

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**T**he Lord is my strength and song, and He is my salvation; this is my G-d, and I will glorify Him; my father's G-d, and I will exalt Him" (Exodus 15:2). This week's Biblical portion describes in prose (chapter 14) and in poetry (chapter 15) the final and decisive victory of the Hebrew slaves over the Egyptian despots at the Reed Sea. The Bible records how Moses extends his hands over the waves; the turbulent waters split and recede before the advancing Israelites, enabling them to pass through on dry land while the Egyptians in hot pursuit are drowned. But what was the precise significance of this victory of the G-d of Israel over the gods of the most powerful nation on earth?

Secondly, why does the Torah use the names of idolatrous shrines to describe where the Israelites were standing on the seashore? "And G-d said to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and let them turn back and encamp before Pi Hahirof between Migdal and the sea in front of the Master [god] of the North [Hebrew, Ba'al Tzefon]; you shall encamp opposite it, by the sea" (Exodus 14:2). Seven verses later again we read, "and the Egyptians pursued after them and overtook them, encamped near the sea... near the mouth of Hicrot in front of the Master [god] of the North" (14:9). Apparently, both of these names refer to idolatrous shrines, Hicrot being identified with the god Haurus and the 'Master of the North' being the last remaining Egyptian god (see Rashi 14:2). Why highlight these idolatrous shrines? Surely it would have been sufficient to tell us that the Israelites encamped near the entrance to the Reed Sea?

Finally, when the Israelites cry out in prayer to G-d and in complaint to Moses for taking them out of Egypt to die at the hands of the Egyptians, Moses comforts them, telling them to remain where they are and promising G-d's miraculous salvation: "Hashem yilachem lachem v'atem tacharishun," or, "The Lord will do battle for you and you will remain silent" (14:14). In the very next verse, G-d seems to be chiding Moses, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out in prayer to Me? Speak to the children of the Israel and let them begin to advance [into the sea]'" (14:15). In other words, they should not merely stand by and wait for Me, they must act (see Rashi, ad loc). How and why is G-d tweaking, or changing and perfecting, Moses' vision?

In order to understand our text, I would submit that the Hebrew word Hicrot is closely related to the Hebrew word herut, which means freedom; the Bible is hinting that at this historic and climatic moment, the Hebrews are poised theologically between the Egyptian idolatry of Baal Tzefon, the 'Master of the North,' and their imminent freedom under the supreme G-d who will effectuate redemption together with them.

In Egypt, people lived in a mysterious, idolatrous world controlled by jealous and warring gods; every phenomenon was attributed to these gods before whom the individual was powerless. All that humans could hope to do was to propitiate or bribe the gods with gifts and ritual prowess.

Let us switch gears for a moment, and examine a different Hebrew phrase sung by the Israelites after the splitting of the Reed Sea: "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him ("Ve'anve'hu," 15:2). This Hebrew word, which many translate as "glorify," is obscure. Targum Onkelos builds on the root word "haveh," which means "house," and so translates, "I shall build Him a Temple." Rashi isolates the Hebrew noi, which means "beauty," and explains the word as meaning, "I shall speak of His beauty and praise," - I will praise Him to the world and I will pray to Him with words of praise. The sages of the Talmud offer two other interpretations: "I will beautify His commandments before Him," also building on Rashi's basic root noi, but taking it to signify beautifying the ritual objects - such as the sukkah, teffilin, or Kiddush cup which He asks us to use. And finally, the Talmudic sage Abba Shaul breaks down the Hebrew word anve'hu into two words, "ani veHu," meaning He and I, thus interpreting it as, "I will strive to walk in His ways and to emulate His attributes."

It is this last interpretation which I find most meaningful. Serving G-d in the deepest sense doesn't only mean building Him a Temple, or praising Him with words of prayer, or adorning Him, as it were, with beautiful ritual objects. Indeed, all of these things - if done for the wrong reasons - may become another form of propitiating and even bribing the King of all kings. Unlike idolatry, we do not make our G-d in our image, desirous of a fancy home, words of praise and ritual gifts.

We, created in His image, serve Him best only when we observe his commandments and adopt His attributes, walk in His ways, and attempt to perfect His world in ways of freedom, morality and peace. We pray to G-d not only to praise Him, but also to draw closer to

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Him - to be better enabled to adopt His creativity and lovingkindness. We observe commandments using ritual objects and study His divine words not in order to please or propitiate Him but rather in order to observe His will, internalize His values and attempt to bring about His world vision. So it is not what you say to G-d, or what you build or beautify for G-d, which is important; it is rather who you are and how you act.

