

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI ARI WEISS**

### The Proverbial Point

**T**his 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 "ketzetz B'nitoyot" - 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

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**I**n September 2010, BBC, Reuters and other news agencies reported on a sensational scientific discovery. Researchers at US National Center for Atmospheric Research and the University of Colorado have shown 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 mud flats. 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."

So we now have scientific evidence to support



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the biblical account, though to be fair, a very similar case was made some years ago by Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, and Professor of Experimental Physics at the Royal Institution in London, in his book *The Miracles of Exodus*.

To me, though, the real issue is what the biblical account actually is. Because it is just 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 all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." (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 a wall.

The second is that what happened was miraculous 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 Ramses 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 sea bed. 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)

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.

So 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 *ruach*, the human spirit, can expose, beneath the surface of a story, a deeper meaning beneath. ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Moses brought the bones of Joseph with him, since [Joseph] had adjured the children of Israel to take an oath; [Joseph] had said, 'G-d will surely remember you; bring up my bones with you from this [place].'" [Ex. 13:19] At the climax of the ten plagues, with the Israelites escaping their Egyptian slave masters, the Torah suddenly makes reference to a heroic personality from the Book of Genesis, Joseph.

Why interrupt the drama of the Exodus with the detail of concern over Joseph's remains? From a certain perspective, Joseph's name even evokes a jarring note at this moment of Israel's freedom. After all, Joseph may well be seen as representing the opposite of Moses: Joseph begins within the family of Jacob-Israel, and moves outside of it as he rises to great heights in Egypt, whereas Moses begins as a prince of Egypt and moves into the family of Israel when he smites the Egyptian taskmaster.

Joseph is the one who brings the children of Jacob into Egypt whereas Moses takes them out; Joseph gives all of his wisdom and energy to Egypt

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

The fact is that Joseph is a complex and amazing personality who very much stands at the crossroads of—and serves as a vital connection between—the Books of Genesis and Exodus. The jealous enmity of the brothers towards Joseph was in no small way rooted in the grandiose ambition expressed in his dreams: sheaves of grain evoke Egyptian agriculture rather than Israeli shepherding, and the bowing sun, moon and stars smack of Joseph's cosmic domination.

Despite the truths that we have just expressed, Joseph certainly symbolizes not only the Jew who rises to a most prominent position in Egypt—a Henry Kissinger to the tenth degree. He also introduced Pharaoh to the G-d of Israel and the universe, when he stood before the monarch about to interpret his dreams. And is it not Israel's mission to be a kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation with the mandate of perfecting the world in the kingship of the divine?

Moreover, with his very last breaths, in the closing lines of the book of Genesis (50:24–25), does not Joseph profess absolute faith in G-d's eventual return of the Israelites to their homeland, at which time he makes his brothers swear that his remains will be taken “home” to Israel? Despite the prominence he attained in Egypt, he understands that Israel is the only eternal home for the descendants of Abraham!

The Midrash describes a fascinating scene:

When the Israelites went forth from Egypt, two casks [aronot] accompanied them for forty years in the desert: the cask of [the divine Torah that they had received as family tradition until that time] and the casket of Joseph.

The nations of the world would ask, “What is the nature of these two casks? Is it necessary for the cask of the dead to go together with the cask of [Torah]?” The answer is that the one who is buried in this [cask] fulfilled whatever is written in that [cask]. [Tanhuma, Beshalach 2]

Generally this midrash is understood to be saying that Joseph fulfilled the moral commandments already expressed in the Torah from the story of Creation up until and including the Exodus. After all, Joseph was moral and upright, even to the extent of rebuffing the enticements of the beautiful “Mrs. Potiphar,” thereby earning the appellation of “the righteous one.”

However, I would suggest an alternate interpretation: The Torah of the Book of Exodus encased in one cask fulfilled the dreams, expectations

and prophecies of Joseph buried in the other cask.

