

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI ARI WEISS

The Proverbial Point

This shabbat, besides being Shabbat Shirah, is also Tu B'Shevat, the Jewish new year for trees. The importance of trees in Jewish life is expressed in many areas, not the least of which is in this week's parsha, B'Shalach. In it we read how Moshe used a tree to sweeten the waters at Marah, and how the Jews found seventy date palms waiting for them in the oasis of Elim.

Interestingly, the Talmud makes the statement that one who is studying Torah and stops to admire a tree, is worthy of death (although not literally punishable by death). Additionally, we read that no trees were allowed to be planted or cultivated anywhere on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. From these sources, one might question the perspective the sages had regarding trees and their importance, but in truth these statements relate the depth of their understanding regarding the specialness of trees.

Throughout the Torah and Talmud, trees have profound mystical symbolism. The Torah itself is referred to as the "Etz Chaim" - the tree of life. The righteous are likened to the date palm and the mighty cedar, while the book of Shir HaShirim is replete with metaphoric representations of the nation of Israel as trees. Indeed, the connection that a tree has with the ground, while constantly reaching skyward with its limbs is symbolic of the human condition: grounded in the physical, yet striving for the spiritual. In trees we see not only a model of our own spiritual growth, but in fact a representation of our connectedness to our history and G-d Himself.

The meaning, therefore, of the previously mentioned sources, is not, G-d forbid, that our sages didn't appreciate the importance and necessity of the trees. Rather, they understood that our appreciation of plant life needs to be utilized as a method of connecting with the Divine, not as an end in itself. One who loses that connection between G-d's creations and G-d Himself, Heaven forbid, is referred to as a "kotzet B'nityot" - one who severs a tree from that which sustains it. In a similar way, the idolatrous religion of Asheira, involving the worship of trees, evolved when people began to disassociate the trees with G-d, and worshipped the trees as an end in itself. Therefore, on the temple mount, the location of the ultimate

connection with G-d, it is not appropriate for there to be representations and symbols. Why notice a tree as a symbol of the connection with the Divine, when you can partake in the real thing? The same is true with Torah study; one who is connecting with G-d through Torah, but then stops to focus instead on a metaphor of that connection, is missing the proverbial point.

So this Shabbat, on Tu B'Shevat, please take the time to appreciate the beautiful and vital role trees play in our world, but then be sure to thank Hashem for creating them. Indulge in the delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables with which we've been blessed, but be sure to begin and end with the appropriate blessings, giving praise and thanks to the Creator who saw fit to grace us with His abundance. Use the wonderful creations of this world as stepping stones to bring us even closer to our loving and caring G-d, and our appreciation of those creations will be that much more profound. © 2013 Rabbi A. Weiss

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

“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 . . .”

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 collective song - a song we recite every day. There is a fascinating discussion among the sages as to how exactly they sang. On this, there were four opinions. Three appear in the tractate of Sotah: Our rabbis taught: On that day Rabbi Akiva expounded: When the Israelites came up from the Red Sea, they wanted to sing a song. How did they sing it? Like an adult who reads the Hallel and they respond after him with the leading word. Moses said, I will sing to the Lord, and they responded, I will sing to the Lord. Moses said, For He has triumphed gloriously, and they responded, I will sing to the Lord.

R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean said: It was like a child who reads the Hallel and they repeat after him all that he says. Moses said, I will sing to the Lord, and they responded, I will sing to the Lord. Moses

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said, For He has triumphed gloriously, and they responded, For He has triumphed gloriously.

R. Nehemiah said: It was like a schoolteacher who recites the Shema in the synagogue. He begins first and they respond after him. (Sotah 30b)

According to Rabbi Akiva, Moses sang the song phrase by phrase, and after each phrase the people responded, I will sing to the Lord - their way, as it were, of saying Amen to each line.

According to R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean, Moses recited the song phrase by phrase, and they repeated each phrase after he had said it.

According to Rabbi Nehemiah, Moses and the people sang the whole song together. Rashi explains that all the people were seized by divine inspiration and miraculously, the same words came into their minds at the same time.