After all, we are created in G-d's image and G-d wants us to utilize our freedom to choose to create and not to destroy; to be His partners in perfecting an imperfect world (Isaiah 45:7). G-d Himself is waiting for our actions and our initiatives to redeem humanity and realize the prophetic vision of the Messiah. G-d wants us to act in this world with courage and integrity. Hence, G-d chides Moses when he tells the Israelites to stand and wait for G-d to do all the work. Indeed, the Hassidic Masters reinterpreted Moses' aforementioned words to the Israelites, "Hashem yilachem lachem v'atem tacharishun" (Exodus 14:14) as follows: "G-d will give you bread [reading 'lechem,' bread, instead of 'lachem,' to you] but you must first plough ['tacharishun' can mean 'to plough,' in addition to meaning 'to be silent']".

And so the best interpretation I know of "Ve'anve'hu" is given by Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch: "This is my G-d and I must become His house" - I must be an expression of His will in every word I utter, in every thing I do. Then truly "ani v'Hu," He and I, will establish a true partnership dedicated to the perfection of the world. The victory at the Reed Sea was a victory of freedom (herut) over subjugation, of a G-d who wanted a true and free partner over gods who only want to be slavishly praised and handsomely bribed. When the Israelites acted courageously for freedom, G-d was triumphant over Pharaohic enslavement and idolatry.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The people of Israel had a charmed existence in their life in the desert. Unlike us, their descendants, they did not face economic downturns or long lines waiting at the supermarket checkout counter. Their food was delivered to them daily (for the righteous at their doorstep) and a magical well of Miriam sustained their needs for water without bills and taxes and surcharges.

The great clouds of honor protected them from heat and the sun and their clothing was miraculously laundered and cleaned for them. It was the idyllic life. But apparently it wasn't. The rest of the Torah, including this week's parsha, is replete with repeated complaints about the food, the water, about everything, about life itself.

Their memories of Egypt become fonder and fonder and their ingratitude towards Moshe and G-d reaches startling proportions. Moshe, the redeemer of Israel and their unquestionably revered leader, is heard to say to G-d in this week's parsha that he feels his life endangered by the murmurings of dissatisfaction of the people against G-d and him. "Soon they will stone me," he states.

What happened to their belief in "G-d and in Moshe, His servant?" How did it occur that they could complain about the marvelous situation of security and freedom in which they now found themselves? How can they proclaim that they want to return to Egypt, the country of their oppression and persecution? These questions are very disturbing ones and all of the great Jewish commentators to the Torah have attempted to deal with them.

Though each of the commentators offers a differently nuanced answer to these questions there is a common thread that runs through all of their words and ideas. And that is that human beings are basically dissatisfied creatures. The rabbis taught us that he who has one hundred (million, billion, trillion?) always wishes for two hundred!

The rabbis, therefore, defined wealth in terms of personal satisfaction and gratitude and they ruefully remarked that there are rather few wealthy people present in our world. "Most of the world is poor," they declaimed and they were not speaking of material artificially and statically arrived at poverty lines. In fact, the largesse and ease poured unto our ancestors as they left Egypt was meant to teach them that no amount of material well being would ever be enough for them.

There had to be another dimension that had to enter their lives and beings. And that was an intangible one of spirit and holy purpose, of G-dly behavior and gratitude for life itself. It was represented by the Torah that they would receive and accept at Mount Sinai fifty days after their liberation from Egyptian slavery.

For fifty days their ingratitude would be forgivable for they had no other insight into life except the always unsatisfactory material one. After receiving the Torah at Sinai they would now be held to a higher standard of appreciation and thankfulness.

That has been the secret of Jewish resilience and survival throughout many a very bleak physical time. It remains valid and true for our current time as well. © 2010 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

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Although the Torah often points out the infinite value of every human life, this week's parsha gives a clear message about the value of Jewish life. We are told that no one will be permitted to murder Jews with impunity.