Joseph foresaw an eventual exodus from Egypt and return to Israel. Joseph also foresaw a cosmic obeisance of the sun, moon and stars to the universal G-d of justice and peace whom he represented. This, too, was fulfilled when the world was paralyzed by the force of the plagues, when the nations trembled at the destruction of Egypt and the victory of the Israelites when the Sea of Reeds split apart:

“Nations heard and shuddered; terror gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. Edom's chiefs then panicked, Moab's heroes were seized with trembling, Canaan's residents melted away...G-d will reign supreme forever and ever.” [Ex. 15:14–15,18]

At the supreme triumphant moment of the Exodus, Moses stops to fulfill a vow and take the bones of Joseph out of Egypt and into Israel with the Israelites. Moses wanted the faith of Joseph, the universality of Joseph, the morality of Joseph, the grandeur of Joseph, to accompany the Israelites throughout their sojourn in the desert (suggesting subsequent Jewish exiles), and to enter the Land of Israel and influence the Jewish commonwealth. ©2017 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**his week's Torah reading mentions the eternal problem that all fundraisers for institutions face – namely, that though one may have been successful in raising great sums of money for buildings, it is much more difficult to raise funds for the necessary daily maintenance of the institution and for the salaries of those who are involved with it on a daily basis.

The Jewish people truly appreciated and sang G-d's praises for extricating them from Egyptian bondage and splitting the sea to allow their exodus to be complete. But they found themselves in the midst of a trackless desert without visible supplies of food, water and shelter. In short, the building has been built but the question of how it would be maintained was still a problem?

The Lord's answer, so to speak, to this fundamental issue is intriguing and instructive. Just as the entire process of the Exodus from Egypt was wholly miraculous, unexpected and beyond mere human comprehension, so too was the sustenance of the Jewish people as they wandered in the desert of Sinai for forty years. It was miraculous, unexpected, unpredictable and also beyond human comprehension.

The line between the miraculous and what we deem to be natural is a blurred one as far as Jewish thought is concerned. Everything in the world is miraculous and everything is also natural and in some ways can be explained rationally.

The rabbis of the Talmud summed this up in the pithy statement of that indigent scholar who had no

money with which to buy oil for the lamp. So he used vinegar instead and confidently stated: "The One Who commanded and ordained that the oil should burn will also command and ordain that vinegar should burn."

Bringing forth wheat from the ground and grinding it into flour and baking it into bread is no less a miracle than manna falling from heaven to sustain millions of people for decades.

The education of the Jewish people, in the forty year course of their initial schooling as a unique and special people, was aimed to make them realize how thin the line is between what we humans consider to be natural and rational, and what is miraculous and beyond our understanding.

It is fairly clear that many times we live in a world that seems to be completely irrational and beyond our understanding and control. However, instead of being humbled by this realization, many times we retain our hubris and arrogance and claim to have true understanding and lasting solutions to difficult problems that constantly arise.

We certainly have to make every attempt to do our best and industriously try to solve our problems. However, at the end of the day, we should realize that we are all sustained by manna from heaven, in whatever form it is received by every generation. The drawing forth of water from the rock by Moshe is certainly to be considered a miraculous event. However, the ability to desalinate salt water from the sea, a process attributed to human creativity and invention, realistically viewed, is no less miraculous. And this overriding lesson that the Torah teaches us in this week's reading, is a basic axiom of Judaism and Jewish life. ©2017 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

"Where 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 seventy-five 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. ©2017 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

#### **ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT**

### **Beautifying the Mitzvot**

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

"This is my G-d and I will adorn him" (zeh keli v'anvehu ) The sentence quoted in the title (zeh keli v'anvehu ) is found in this week's portion and is the source for beautifying the Mitzvot – decorating the Succah, acquiring a nice Lulav and Etrog , to blow on Rosh Hashannah from a nice Shofar, to wear a beautiful Tallit etc. Not only are we required to beautify the actual Mitzva but we must as well

decorate the utensils that carry or cloak the Mitzva. Thus we not only embellish the first fruits that were brought to the Holy Temple but we also adorn the wagon that carries the fruit and the oxen that lead the wagon. We are also forbidden to eat before the Seder on Pesach so that we can eat the matzah heartily (B'teavon), which also fulfills the Mitzvah of "zeh keli v'anvehu".

Our Sages question whether this Mitzvah- using the sentence quoted above- is derived from the Torah or it is Rabbinic in nature. Some believe that the Mitzvah is generated from the Torah however the Rabbis quantify how "Hiddur" (beutification) is achieved. This conflict would arise in certain situations when the obligation of "Hiddur" creates a struggle if it conflicts with other obligations whether from the Torah (Mdioryta) or from the Rabbis (mdirabanan).