There is a fourth view, found in the Mekhilta: Eliezer ben Taddai said, Moses began and the Israelites repeated what he had said and then completed the verse. Moses began by saying, I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, and the Israelites repeated what he had said, and then completed the verse with him, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and its rider He hurled into the sea. Moses began saying, The Lord is my strength and my song, and the Israelites repeated and then completed the verse with him, saying, The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation. Moses began saying, The Lord is a warrior, and the Israelites repeated and then completed the verse with him, saying, The Lord is a warrior, Lord is His name. (Mekhilta Beshallah Parshah 1)

Technically, as the Talmud explains, the sages are debating the implication of the (apparently) superfluous words *vayomru lemor*, "they said, saying", which they understood to mean "repeating". What did the Israelites repeat? For R. Akiva it was the first words of the song only, which they repeated as a litany. For R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean they repeated the whole song, phrase by phrase. For R. Nehemiah they recited the entire song in unison. For R. Eliezer ben Taddai they repeated the opening phrase of each line, but then completed the whole verse without Moses having to teach it to them.

Read thus, we have before us a localised debate on the meaning of a biblical verse. There is, however, a deeper issue at stake. To understand this, we must look at another Talmudic passage, on the face of it unrelated to the passage in Sotah. It appears in the tractate of Kiddushin, and poses a fascinating question. There are various people we are commanded to honour: a parent, a teacher (i.e. a rabbi), the Nasi, (religious head of the Jewish community), and a king. Many any of these four types renounce the honour that is their due?

R. Isaac ben Shila said in the name of R. Mattana, in the name of R. Hisda: If a father renounces the honour due to him, it is renounced, but if a rabbi renounces the honour due to him it is not renounced. R. Joseph ruled: Even if a rabbi renounces his honour, it is renounced . . .

R. Ashi said: Even on the view that a rabbi may renounce his honour, if a Nasi renounces his honour, the renunciation is invalid

Rather, if was stated, it was stated thus: Even on the view that a Nasi may renounce his honour, yet a king may not renounce his honour, as it is said, You shall surely set a king over you, meaning, his authority should be over you. (Kiddushin 32 a-b)

Each of these people exercises a leadership role: father to son, teacher to disciple, Nasi to the community and king to the nation. Analysed in depth, the passages makes it clear that these four roles occupy different places on the spectrum between authority predicated on the person and authority vested in the holder of an office. The more the relationship is personal, the more easily honour can be renounced. At one extreme is the role of a parent (intensely personal), at the other that of king (wholly official).

I suggest that this was the issue at stake in the argument over how Moses and the Israelites sang the Song at the Sea. For R. Akiva, Moses was like a king. He spoke, and the people merely answered Amen (in this case, the words "I will sing to the Lord"). For R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean, he was like a teacher. Moses spoke, and the Israelites repeated, phrase by phrase, what he had said. For R. Nehemiah, he was like a Nasi among his rabbinical colleagues (the passage in Kiddushin, which holds that a Nasi may renounce his honour, makes it clear that this is only among his fellow rabbis). The relationship was collegial: Moses began, but thereafter, they sung in unison. For R. Eliezer ben Taddai Moses was like a father. He began, but allowed the Israelites to complete each verse. This is the great truth about parenthood, made clear in the first glimpse we have of Abraham:

Terach took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. (Bereishith 31:11)

Abraham completed the journey his father began. To be a parent is to want one's children to go further than you did. That too, for R. Eliezer ben Taddai, was Moses' relationship to the Israelites.

The prelude to the Song at the Sea states that the people "believed in G-d and in his servant Moses" - the first time they are described as believing in Moses' leadership. On this, the sages asked: What is it to be a leader of the Jewish people? Is it to hold official authority, of which the supreme example is a king ("The rabbis are called kings")? Is it to have the kind of personal relationship with one's followers that rests not on honour and deference but on encouraging people to grow, accept responsibility and continue the journey you have begun? Or is it something in between?