In the Shirat Hayam (Song at the Sea), Moshe (Moses) and the Jewish people use three expressions to describe the downfall of the Egyptians. The Egyptians drowning in the sea are described as "they descended in the depths like stone." (Exodus 15:5) In a second expression, Moshe describes the defeat of the Egyptians in the following manner. "You sent forth Your wrath it consumes them like straw." (Exodus 15:7) There is one other image used to portray the drowning. The Jews sing out that "they sank as lead in the mighty waters." (Exodus 15:10)

One could claim that these phrases seem contradictory. Did the Egyptians sink like stone, like straw or like lead? Which was it?

Rashi notes that these variant similes are descriptive of different Egyptians who were punished in accordance with what they deserved. The most wicked were tossed around like weightless straw-they were allowed to brutally suffer. The best of the group drowned like lead, which of course sinks immediately-they suffered the least. Those who did not fall into any clear category sank like stones.

What emerges from Rashi is the precision of punishment, moreover, the clear statement that those who were guilty of oppressing and murdering Jews would receive their due.

In 1956, Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik wrote that with the establishment of the State of Israel, "G-d...suddenly manifested Himself." One such manifestation was that "Jewish blood is not free for taking, is not hefker." (Kol Dodi Dofek) During the Shoah, Jewish life, for most of the world, was worthless. It is said that in Hungary it was decided that Jews would not even be gassed before being incinerated. The cost of the gassing was a fraction of a penny. Even in death we were worth nothing.

With the establishment of the state, Rav Soloveitchik declared that one could sense G-d's presence in that Jews would be protected. No one would be able to spill blood in Israel without a strong response. The Jewish community in Israel was sending a message to Jews in the exile who felt more vulnerable-"Don't be afraid."

Even as we seek peace - Jewish life is precious. One can only hope that Israel find peace while keeping true to the principle of "Jewish blood is not cheap." © 2010 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 SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The division of the Red Sea is engraved in Jewish memory. We recite it daily in the morning service, at the transition from the Verses of Praise to the beginning of communal prayer. We speak of it again after the Shema, just before the Amidah. It was the supreme miracle of the exodus. But in what sense?

If we listen carefully to the narratives, we can distinguish two perspectives. This is the first: "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 . . . The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen-the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left." (Exodus 14: 22, 28-29)

The same note is struck in the Song at the Sea:
By the blast of Your nostrils
the waters piled up.

The surging waters stood firm like a wall;
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. (Exodus 15: 8)

The emphasis here is on the supernatural dimension of what happened. Water, which normally flows, stood upright. The sea parted to expose dry land. The laws of nature were suspended. Something happened for which there can be no scientific explanation. However, if we listen carefully, we can also hear a different note: 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. (Exodus 14: 21)

Here there is not a sudden change in the behaviour of water, with no apparent cause. G-d brings a wind that, in the course of several hours, drives the waters back. Or consider this passage: During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. The Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." (Exodus 14: 24-25).

The emphasis here is less on miracle than on irony. The great military assets of the Egyptians - making them almost invulnerable in their day - were their horses and chariots. These were Egypt's specialty. They still were, in the time of Solomon, five centuries later: Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem . . . They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. (I Kings 10: 26-29)

Viewed from this perspective, the events that took place could be described as follows: The Israelites had arrived at the Reed Sea at a point at which it was shallow. Possibly there was a ridge in the sea bed, normally covered by water, but occasionally - when, for example, a fierce east wind blows - exposed. This is how the Cambridge University physicist Colin Humphreys puts it in his recent book *The Miracles of Exodus* (2003): "Wind tides are well known to oceanographers. For example, a strong wind blowing along Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes, has produced water elevation differences of as much as sixteen feet between Toledo, Ohio, on the west, and Buffalo, New York, on the east . . . There are reports that Napoleon was almost killed by a "sudden high tide" while he was crossing shallow water near the head of the Gulf of Suez." (pp. 247-48)

In the case of the wind that exposed the ridge in the bed of the sea, the consequences were dramatic. Suddenly the Israelites, traveling on foot, had an immense advantage over the Egyptian chariots that were pursuing them. Their wheels became stuck in the mud. The charioteers made ferocious efforts to free them, only to find that they quickly became mired again. The Egyptian army could neither advance nor retreat. So intent were they on the trapped wheels, and so reluctant were they to abandon their prized war machines, the chariots, that they failed to notice that the wind had dropped and the water was returning. By the time they realized what was happening, they were trapped. The ridge was now covered with sea water in either direction, and the island of dry land in the middle was shrinking by the minute. The mightiest army of the ancient world was defeated, and its warriors drowned, not by a superior army, not by human opposition at all, but by its own folly in being so focused on capturing the Israelites that they ignored the fact that they were driving into mud where their chariots could not go.