For example what would be the law if a person had an Etrog in the morning but he knew that during the day he would have a more Mehudar one? Shall he recite the Bracha now since the mitzvah is in his hand or should he wait for the more Mehudar Etrog? (In this case actually he may make the Bracha twice).

In addition what would be the law if ones action will negate or shame (bizayon) a future action as in the case of a person lighting Chanukah candles made of wax and then he receives pure olive oil? May he then light the candles with the more Mehudar oil? May he switch the candles to fulfill the Mitzvah of "Zeh keli veanvehu"?

### Preparation (Hachanah)

There are numerous laws that one may derive from this week's Parsha when it states "and it will be on the sixth day when they prepare what they bring" (Shmot 17:5)

Firstly, one should prepare properly on Friday for the Shabbat so that one has enough to eat on Shabbat. Secondly, the food that was not prepared for the Shabbat would be forbidden to use on Shabbat

Our sages also learn from this that one is permitted to prepare on Friday for Shabbat but not from Shabbat to Sunday. Thus many people do not wash dishes or pots on Shabbat because they will not use them again until after Shabbat. Some people also don't fold their Tallit after prayers and wait until after Shabbat for the same reason.

From the implications of this law our Rabbis also derive that one is not permitted to prepare from Yom Tov to Shabbat. The only way they permit this is by making an "Eruv Tavshillin" which in essence requires the individual to begin some preparation on the weekday before Yom Tov for Shabbat. (In addition a declaration must be said before Yom Tov, designating certain cooked foods for use on Shabbat).

The situations cited are all examples of preparations by man. However we really didn't need a

special sentence quoted above for this, for it states later in the Torah "Et asher Tofu eifu" (bake what you wish to bake 17;23 in preparation for Shabbat) ?

Therefore our Rabbis posit that here we are speaking about something that was prepared by the heavens such as an egg that was laid on Shabbat (which is one of the main subjects in Tractate Beitzah, ) which one may not use on Shabbat and the Yom Tov that follows or from Yom Tov to Shabbat because there was no designated preparation before Shabbat or Yom Tov. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

## Weekly Dvar

After the Jews made it across the sea, this week's Parsha (Beshalach) introduces the Jews singing in joy. Moshe sang with the men (15:1), and then Miriam sang with the women (15:21). Both of them sang, while the people responded. However, when Miriam sang, the Passuk (verse) says that she responded to "them" in masculine form. If she sang with the women, why is the word in masculine form? Also, of all the verses that Miriam chose to repeat of Moshe's song, she chose the verse "sing to G-d because He's great; horse and wagon drowned in the sea." Why did she choose this seemingly random verse?

To understand this, we must ask ourselves why the horses drowned, if only their riders had sinned? Rav Chashin tells of a much deeper exchange between Moshe and Miriam: After Moshe sang with the men, Miriam responded to Moshe in the form of a metaphor by telling him that the horses were punished just like the soldiers on their backs because they facilitated those soldiers. By the same token, Miriam is telling Moshe that the women deserve just as much credit as the men, regardless of their difference in familial roles. Miriam's message couldn't be more true today: Helping someone follow the Torah's laws is as important as personally following the Torah's laws, and is in fact following those laws. If we all try our best to follow the Torah's laws, and help others do the same, we'll all sing together, in harmony. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

### RABBI DOV KRAMER

## Taking a Closer Look

“A nd G-d did not lead them via the road to the land of the P'lishtim, for it was close, for G-d said, 'lest the nation become regretful when they see war and return to Egypt' (Sh'mos 13:17). The wording of this verse, with two clauses explaining why G-d took the Children of Israel through the desert rather than along the Mediterranean Coast ("because it was close" and "because they might become regretful") has generated much discussion.

Some (quoted by Ibn Ezra; see Ramban and

Chizkuni) explain the first clause not as a reason why G-d avoided the coastal road, but a reason why it would have been preferable to take it (it's a much shorter route), with the verse reading "G-d did not lead them via the road to the land of the P'lishtim even though it was closer, because G-d said, 'lest the nation become regretful when they are faced with war and return to Egypt.'" However, since the Torah used the same term ("ki") for both clauses, it would seem that both are meant to explain why G-d chose the route He did.