There is no single answer. At times, Moses asserted his authority (during the Korach rebellion). At others, he expressed the wish that "all G-d's people were prophets". Judaism is a complex faith. There is no one Torah model of leadership. We are each called on to fill a number of leadership roles: as parents, teachers, friends, team-members and team-leaders. There is no doubt, however, that Judaism favours as an ideal the role of parent, encouraging those we lead to continue the journey we have begun, and go further than we did. A good leader creates followers. A great leader creates leaders. That was Moses' greatest achievement - that he left behind him a people willing, in each generation, to accept responsibility for taking further the great task he had begun. © 2013 *Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**M**iriam led [the women] in song, 'Sing to G-d for He is exalted above the arrogant horse and rider He cast into the sea'(Exodus 15:21).

The splitting of the Red (Reed) Sea was the remarkable miracle that climaxed the Ten Plagues and indisputably confirmed the Hebrews as free people. The Egyptians had chased them into the desert, hoping to force their former slaves to return; Moses extended his hand over the sea, G-d drove back the waters with a powerful easterly wind and the Israelites entered the sea bed on dry land.

The Egyptians pursued the Hebrews, Moses extended his hand a second time, and the waters returned with a vengeance, completely overwhelming the Egyptian cavalry and chariots. Now, the Israelites found themselves in the midst of the sea on dry land, with all of the drowned Egyptians dead on the seashore.

"Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to G-d, expressing, 'I will sing to G-d for His great victory, horse and rider He cast into the sea...'" (Exodus 15:19). With the conclusion of this male paean of praise to the Almighty for His wonders, the Bible records the

activity of the women at the scene: "Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a drum in her hand and all the women followed with drums and with dancing. And Miriam led them in song, 'Sing to G-d for His great victory, horse and rider He cast into the sea'" (ibid. 2021).

Apparently, Moses and Miriam sang the same lengthy song, although the Bible only repeats the first verse in its description of the women's celebration. The great Hellenistic philosopher Philo Judaeus (20 BCE-50 CE) suggests that the men and women sang together. Rashi (ad loc.), citing the Mechilta, interprets that "Moses sang the song to the men, he sang the song and they responded after him, and Miriam sang the song to the women (and they responded after her, as it is written 'sing' [shiru])." The Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser, 1809-1879) adds that "the women claimed that all of this (the redemption from Egypt) occurred in their merit (Miriam and Princess Batya saved Moses, Shiphrah and Puah defied Pharaoh).

Therefore, they insisted on singing separately, since they had (such) a (large) share in the miracles" (ad loc.). And Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch has them singing in tandem, with the men initiating the song and women responding by repeating it. He emphasizes that the women's singing was of equal importance to the men's.

What is most remarkable about the description of this biblical scene and its various commentaries is that no one seems concerned about "Kol Isha," the prohibition against hearing a woman sing since "a woman's voice is a sexual stimulus" (B.T. Brachot 24a). Indeed, the Israeli news was filled with debates about religious soldiers who walked out of a military ceremony when a group of women began to sing. One head of a hesder yeshiva (under whose auspices soldiers combine studies with military service) declared that one is forbidden from hearing a woman sing even under pain of death, although he later admitted that he had been exaggerating to make his point.

When we study the actual sources of Kol Isha and the commentaries of rabbinic decisors, the incident at the Reed Sea appears much more normative than the attitude of the yeshiva head. Most importantly, the Talmudic passage stating that "a woman's voice is a sexual stimulus" is written in the context of retaining concentration when reciting the Shema prayer.

Rav Hai Gaon (cited in the Otzar Hagaonim, Interpretations to Brachot 24 and in the Mordechai to Brachot siman 80), Rabbenu Hannanel (Brachot ibid.) and the Raviyah (Rabbi Eliezer ben Yoel Halevi) all limit the prohibition of a man hearing a woman sing to someone who is reciting the Shema.

Rav Yosef Karo's Code of Jewish Law (Shulhan Aruch Orah Haim 75:3) rules that, "There is reason to be careful lest one hear the voice of a woman vocalist when one is reciting the Shema." Rabbi Moshe Isserlis (Krakow, 1520-1572) adds, "Even if the vocalist is one's

wife, but a voice to which one is accustomed is not considered to be a sexual stimulus."