We have here two ways of seeing the same events: one natural, the other supernatural. The supernatural explanation - that the waters stood upright - is immensely powerful, and so it entered Jewish memory. But the natural explanation is no less compelling. The Egyptian strength proved to be their weakness. The weakness of the Israelites became their strength. On this reading, what was significant was less the supernatural than the moral dimension of what happened. G-d visits the sins on the sinners. He mocks those who mock Him. He showed the Egyptian army, which reveled in its might, that the weak were stronger than they - just as He later did with the pagan prophet Bilaam, who prided himself in his prophetic powers and was then shown that his donkey (who could see the angel Balaam could not see) was a better prophet than he was.

To put it another way: a miracle is not necessarily something that suspends natural law. It is, rather, an event for which there may be a natural

explanation, but which - happening when, where and how it did - evokes wonder, such that even the most hardened sceptic senses that G-d has intervened in history. The weak are saved; those in danger, delivered. More significantly still is the moral message such an event conveys: that hubris is punished by nemesis; that the proud are humbled and the humble given pride; that there is justice in history, often hidden but sometimes gloriously revealed.

Not all Jewish thinkers focused on the supernatural dimension of G-d's involvement in human history. Maimonides, for example, writes: The Israelites did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the miraculous signs he performed. When someone's faith is founded on miraculous signs, there is always a lingering doubt in the mind that these signs may have been performed with magic or witchcraft. All the signs Moses performed in the wilderness, he did because they were necessary, not to establish his credentials as a prophet. (*Yesodei ha-Torah*, 8: 1)

What made Moses the greatest of the prophets, says Maimonides, it not that he performed supernatural deeds but that, at Mount Sinai, he brought the people the word of G-d. Nachmanides, with a somewhat different approach, emphasizes the phenomenon he calls a "hidden miracle", an event that, though consistent with the laws of nature, is no less wondrous: the existence of the universe, the fact that we are here, the sustenance and shelter with which we are provided, and so on. "G-d", said Einstein, "does not play dice with the universe." The astonishing complexity of life, and the sheer improbability of existence (nowadays known as the anthropic principle), are miracles disclosed by science, not challenged by science.

The genius of the biblical narrative of the crossing of the Reed Sea is that it does not resolve the issue one way or another. It gives us both perspectives. To some the miracle was the suspension of the laws of nature. To others, the fact that there was a naturalistic explanation did not make the event any less miraculous. That the Israelites should arrive at the sea precisely where the waters were unexpectedly shallow, that a strong east wind should blow when and how it did, and that the Egyptians' greatest military asset should have proved their undoing - all these things were wonders, and we have never forgotten them.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Coventry - January 2009

It's said that if you drop a frog in boiling water it'll jump out. But if you put it in cold water and heat it to boiling point slowly enough it will stay and die. Hate can be like that water. It heats slowly, but it kills. And so it happened in the Holocaust.

First came centuries of prejudice. Jews were said to be different, alien. Then worse. Jews are responsible for the bad things that happen in our world. Then worse again. Jews are lice, vermin that have to be

exterminated. Then came the measures, slowly, gradually. 1933, Nazis boycott Jewish businesses. They prohibit Jews from owning land, being newspaper editors.

1934. Jews are no longer allowed national health insurance. They are banned from law, the arts, the universities. 1935 The Nuremberg Laws. Jews are no longer citizens. Now they have no legal rights. Everything slowly, gradually. 1942, the Wannsee Conference which maps out the Final Solution and the decision to exterminate the entire Jewish population of Europe, an estimated 11 million persons. And still the worst has not yet begun.

And who protested? Almost no one. Jews had friends, neighbours, colleagues, who might have raised their voice. Some did. Most did not. And the tragedy is that had people protested it would have made a difference. Eventually some did protest the euthanasia of the mentally ill, and that programme was stopped.

Martin Luther King was right. 'In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.' Sometimes hate comes not as boiling water, but as a slow heating of the atmosphere, so gentle you hardly know it's happening, with beginnings so mild that if you take a stand, people think you're paranoid, scared by phantoms that aren't really there. But they are.