Rashi combines the two clauses into one, with facing war likely causing the nation to turn around and go back because they were still so close to Egypt (making it easy to return). However, as Ramban points out, if it was meant as one long clause it shouldn't have been interrupted by "for G-d said." Either that part is superfluous, or it should have preceded both parts of the clause (with only one "ki" being necessary).

Chazal give various explanation for both clauses. Among the explanations offered by the Mechilta (and other Midrashim) as to what was "too close" are: that it was too short a distance to return to Egypt (when facing adversity); that it was too close (time wise) to when Avraham had sworn that his children wouldn't harm Avimelech's (see B'reishis 21:23); that it was too early to drive out the Canaanites; that it was too soon after the Canaanites had destroyed their own property (thinking that the Children of Israel were coming to inherit the land from them) so more time was needed for everything to grow back/be rebuilt; and that entering the Promised Land so soon after the exodus would mean having to take care of it (plowing/planting/harvesting, etc.) instead of having time to learn Torah and absorb it properly. The explanation for the second clause is rather straightforward; the nation might regret leaving Egypt when they are faced with the prospect of fighting a war, a war that they may be able to avoid by taking another route.

The fact that each clause is explained independently, as a separate reason why G-d didn't lead the nation along the Mediterranean coast, indicates that Chazal understood them to be two separate reasons. This would explain why the word "ki" ("for" or "because") is used twice, with each introducing a different reason for G-d not choosing the coastal road. However, it would not explain why the words "for G-d said" are inserted between the two reasons.

The expression "for he said" (or "for He said") is used throughout the Torah as a means of expressing why a certain choice was made. Taking a closer look at one example (which appears twice) may shed light upon why the word "said" is included when giving the reason, even though the word "for" or "because" ("ki") should be enough of an introduction to let us know that what follows is the reason this choice was made.

After escaping Pharaoh's death sentence

(Sh'mos 2:15), Moshe ends up in Midyan, where he marries Yisro's daughter, Tziphora (2:21). They have a son, whom Moshe names Gershom, "for he (Moshe) would say 'I was a sojourner in a foreign land'" (2:22, see also 18:3). Later (18:3-4), we learn that Moshe and Tziphora had a second son, Eliezer, "for the G-d of my father helped me, saving me from Pharaoh's sword." Since Gershom was born in Midyan, why did Moshe use the past tense ("I was a sojourner") rather than the present tense ("for I am a sojourner")? Additionally, the order of the names should have been reversed, as first Moshe was first saved from Pharaoh and then he fled to Midyan. Yet Moshe names his firstborn by referencing his living in a strange land and his second son for G-d having saved him.

The Ba'al Haturim (18:4) asks why when referring to Gershom (both in 2:22 and in 18:3) the Torah says "ki amar" (for he said), yet by Eliezer it just states why he was given that name, without prefacing it with "for he said." In order to explain this, the Ba'al Haturim brings a Midrash (Mechilta, Yisro 1:3) that says that before Yisro let Moshe marry his daughter, he made him promise that their first son would worship idols, while any others born could worship Moshe's G-d. Therefore, Gershom, the firstborn, was not circumcised until the angel tried to kill him (4:24-26). [When Tziphora circumcised him, she relinquished Moshe from this oath.] Moshe wanted it known that he was forced to accept Yisro's condition, so he not only named his son appropriately ("for I was a stranger in a foreign land"), but also explained why he gave him that name ("ki amar"). On the other hand, Moshe didn't want it known that he had killed someone and was sentenced to death because of it, and therefore didn't publicize the reason for Eliezer's name. [Moshav Zekainim (a compilation of the commentary of the Ba'alei Tosfos) says (4:24) that the reason the Torah doesn't call Gershom his "first" son and Eliezer his "second" son (18:3-4), instead referring to each as "one son," is precisely because Eliezer was his first son designated to serve G-d.]

Even though Moshe was saved from Pharaoh before fleeing to Midyan, since it was specifically the first son that had been promised to Yisro, this son had to be named Gershom. Moshav Zekainim (18:3-4; see also Panayach Razah on 18:4) adds that this son could not have been named Eliezer, as it was inappropriate to include G-d's name when referencing a son who was designated to be an idol worshipper. [This is not the place to explain what Moshe, or Yisro, was thinking. Suffice it to say (for now) that some suggest Yisro wanted his grandson to find G-d by first experiencing other forms of worship, as he did, thereby (eventually) having a greater appreciation of the One True G-d.]