To be sure, the Hatam Sofer forbids hearing a woman sing, or even speak, regardless of any connection to the recitation of the Shema and there are certainly latter-day decisors who rule likewise. I do not know of any posek who would permit listening to women who are singing sexually suggestive songs; I would even forbid listening to a man singing such songs (Kol Ish). But more contemporary rulings are those of Rabbi Yehiel Weinberg (Montreux, 1884- 1966) in his Sridei Aish (Part 2 Siman 8) who permits young men and women singing together in the context of a religious youth group, the Sdei Hemed (Rav Hizkiyahu Medini, 1833-1905) who permits men to listen to a woman singing songs of sanctity even if she is a soloist, and Rabbi Shmuel Ehrenfeld, the son-in-law of the Hatam Sofer, known as the Hatan Sofer, who rules that several voices together in a kind of choir situation is always permitted, since "two voices singing together makes each individual voice unrecognizable and indistinguishable."

Hence the women singing at the sea was perfectly permissible as it was a song of sanctity sung by many voices at the same time. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The miracles performed by G-d through Moshe and Aharon, the apex of which is reached in this week's parsha by the splitting of Yam Suf and the final deliverance of the Jewish people from the oppression of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. We are then further witness to the miracle of the manna falling six times a week to sustain the Jewish people in the Sinai desert and the ongoing miracle of water supplied to millions in that arid climate.

With all this, the Jewish people are trained and accustomed to a completely miraculous supernatural existence and way of life. They are, to a certain extent, lulled into believing that this is always the way things will be. Their passive role in all of these events is somehow the norm that will always be expected of them.

In the name of G-d, Moshe told them at the Yam Suf that G-d would fight their battle with Pharaoh and that they might remain quiet and passive in the ensuing struggle. It is this experience of constant visible and recognizable Divine intervention on their behalf, during the forty year span of residing in the desert of Sinai, that makes preparation for entry into the Land of Israel so difficult, as we will read later in the Torah.

A dependent society that is accustomed only to supernatural intervention will find it difficult to suddenly change and become self-reliant and independent. From this vantage point of practical living, the rabbis of the

Talmud constantly reminded us not to rely solely on miracles.

Through the long and bitter centuries of Jewish exile amongst the Christian and Moslem nations of the world, the Jewish people somehow survived - barely so, but survive we did - in nothing short of a miraculous fashion. Powerless and defenseless, despised, hated and ridiculed, Jews nevertheless persevered, convinced that Divine intervention would somehow guarantee their continuance - individually and nationally.

Because of this enforced condition of passivity, Jews waited for supernatural deliverance from their plight. The hand of G-d, so to speak, acting almost invisibly and through seemingly natural forces and occurrences in the last century, changed these dynamics of Jewish life. Passivity now gave way to activity and great human effort and sacrifice.

G-d's miracles were always present with us but much of the Jewish nation girded its loins to struggle on its own for independence, self-reliance and national realization. The fact that these efforts proved successful is itself nothing short of miraculous. Viewing the Jewish world at the beginning of the twentieth century, who could have imagined what that Jewish world would look like a scant one hundred years later.

There are those who refuse to see the hand of G-d, so to speak, in these remarkable events. And there are those who refuse to see that positive human effort and initiative were necessary to bring this wonder about. But the truth is that both factors were and are present in the events of Jewish life today and will continue to be so in our immediate future as well. © 2013 *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*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

After the sea was split in our Parsha, Beshalach, the Torah says (14:31), "And they believed in G-d and His servant Moshe." As Rav Aron Tendler wonders, what exactly did they believe in? It can not mean that they believed in the existence of G-d and Moshe, because they saw G-d, and new that Moshe existed. If you know something, it's fact, not belief, so what is the Passuk (verse) referring to by using the word "believed"?

Rav Tendler explains that following the splitting of the sea, the Jews understood far more than the obvious reality of G-d's power and majesty. They understood that they had been chosen to the exclusion of the rest of the Egyptians, and the rest of the world. They also understood that being chosen meant that they had a mission to accomplish. Therefore, their stated belief was not for that which they had already experienced or witnessed, but with accepting their

station and responsibilities as the world's designated teachers. As Jews we need to insure that all our actions reflect the dignity, honor and responsibility we were given. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

“**W**here is G-d?” asked Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, one of the great Hasidic masters. “Everywhere,” replied his students. “No, my children,” he responded, “G-d is not everywhere, but only where you let Him enter.”