So when I see antisemitism, which I do, I protest. But I protest too when Muslims are targeted, or Hindus or Sikhs, or other groups in our society, for hate is dangerous, whoever holds it and whoever they hold it against. I go to schools to translate the message of the holocaust for us today. When I broadcast I try to speak about tolerance and the need to be vigilant against hate.

We must all take a stand whenever we see hate or prejudice in any form. We can all make a difference. © 2010 Rabbi Sir J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**T**here (in Marah) statute and law were set for him" (Shemos 15:25). Rashi explains this to mean "in Marah [G-d] gave them partial sections of Torah that they should become busy in; Shabbos, Para Aduma (the red heifer used in the purification process) and [civil] laws." The commentators discuss how Rashi knew which commandments were taught at Marah, including what his source was. There are numerous sources that mention what was taught there, yet Rashi eschews sources he usually relies on (the Talmud, Seder Olam Rabba and the Mechilta), and instead quotes (almost verbatim) Seder Olam Zuta (4:21). Why did Rashi go with the more obscure Midrash (a Midrash most commentators didn't even know of, leading many to assume that there must be an unknown Midrash that

Rashi was using, and one to suggest that it was a scribal error) rather than a more "mainstream" source?

Let's take a look at what the sources say. According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 56b) and Seder Olam Rabba (5) there were ten commandments commanded at Marah; the seven Noachide laws, [civil] laws, Shabbos, and honoring parents. Para Aduma is not included in these sources, while Rashi omits honoring parents. (Rashi also leaves out the Noachide laws.) The Mechilta (Beshalach, Vayosa 1) quotes two opinions; Rabbi Yehoshua says that "statute" refers to Shabbos and "law" refers to honoring parents, while Rabbi Elazar Hamodai says that "statute" refers to illicit relations and "law" refers to some of the civil laws not already included in the Noachide laws (see Zais Raanan). Still no mention of Para Aduma (by either opinion), and Rashi is sort of combining the opinions brought in the Mechilta (using both of Rabbi Yehoshua's mitzvos and only one of Rabbi Elazar Hamodai's). Adding to the confusion is that elsewhere (Devarim 5:16) Rashi includes honoring parents as being commanded at Marah, and (Shemos 24:3) lists four commandments (the three mentioned here plus honoring parents) as having been commanded at Marah. None of these sources has all four of these as being taught at Marah; how can Rashi just disregard them and make up his own combination?

Usually, when Moshe is given a commandment to give over to the nation, there is a format. "And G-d spoke to Moshe, saying." "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them." Or something similar. Here, though, there is a cryptic reference to "law(s) and statute(s)" without the normal commandment procedure (see Ramban). Not only that, but the wording of The Seder Olam Zuta quoted by Rashi is not that they were given "commandments to obey" but "commandment to keep busy with." This leads several commentators to conclude that the main purpose of these commandments being taught here was for the nation to study them. When the Torah tells us that "the nation traveled for three days in the desert and did not find water (15:22), several Tosafists (and others), based on the Mechilta (ibid) explain that "water" refers to "Torah study," which is what the nation thirsted for. (This is why we read from the Torah every Shabbos, Monday and Thursday in synagogue, to make sure we don't go for three days without Torah.) By giving them several commandments to become engrossed in the study of, this thirst was quenched.

Were they required to keep all the commandments that they were taught at Marah? Well, the concept of Para Adumah did not apply until a purification process was needed and could be done. This wouldn't occur for almost a full year, when the Mishkan was built. Nevertheless the concept behind the process has mystified scholars since it was introduced; even King Solomon, the wisest of men, couldn't fully grasp it. How can the same substance and procedure

cause some to become ritually impure and others to be ritually purified? Even though studying Para Adumah had no practical application at Marah (or for a while afterwards), the study itself was something they could become immersed in. The civil laws could have applied right away, and if Yisro showed up before the Torah was given (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5769/yisro.pdf, pg. 2), his seeing Moshe "judging" the nation "from morning till evening" (18:13) indicates that it did. Anyone who's learned in Yeshiva knows first-hand how easy it is to get lost in the intricacies of the civil laws (remember the "shomrim" tables?). There would be no reason for the requirement to honor one's parents not to apply right away, especially as this is a law that is self-evident (see Maharal on Devarim 5:16), but the laws involved do not seem to be too complicated. What about Shabbos? These laws are very complex, and certainly were required a couple of weeks after Marah, when the "mun" fell with a double portion on Friday (Shemos 16:22), the nation was told not to cook or bake on Shabbos (16:23) and other ways to act on Shabbos (16:25-30). Did the requirement start right away, or were they just given a head start of a few weeks to learn the concepts (and application) of the 39 categories of forbidden activities before the requirement took effect? The Netziv (on the Mechilta) says that they could not have been expected to keep Shabbos properly without learning its laws first, but either way, the laws are complicated enough to require immersion in their study in order to know and understand them.