While he was still living in Midyan, there was no need for Moshe to explain why he had accepted Yisro's prerequisite. It was only when rejoining his brethren,

who were fellow monotheists, that he would want the reason for Gershom's name publicized. Therefore he used the past tense, "for I was a stranger in a foreign land."

The take-away (for our purposes) is that the expression "for he said" refers to when the reason is "said" to others, whether the information is intended for a small audience or a large one. Moshe wanted others to know why he gave his first child the name Gershom (or, more precisely, why he agreed to Yisro's condition), so publicized it ("for he said"). He didn't want to share why his second son was named Eliezer, so the expression "for he said" is not used in connection with his name.

Applying this to our verse, there are two clauses stating why G-d didn't lead the Children of Israel along the coastal road. The first one, "because it was too close," was not shared with anyone (at least not until the text of the Torah was given). Whether because most wouldn't understand why they had to take the long way (even if the reasons, stated above, had been shared with it) or because G-d didn't want to share those reasons yet, we are told why G-d chose the route he did, but those who left Egypt were not privy to this information (at least not right away), so "for G-d said" is not used to introduce this clause. That the nation would be afraid of war, on the other hand, was shared; knowing that taking the coastal road meant going to war was important enough to be explained as soon as they started traveling. Therefore, before stating the second clause the Torah adds "for G-d said," telling us that this was shared with others right away, when they started on their trip. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah shows the effect of the Jewish nation's faith in Hashem irrespective of their level of mitzva observance. After the passing of Moshe Rabbeinu's devout disciple, Joshua the Jewish people were led by numerous judges. Their authority and influence was considerably limited and the Jewish people adopted foreign cultures and strayed from the Torah's ways. They typically fluctuated between sincere service of Hashem and repulsive idolatry. Hashem would respond to their abhorrent behavior and release one of the powerful nations to oppress them. The Jewish people would hear the message and sincerely return to Hashem until they succumbed again to foreign influences.

This week's haftorah speaks of one of those times when the Jewish nation severely strayed from the path. Hashem responded and permitted Yovin, the king of Canaan to capture the Jewish nation and annex her to his mighty empire. After twenty years of firm control the message hit home and the Jewish people began to repent. Hashem recognized their initial stages of

repentance and sent the Prophetess Devorah to help them complete the process. They merited through her efforts an incredible miracle and Devorah composed a moving song of praise describing Hashem's revelations.

The miracle occurred when Devora instructed the leading Jewish general, Barak to select ten thousand men and charge into the Canaanite lines. Yovin gathered an army of hundreds of thousands and planned a massive attack against the Jewish people. Hashem intervened on behalf of His people and created an illusion of enormous proportions forcing the Canaanites to flee for their lives. In the midst of this, Hashem sent blazing heat to the battle front and brought the Canaanites down to the Kishon Brook to cool off. At that exact moment, Hashem caused the brook to overflow and drown the Canaanites. Devorah sang about this miracle and said, "Kishon Brook swept them away -- that brook of age my soul treads with strength." (Shoftim 5: 21) Devorah referred to the Kishon as a brook of age seeming to relate it an earlier experience.

Chazal explain that this earlier incident was, in fact, the splitting of the Sea of Reeds recorded in this week's parsha. They quote an intriguing conversation between Hashem and the angel appointed over the sea of Reeds. Chazal reflect upon a verse in Tehillim (106:7) that indicates the Jewish people's imperfect faith while crossing the sea. Chazal explain that although the entire nation heard Moshe Rabbeinu's prediction of Egypt's downfall at the sea many found it difficult to accept in full. Hence, after the sea miraculously opened they entertained the possibility that Egyptians were also safely crossing and would continue their chase. The Jewish people felt undeserving of a miracle performed solely for their sake and reasoned that the sea split in numerous places. Hashem dispelled this fiction and instructed the angel over the Sea of Reeds to cast the dying Egyptians onto shore. When the Jewish people saw this they understood retroactively what truly transpired for them.