The Kotzker's answer reinforces a distinction that Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik makes between two terms of redemption - both relate to being saved - hatzalah and yeshuah. Hatzalah requires no action on the part of the person being saved. Yeshuah, on the other hand, is the process whereby the recipient of salvation participates in helping him or herself.

In the portions read during the last few weeks, the Torah describes how the Jewish people, emerging from Egypt, experienced the process of hatzalah. Note G-d's words-ve-hitzalti etchem. (Exodus 6:6) G-d and G-d alone, says the Hagadah, took us out of Egypt. Just as a newborn is protected by her or his parents, so were the newly born Jewish people protected by G-d.

Much like a child who grows up, the Jewish people, having left Egypt, were expected to assume responsibilities. While Moshe thought that the process of hatzalah would be extended into the future, G-d does not concur - the sea will split, but you will be saved only if you do your share and try to cross on your own. (Rashi on Exodus 14:15) As the Jews stand by the sea, the Torah suddenly shifts from the language of hatzalah to that of yeshuah as it states va-yosha Hashem. (Exodus 14:30)

I remember my son Dov, as a small child at the Seder table, asking: “Why do we have to open the door for Eliyahu (Elijah) the prophet? He has so much power! He gets around so quickly and drinks a lot. Couldn't he squeeze through the cracks?”

At the Seder table, in addition to re-enacting the redemption from Egypt we also stress the hope for future redemption. This part of the Seder experience begins with the welcoming of Eliyahu, who the prophet says, will be the harbinger of the Messianic period. But for the Messiah to come, says Rav Kook, we must do our share and so we open the door and welcome him in. Sitting on our hands and waiting is not enough.

I often asked my parents where their generation was sixty years ago when our people were being murdered and destroyed. Although many stood up, not enough people made their voices heard. Let us bless each other today that when our children and our grandchildren ask us similar questions such as, “Where were you when Jews were mercilessly murdered in

Israel” we will be able to answer that we did stand up and did our best to make a difference.

Let us pray that we will have done our share and opened the door to let G-d in. We must recognize that we can't only ask for hatzalah, where G-d alone intervenes, but we must also do our share to bring about a new era, one of genuine partnership between heaven and earth - a true yeshuah. © 2009 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 NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

A good Rabbi tries to have a repertoire of inspiring Torah thoughts to draw upon at a moment's notice. One never knows when one may be called upon to speak. Stocking up on a few divrei Torah, and rolling one of them out when asked to say a few words, however, often falls somewhat short. These recycled thoughts tend to sound rehearsed, lacking spontaneity and freshness.

The remedy I have found is to internalize a few ideas and thoughts about which one is truly passionate and which are so fundamental they apply almost universally. They ideas do not have to be twisted and stretched to fit an occasion, but spring forth naturally, almost of their own accord.

One such thought is particularly suited to wedding or sheva brochos events. It is related to the famous saying of the sages that the bringing together of husband and wife is as difficult to accomplish as the splitting of the Yam Suf, the Red Sea. This is difficult to understand. For Hashem, the miraculous and the natural are one; both require no effort. This is reflected in the Torah's description of the splitting of the sea that we read in this week's Torah portion: Moshe lifted up his staff and the waters split with a mighty roar. In what way can this miracle be understood as “difficult” for Hashem?

Furthermore, don't the Sages tell us that Hashem had programmed into the Creation that the Red sea should part for the Jews on their way to the promised land? Where is the parallel between this pre-ordained miracle and the pairing of chosson and kallah?

The answer lies in the fundamental concept that what appears in any given “shidduch” to be a new union of two separate individuals, is actually the re-unification of those two components that were formerly a single entity.

This process is readily apparent in the miracle of the splitting of the sea. Before it split, it was one entity -- a large body of water flowing in an uninterrupted manner. It then split into two walls, one opposite the other, to fulfill G-d's will and allow the Jewish people to pass through. At the conclusion of their mission, the two walls came crashing down and united as before.

In a parallel vein, the souls of husband and wife were actually one unit in the celestial fields before they descended to earth. The original man, Adom, and his wife, Chava, were previously two sides of one person. They were then separated in order that each serve as an ezer k'negdo, a corresponding support of strength to one another. So too, in this world, a soul is split into two units and invested in separate bodies with entirely different life conditions. They come together as husband and wife, and at the end of life's journey, the two souls will once again reunite in heaven as one for eternity.