It is therefore seems very possible that Rashi was of the opinion that the Talmud, Seder Olam Rabba and Seder Olam Zuta were in agreement. The Seder Olam Zuta was discussing the commandments that satisfied the nation's need for Torah study (see Maharal on Shemos 15:25), and because of the "format" the Torah uses, this is what Rashi uses to explain the verse. [It is interesting to note that the same verb, "sam" ("put"), is used both here and as a prelude to the civil laws enumerated in Parashas Mishpatim ("tasim"), which were taught at Marah (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5766/mishpatim.pdf), a verb Rashi (21:1) tells us means to "teach until they fully understand."] The seven Noachide laws (as well as circumcision and "gid hanasheh," see Tosfos on Sanhedrin 56b) were all laws that had already been kept, and did not require deep study, so was not mentioned by Rashi. Honoring parents may have been a new requirement, added at Marah, but it didn't require the same level of study either.

The Talmud and Seder Olam Rabba are discussing the requirements added that were in effect right away (or would soon be). Therefore, Para Aduma, which wouldn't apply for almost a year, was omitted, but Shabbos, the civil laws, and honoring parents were. It was reiterated that the seven Noachide laws would continue to be in effect, but since "gid hanasheh" and circumcision (recently reaffirmed before the exodus, as

no one uncircumcised could eat the Passover offering) were unique to this nation, there was no need to reiterate that they still applied. It was therefore only the seven Noachide laws, Shabbos, the civil laws and honoring parents that were included in their list of the mitzvos commanded at Marah.

When Rashi lists the commandments taught at Marah (Shemos 24:3), he mentions the four "new" mitzvos (Shabbos, honoring parents, Para Aduma and the civil laws), but doesn't include any of the "old" ones (the Noachide laws, "gid hanasheh," or circumcision). However, when listing the mitzvos taught in order to provide a curriculum of Torah study, he only includes Shabbos, Para Aduma and the civil laws. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

YOUNG ISRAEL OF PASSAIC-CLIFTON

And You, Be Silent

by Rabbi JB Love

B'*nai Yisrael* are silenced by Moshe. "G-D will do battle for you, and you be silent."¹ Moshe is silenced by G-D. "Why scream to Me?"² "This is no time for lengthy prayer."³ Out of this silence emerges the greatest of songs. "I will sing to G-D," says Rashi zl, "for He has triumphed over all songs and praise."⁴ Here is the inevitable paradox. I must praise Him, but I cannot praise Him. "One who recites the *hallel* every day is blaspheming."⁵ Unmandated praise is illicit praise and illicit praise is blasphemy. Praise of G-D can be an insult, for He, "has triumphed over all songs and praise." "Were Moshe not to have written the words, 'The Great, The Mighty, The Awesome,' and were they not placed in the liturgy by the Men of the Great Assembly, we would not be permitted to say them."⁶ We seek to praise and we face silence.

In the *shabbos* and *yom tov* liturgy we say, "such is the obligation of all creatures, before you . . . to thank, laud, praise, glorify, exalt, adore, bless, elevate and extol, beyond all David's words of song and praise." There's the rub. Were we to imagine what praise we need say, it would be unimaginable, beyond the imagination of even that Sweet Singer of Israel.

¹ Sh'mos 14:14.

² Ibid.: 15.

³ Rashi, loc. cit. S.v. *ma*.

⁴ To Sh'mos 15:1, s.v. *davar acher*.

⁵ B. Shabbos 118b. This particular ruling, as does the very topic of praising the unpraisable, begs the question, when then can we say *hallel*? The answer, as seems evident from the quote brought later in the text about The Great, The Mighty and The Awesome (B. B'rachos 33b), is that we may praise when and how the Chazal said we could. The problem of when an occasion for praise fits into the rules set by Chazal seems to have already played a part in the creation of Purim and Chanuka as holidays no less than it has in the argument about contemporary days of praise as they have, thank G-D, arisen.

