his household. "I handle all the important things like: whether we should go to war against Russia, how much taxes should be raised, and whether the speed limit should be lowered. My wife takes care of the small issues such as: where we should live, what school the kids should go to, and what kind of car we should buy."

So what should we do in the face of September 11? We first should realize that the world has not changed much. Human beings are very resilient and we have bounced back from the catastrophe. No longer do advertisers apologize for making us think of petty things like clothing and cars, and professional sports are back in full force. (This is not to minimize the pain of those who lost friends or relatives or those who have lost jobs. But, by and large, it is true.)

If we do feel pretty much 'back to normal' now, then we unfortunately share the weakness of all the nations at the time of the Splitting of the Sea. We must do something active in order to change and grow spiritually from September 11.

We know that whenever tragedy strikes, be it 9-11 or bombings in Israel, it is a reminder of the fact that we no longer merit Divine Protection. G-d no longer steps in to save us consistently as He did in the days of the Bible. Sure, there is divine assistance-even today-

and miracles still happen if we open our eyes to them. But too often G-d lets evil succeed and does not protect us.

We have to be thinking of ways in which we can attempt to earn G-d's Divine Protection once again. What spiritual area can I improve in that will help myself, the Jewish nation, and the world become a safer place? Is it prayer? Is it Torah study? Is it acts of kindness? Is it avoiding gossip and thinking negatively about people? Maybe I did accept something upon myself September 11 or in the last 18 months as Israel has faced immense violence and deaths. Am I still keeping my resolution or have I forgotten what it was?

If we don't allow our reactions to 9-11 to become real spiritual actions that will last permanently, will there ever be anything that will move us? What else has to happen, G-d forbid?

Let us not become like the nations of the Red Sea. Let us act and not just react. © 2008 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

This week's parsha recounts the final hours of the historic Exodus from Egypt. The Israelites left Egypt in a cloud of glory, literally. The splitting of the Reed Sea was the climactic event culminating in a miracle-packed year when Pharaoh and his culture of magic were soundly defeated by the G-d of the Hebrews. At the crossing of the Sea when Pharaoh and his choice army were drowned, Moses and the People sang praise to Hashem: The Song of the Sea. In it we read the following verse:

"Hashem is a man of war, Hashem is His name." (Exodus 15:3) "Hashem is a man of war"- RASHI: "[The Hebrew 'Ish Milchama'] means the Master of Wars. As in (Ruth 1:3) 'Ish Naomi'-The husband (or master) of Naomi.' Similarly, (in Kings 2:2 when David speaks to his son, Shlomo) 'Be strengthened and be a man' meaning, 'and be a strong person.'"

Rashi is translating the word "Ish" which literally means "man." He gives it the meaning of "master." A Question: Why is Rashi's translation, "master," better than the simple meaning of "man"? What was bothering him about the word "man"?

An Answer: Describing G-d as "man" is problematic. G-d is not a man. As the verse says "G-d is not man" (Numbers 23:19). If He is not a "man" why then does the verse refer to him as "Ish Milchama"?

How does Rashi's brief interpretation help us?

An Answer: G-d is described here neither as a "man" in the sense of "man and not woman" nor in the sense of "man and not animal." The word is now translated as "master" one who is in charge of, in control of, wars. In this way we have avoided any possible anthropomorphism, that is describing G-d in

human terms. Can you see any other significance to Rashi's new translation?

An Answer: The words "a Man of War" convey the idea of an aggressive G-d, one whose chief characteristic and whose main pastime is making wars. This is not the Jewish view of G-d. But, in fact, it is the Christian view of the G-d of the Old Testament (i.e. as they see the Jewish view of G-d). It has often been said by gentiles that the Old Testament (the Tanach) conveys G-d as a cruel, unforgiving deity; a harsh disciplinarian. Many verses throughout Tanach can be cited that refute this claim. But this is not the place to go into that.

It is enough to see how Rashi's sensitivity to this point may have prompted him to make this comment. G-d is not a "man of war" in the sense that He is occupied and preoccupied with making war. He is, rather, the Master of wars, in the sense that if wars must be fought, then His battles, which are on the side of justice and righteousness, are in His control. He is the Master of these wars and after the dust of battle settles, then His values will prevail.

Let us be blessed to live to see such Divine victories. © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.ocm

RABBI CHAIM FLOM

Short Vorts

“I am always so impressed how nicely you do mitzvos. Your Bar Mitzva was just right, and your weddings were perfect. When that Rosh Yeshiva came from Israel you really made him feel at home. But I never understood why when it came to paying your children's tuition, you always try your best to avoid it!!”

When the Torah says "This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him" (Shemos 15:2). The Gomorrah (Shabbos 133b) says it refers to glorifying mitzvos as we do them, since this glorifies G-d. People have special cups for ritually washing their hands, beautiful Esrog boxes, Kiddush cups etc. Sometimes we forget that paying tuition, giving charity, or paying any money that we owe is a mitzva. When we have an opportunity to do a mitzva, make sure we glorify G-d.

There is a silversmith in Yerushalayim who makes everyone who pays him for his work, say "I am hereby fulfilling the mitzva of paying for work done for me." © 2008 Rabbi C. Flom and torah.org