It is for this reason that the Talmud teaches us that Rav Chiya would dance before a bride and groom, reminding them of the day of death. He wasn't simply sobering them up to the day of reality; he was adding to their joy and giving them a deeper awareness and appreciation that finding one another and living as husband and wife is merely a reflection of a deeper reality. Their true marriage was and will be for eternity in the world to come.

Drawing on a personal experience helps me to conceptualize this rather esoteric and mystical concept. My father of blessed memory, was a passionate collector of Hebraic. His stellar collection included many 16th century works and I benefited greatly from his fascinating knowledge of the great authors in the Jewish communities where these profound seforim were produced. To a collector, the title page of any early work is the most valuable part of the book as it provides all the vital details and information regarding the author and the sefer's origin. The information was invariably imparted in a beautiful woodcut. Yet, the title page more often than not in bad condition, tattered and worn, if not wholly ruined.

My father would painstakingly assemble the fragments and have them re-sewn together. He delighted in showing me some restored title pages in which it was hard to detect that the pieces had been delicately re-glued and re-sewn. However, when the page was lifted to the light, the thick lines and patches were clearly visible; one could see that the page was carefully reconstructed.

One time, my father acquired a particularly valuable work with a badly torn title page. A friend referred him to a master craftsman who worked for the British museum restoring old Paris manuscripts. My father was delighted when this man accepted the book and agreed to restore it. He cautioned my father that this would take a few years and he couldn't give a precise date for its return.

I recall the happy occasion when this sefer was finally returned. That Friday night after the meal, my father produced this sefer from its place on the bookshelf with a triumphant flourish. "Look!" he told me. "Lift up the title page to the light and see what a craftsman this fellow is!" Only after squinting carefully at the page could I faintly detect the seam lines where the

page had been restored. It was truly a master craftsman's work of art.

Husband and wife are part of the same "title page." A single entity is separated into two souls by Hashem and ordained from the beginning of time to be re-united in this world. The true ideal union is achieved when we respect, accommodate and empathize with one another. When we reach this level of union, learning to live for one another with the goal of fulfilling the will of our Creator, then just as the two pillars of water merged seamlessly after all the Jews passed through, we too will be seamlessly integrated in the Hereafter.

There is no greater blessing to offer a chosson and kallah than that they should be zoche to this exalted union. It is a blessing that leads to the spiritual bliss we all strive for. © 2013 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Out of Bounds

In this week's parsha the B'nai Yisrael are given the manna. It falls every day from Heaven—except on the Sabbath. The Jews may not collect it on the Shabbos and thus a double portion falls from heaven on Friday. "See that Hashem has given you the Sabbath; that is why He gives you on the sixth day a two-day portion of bread." In addition the Torah proscribes the Jews from traveling distances on the Shabbos. "Let every man remain in his place; let no man leave his place on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29).

Rashi explains that this refers to the t'chum Shabbos, a Shabbos ordinance that confines one's boundaries under certain settings to 2,000 cubits from the initial point of origin. One cannot walk farther than that distance on Shabbos.

Though this is not the forum for a discussion of the intricate laws of Sabbath borders, including certain limitations to the restrictions, one basic question arises: There are many intricate laws regarding Shabbos activities. None were yet mentioned. Why discuss the concept of confinement to an approximate one-mile radius before the Jews learned about the most basic prohibitions of the Sabbath such as lighting new fires or carrying in the public domain? In fact, this law of t'chum does not carry the severe penalties associated with other transgression. Why, then, is it the first Shabbos law that is introduced?

Once a religious man came to the Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchok Zev Soleveitchik, and asked him whether he should join a certain organization comprised of people whose views were antithetical to Torah philosophy. Well intentioned, the man felt that his association would perhaps sway the opinions of the antagonists and create harmony among the factions. He would be able to attend meetings and raise his voice in support of Torah outlook.

The Rav advised him not to get involved. The man unfortunately decided to ignore the advice. Within a few months, he was in a quagmire, because policies and actions of the theologically-skewed organization were being linked to him, and were creating animus toward him throughout the community.