⁶ B. B'rachos 33b.

Ironically, it is in this same part of the liturgy where we say, “were our mouths as full as the sea with song, and our tongue with shouts like its waves, our lips with praise like the vastness of the sky . . . we could not sufficiently praise You for one of the million million...” It is the obligation of all creatures yet we are terribly incapable. The greatest of praise is silence.

The theme resounds throughout the Song of the Sea, “Who is like You among the mighty, O G-D, who is like You mighty in holiness, awesome in praise, doer of wonders.”⁷ “Awesome in praise,” says Rashi,⁸ “Too awesome to speak His praises lest they are insufficient, as it is written, ‘silence is Your praise.’”⁹ Ibn Ezra zl echoes,¹⁰ “All who would praise are afraid to praise for, ‘who can proclaim **all** His praise?’”¹¹ The very need to praise, the very motivation for a resounding roar of exaltation, His greatness and graciousness which abounds, begets an awesome fear of opening our mouths in a mere peep which, by its insufficiency, would be insult rather than praise. “Silence is Your praise”

This song, though, is not only the song of the silence of man in the presence of G-D. There is another silence we sing of. The school of R. Yishmael taught, “Do not read, ‘who is like You among the mighty (*ba’eylim*),’ but, rather, ‘who is like You among the **mute** (*ba’ilmim*).’ That You can hear the insults and blasphemies of that evil one and be silent.”¹² Arriving at the conclusion that we could never express G-d’s greatness, recognizing the total ineptitude of mere mortal man when faced with the glory of his Creator, brings with it the realization that we cannot hope to fathom His reasons or plans either. How does G-D, while declaring His love for mankind, allow Par’oh to torture and kill for two centuries before reacting? How does He allow Yerushalayim to sit in ruins for close to two millennia while “His children” suffer exile, crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, holocausts and terrorist bombs? Why do bad things happen to good people?

Are these the questions you would ask of The One whose praise turns to a whimper of frustration in your throat for your inadequacy? The greatest gift given to man, the power of speech, comes to naught when it is called upon to declare thanks for an event we have experienced and, ostensibly, understand. Would you then question the author of such events when you cannot understand? *Nora s’hilos*, too awesome for praise, but not too awesome to question?¹³ No! In the

face of The *nora s’hilos*, even His own unfathomable silence becomes His praise; *mi kamocho ba’ilmim*.

“At the (Red) sea, a maidservant saw what [even] Yechezkel ben Buzi could not see.”¹⁴ The maidservant could say, “this is my G-D,” with familiar recognition, while Yechezkel saw “as in a vision,” “appearances of.” Yechezkel saw the he “chariot of G-D,” how the motions of our perceived world are indeed guided by the spirit of G-D. Yechezkel was able to picture the connection G-D has to this world. The maidservant was able to perceive that G-d has no connection whatsoever to this world other than what we need to see in order to know His existence. The G-D of Yechezkel’s perception was a G-D for whom the angels sang praises, praises which we, in our prayers, emulate. He saw the closeness of G-D and, so, the possibility of His praise. In “seeing” the nearness of G-D, the attachment of His “throne,” by way of the *chayos* and the *ofanim*, to our world, we lose the perception of His vastness, His total detachment from this, our tiny, insignificant little orb. With that perception, the generation of Yechezkel could also question.

Yirmiyahu, a contemporary of Yechezkel, refused to include “awesome” in his prayer.¹⁵ “Where is this awe?” he asked, “if the Gentiles could dance in what was His holy place.”¹⁶ Daniel, another contemporary excluded “mighty” from his prayer.¹⁷ His problem? “Where is His might if His children are enslaved by strangers?” G-D is near, G-D is in control, G-D listens. But such nearness allows us to forget how totally inconceivable His “thoughts” are, how totally transcendent He is from our small ideas of reality. So, we ask questions.

No! Say the Men of the Great Assembly,¹⁸ His might is His “self control” and His awe is obvious in the unimpeachable survival of the Jewish People. You cannot understand the machinations of The Master of the universe other than in universal terms.¹⁹ *mi*

to earth. (V. Rashi B’raishis 24:7 s.v. *H’ elokai hashamayim*.) As was it the relationship of Moshe, who, the Chazal tell us, struggled with the problem of *tzadik v’ra lo*. The Kabalists speak of G-D who interacts with the world through the elemental *sefiros* and the essential *ayn sof*, the infinite, the incomprehensible. Both aspects must be present in complete devotion. Here we speak of the latter. The kabalistic idea of “fear and love” is connected with this dialectic idea. See the quote from Rambam’s Mishneh Torah in the text below.