The angel, however, argued that the fish deserved their promised prize of thousands of Egyptian bodies and requested a replacement in the future. Hashem consented and informed the angel that the Kishon Brook would eventually sweep replacements into the sea and grant the fish their earlier present. (Mesichta Pesachim 115b)

The above discussion suggests a direct corollary between the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the overflowing Kishon Brook. It points to a missing dimension of faith at the sea that was ultimately rectified through the Kishon Brook. The analogy of the fish reflects the Jewish people's imperfect perception of Hashem's miracles. The splitting of the sea served a dual function -- to rescue the Jewish people and to punish the Egyptian nation. The first function was fully accomplished however the second was not. Although

the mighty Yam Suf waters delivered the Egyptians their fair share of brutal torture it did not drown them. In essence, the sea played an imperfect role in Hashem's miraculous scheme. This undoubtedly reflected the Jewish people's imperfect faith in Hashem's miracles and concern for His people. The angel of the sea responded to Hashem that the sea deserved a perfect role in Hashem's miracles and should be granted future opportunity for a perfect revelation of Hashem's might. Hashem responded to the angel that the miracle of the Kishon Brook would serve this capacity in full.

In the days of the prophetess Devorah the Jewish people's spiritual level suffered serious decline. They shared similar feelings with the Jewish people at the Sea of Reeds and feel unworthy of great revelations. They recently began their long process of return and could not imagine Hashem performing miracles on their behalf. However, when Devora instructed Barak to select ten thousand men and charge into the massive Canaanite army he immediately accepted his role. He and his men demonstrated total faith in Hashem and believed wholeheartedly that Hashem would perform an open miracle solely on their behalf. Although their level of spirituality was far from perfect they displayed total faith in Hashem. This time they had no doubts and Hashem did not need to prove His involvement on behalf of His people. The sea was therefore granted its full role and its fish eagerly devoured the wicked Canaanites sent to it by the Kishon brook. This miracle was unequivocally clear and bore testimony to all of Hashem's absolute commitment to His people and total involvement on their behalf. Although their mitzva observance was far from perfect they were sincerely committed to rectifying it and deserved Hashem's grace and favor.

We learn from this the power of absolute trust in Hashem. Many question how the present Jewish people could deserve to witness the miraculous era of Mashiach. Our spiritual level is far from perfect and certainly does not warrant Hashem's intervention on our behalf. Let us draw strength and encouragement from our Haftorah's lesson and realize what Hashem expects from us. The road to return is undoubtedly long, however, Hashem only asks for sincerity. Let us resolve to follow Hashem's lead wherever He takes us and trust that He cares for us in untold proportions. In this merit we will hopefully be privileged to witness Hashem's greatest revelations ever to be seen, surpassing even those in Egypt and at the Sea of Reeds. ©2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

**SHLOMO KATZ**

## Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, we find the beginning of the receiving of the Torah.

On the verse (15:25), "There He established for [the nation] a decree and an ordinance, and there

He tested it," Rashi z"l comments: "He gave them a few sections of the Torah in order that they might engage in study thereof -- the sections containing the command regarding Shabbat, the red heifer and the administration of justice."

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) writes: This is wondrous! Why does the Torah not spell out the laws as it does in other places-"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and command them, etc." From Rashi's wording it seems that [Moshe did not teach these laws as "official" commandments; rather] he told them that this is what they would be commanded to keep in the future, when Hashem would give them the Torah at Har Sinai. In this light, says Ramban, we can understand why the Torah calls these commandments a "test." Bnei Yisrael were being tested to see whether they could accustom themselves to mitzvot and accept them with joy.

R' Simcha Mordechai Ziskind Broide z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000) asks: How would these few mitzvot reveal whether or not Bnei Yisrael were ready to receive the whole Torah? He explains:

Ramban teaches (in his commentary to Sefer Devarim) that the Torah expects more of us than merely keeping the mitzvot. We are called upon to learn from the mitzvot what Hashem's Will is. For instance, the Torah tells us not to speak lashon hara, not to take revenge, to stand up for our elders, etc., and from these examples of interpersonal behavior, we are supposed to learn how to interact with our fellow men. When Hashem taught the laws of Shabbat, the red heifer and the administration of justice in our parashah, the purpose was to see whether Bnei Yisrael would look behind those mitzvot to see the Will of Hashem that those laws represent. If Bnei Yisrael succeeded in doing that, it would indicate that they would know what to do with the other mitzvot as well. (Sahm Derech: Ha'yashar Ve'hatov p.19) © 2012 S. Katz & torah.org