For some reason he could not back out of his commitments to the organization. He was torn. How could he regain his reputation as a Torah observing Jew and ingratiate himself to his former community? He returned to the Brisker Rav and asked him once again for his advice.

The Rav told him the following story. There was a young man who aspired to become a wagon driver. He approached a seasoned wagoner and began his training. After a few weeks, he was ready to be certified.

Before receiving an official certification the veteran decided to pose a few practical applications.

"Let's say," he asked his young charge, "that you decide to take a shortcut and deviate from the main highway. You cut through a forest on a very muddy trail. Your wheels become stuck in the mud and your two passengers become agitated. The horses are struggling to pull out of the mud. They can't seem to get out. What do you do?"

The young driver looked up in thought. "Well," he began, "first I would take some wooden planks and try to get them under the wheels. "Ah!" sighed the old timer, "you made a terrible mistake!" "Why?" retorted the neophyte driver, "I followed procedure in the precise manner! What did I do wrong?"

The old man sighed. "Your mistake was very simple. You don't take shortcuts into muddy forests!"

The activist understood the Brisker Rav's message.

Rav Moshe Feinstein of blessed memory explains that before the Jews were even given the laws of Shabbos they were taught an even more important lesson in life. Before you can embark on life's journeys and even approach the holy Shabbos, you must know your boundaries. So before discussing the details of what you can or can not do on Shabbos, the Torah tells us where we can and cannot go on Shabbos. Sometimes, keeping within a proper environment is more primary than rules of order. Because it is worthless to attempt to venture into greatness when you are walking out of your domain. © 2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd [the nation] believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe" (Sh'mos 14:31). After seeing the sea split, allowing them to pass through it on dry land, and then seeing it return to its usual strength-thereby crashing down on the Egyptians who were chasing them and drowning them-the nation

"believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe." Being that they had just seen the havoc caused by the ten plagues in Egypt, it seems kind of strange that the nation first believed in G-d and in Moshe after "K'riyas Yam Suf," the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. Why did it take so long? Why didn't it happen earlier? What about K'riyas Yam Suf changed their perspective about G-d and Moshe?

Abarbanel does not understand the verse to mean that the nation did not believe at all until now, and only started believing after seeing and experiencing K'riyas Yam Suf. There are different levels of belief, and each successive plague and miracle brought about a higher level of belief. K'riyas Yam Suf caused their belief to reach such a high level that they could (figuratively) point to G-d and say "this is my G-d" (see Rashi on 15:2). Although this notion pertains primarily to believing in G-d, the level of belief that Moshe was "G-d's servant," doing everything that G-d instructed him rather than doing it on his own, is a natural extension of believing in G-d. After all, how can one believe that Moshe was doing what G-d told him to do without first believing in G-d! Therefore as the nation's belief in G-d grew, so did their belief that Moshe was carrying out His instructions. It is this increased level of belief that the verse refers to when it says "and they believed in G-d and in His servant Moshe."

Rabbi Yehonasan Eybeschutz (Tiferes Yehonasan) understands the faith achieved through K'riyas Yam Suf as trust rather than belief. The nation believed in G-d after the plagues, but weren't convinced that everything He did was what was best for them. (After so many Israelites had died during the plague of darkness, see Rashi on 10:22, this is quite understandable.) When G-d led them out of Egypt towards the desert rather than towards the Land of the P'lishtim (a route they must have known about since it was taken by members of the Tribe of Efrayim 30 years earlier, see Sh'mos Rabbah 20:11), they didn't understand why He was taking them the long way to the Promised Land, forcing them not only to travel a farther distance but to travel through the desert instead of along the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. After seeing that going towards the Sea of Reeds led to the Egyptians chasing after them, and going through it led to their drowning, the nation learned their lesson and started to believe that G-d has a good reason for everything he does, even if we don't understand it right away. (This fits very well with Rashbam's comment that the nation now believed they could travel through the desert safely.)

[Although G-d could have led the nation through the Mediterranean (in a semicircle) and accomplished the same thing, there are several reasons why the Red Sea was preferable. First of all, it is possible that splitting a sea without breaking the laws of nature was only possible, or at least plausible enough to allow for someone to attribute it to nature, with the Red Sea, not

the Mediterranean, and G-d greatly prefers (if not insists on) working within nature as much as possible (see <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-berashis-5773>). Secondly, the original request made of Pharaoh was to travel for three days to serve G-d, which was true since it referred to the traveling distance from Egypt to Mt. Sinai (see Ralbag on 3:18). Being that Mt. Sinai was where G-d would give us the Torah (see 3:12), traveling along the Mediterranean coast was not really an option. Also, in order to lure Pharaoh into chasing after his former slaves, G-d had the nation turn back towards Egypt and camp in a spot where Pharaoh thought they were trapped and could think that a deity located there (Baal Tz'fon) was helping him (see Rashi on 14:2). There was likely no area along the "way to the Land of the P'lishtim" that shared these characteristics. Additionally, the spoils that the nation collected after K'riyas Yam Suf was not (just) the precious metals from the armor and chariots of the Egyptians that washed up ashore, but valuables from the storehouses that were nearby, where Yosef had put all the money collected during the years of famine (Mechilta; see <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-beshalach-5772>). Obviously, this wealth was only available near the Red Sea, not near the Mediterranean. (Knowing this would be an additional reason why the nation understood why G-d took them this way, and now trusted Him.)]

According to this, the new-found "trust" in Moshe was only an extension of their new-found trust in G-d. They may have previously trusted that Moshe was carrying out G-d's instructions faithfully without being confident that the instructions were ultimately good for them. Now, though, after gaining trust in G-d, their trust in Moshe was relevant. Netziv also explains the nation's new-found faith/trust in G-d to be an extension of their new-found faith/trust in G-d, suggesting that until now they suspected that Moshe might have been using some sort of trickery (black magic, witchcraft, etc.) to perform the miracles. However, upon seeing how exact G-d's punishment by the sea was, with those Egyptians who were more wicked suffering more, each according to their precise level of wickedness, they now fully believed it was G-d, and realized it had been Him all along. Once they knew it was G-d, they also knew that Moshe wasn't a magician, but His faithful servant.

A straight-forward reading of the text indicates that seeing G-d's "great hand" (14:31) was what led to the nation's epiphany. Until now, they had seen what He had done to Egypt, but were unsure that He was the only true deity. The polytheistic beliefs they had been subjected to in Egypt accepted the validity of many deities, deities that often fought with each other. G-d being victorious over the Egyptian deities may prove that He is greater than them, but not that they are completely false. One of the reasons for the Passover offering was to try to eradicate any belief in the validity of the Egyptian deities (see Ralbag's third and fourth

lessons on Sh'mos 12). This belief was not fully eradicated, however, as evidenced by the sin of the golden calf. (This might explain the reluctance to eat their own cattle when they cried out for food, see 16:2-3). Nevertheless, the miracles that occurred at K'riyas Yam Suf were so great that, at least temporarily, the nation believed that G-d was not just one in a pantheon of deities, but stood alone. If the new-found belief in G-d was related to His absolute sovereignty over everything, we would need to find a different explanation for the new-found faith in His servant Moshe.

Although the exile in Egypt was supposed to last for 400 years, it only lasted for 210 years (see Rashi on 12:40). Moshe's detractors, such as Dasan and Aviram, claimed that Moshe was trying to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt too early (similar to the B'nei Efrayim leaving 30 years too early), and that the plagues were sent against Egypt not because G-d wanted to set His nation free, but because Pharaoh had refused G-d's demand that they be allowed to take a three-day journey to serve Him (see page 3 of <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/beshalach.pdf>). As miraculous as the plagues were, they couldn't convince anyone that Moshe was being a faithful servant; even if Moshe was misrepresenting G-d's wishes, and G-d really wanted the servitude to last for another 190 years, the plagues only indicated that G-d was unhappy with Pharaoh's refusal to let them go on a religious retreat. K'riyas Yam Suf, on the other hand, proved that G-d really did want to redeem His nation, and take them out of Egypt permanently. After all, if G-d wanted the Children of Israel to return to Egypt, why didn't He allow the pursuing Egyptians to recapture them and bring them back? When the sea split, allowing the Children of Israel to permanently escape from Egypt, it became obvious that Moshe wasn't acting on his own, but was following G-d's instructions. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