⁷ Sh’mos 15:11.

⁸ To Ibid. S.v. *nora*.

⁹ A midrashic interpretation of Tehilim 65:2 whose simple meaning seems to be, Praise [waits] silently for You in *tzion* and all vows will [there] be fulfilled.

¹⁰ On loc. cit. s.v. *ne’edar*.

¹¹ A midrashic interpretation of Tehilim 106:2.

¹² Cf. B. Gittin 56b.

¹³ But, didn’t Avraham ask, “Should the Judge of the Earth not do justice?” (B’raishis 18:25) Avraham’s relationship (for lack of a better word) with G-D was that of bringing G-D

¹⁴ Mechilta, Shira 3. Rashi, to 15:2 s.v. *zeh* paraphrases, “what prophets did not see,” our extension of the idea to Yechezkel’s contemporaries fits well with Rashi’s zl text.

¹⁵ Yirmiyahu 32:18.

¹⁶ V. Yoma 69b for this piece about Yirmiya, Daniel and the Men of the Great Assembly.

¹⁷ Daniel 9:4.

¹⁸ Zecharia (2:17), one of the Great Assembly, says, “Hush, all flesh, before G-D.”

¹⁹ The Gemara, loc.cit. asks why the two others couldn’t think of the explanation of the Men of the Great Assembly. G-D’s

kamocho ba'ilmim. What Yechezkel and his generation could not see, the handmaiden saw at the sea. "And Aharon was silent."²⁰ Just as the awe of G-D gives us insight into His silence, so, then, is the worship of G-D often best expressed in our silence. "One must say the blessing for bad just as one does so for good."²¹ Both, when recognized as proceeding from the Awesome Master of the Universe, are begotten of silence.

Recently, pictures taken by the Hubble telescope were published in magazines.²² I saw and read, with increasingly intensifying awe, of stars, "hundreds of times the magnitude of our sun." I read of galaxies, "thirteen billion light years away," and of clouds of gas hundreds of millions of miles high. This, then, is G-D's universe! No, only a small corner of G-D's universe. I was suddenly in awe of the Chazal, the Rishonim, the Acharonim whose world perhaps contained our solar system, or maybe the milky way,²³ and yet their abject fear and reverence for The creator was so much more than I, at this point, imagine I could feel. And this, after my entire idea of the meaning of *gadol, gibor, nora* was exploded by those pictures and words.²⁴ And with this sudden realization of the utter incomprehensibility of G-D's magnitude came the beautiful warmth in the knowledge that though He is "The Place"²⁵ of this vast unending expanse of universe, His place is everywhere in the universe. How, by His grace and goodness this microscopic speck that is our world exists. And how on this speck this *am yisrael*, and for that matter, this, His insignificant

signet is truth, the Chazal answer, they didn't believe it so they couldn't lie. Would that our prayers were so sincere. Would that the words of our prayers were significant enough for us to think about whether we believed them or not.

²⁰ Vayikra 10:3. Aharon's children died for their nearness to G-D without the awe that should have accompanied it. Aharon's awe begat silence.

²¹ Mishna, B'rachos 9:5.

²² E.g. Newsweek, November 3, 1997.

²³ E.g. v. B'rachos 32b and B. Chagiga 13a.

²⁴ R' Yisrael Salanter, in a footnote in Or Yisrael, complains that though one's perception of the world grows and matures with age, the perception of religion tends to remain as immature as it was in childhood. I thank G-D that I was given the opportunity to have my concept of the universe so drastically influenced and, along with it my relationship with my Creator. This may be naïveté on my part, and I apologize for any offence taken, but, any one who sees the pictures and reads the articles I refer to will surely see whole new interpretations of terms like *melech ha'olam, nora* and *kadosh*. One needs to revise so many concepts of G-D's containment of and in the universe, not to mention our concepts of time and space *viz a vis* creation. Again, I'm overwhelmed with my experience and, perhaps, naively I wish others the same. I am still in awe of those who reached these and higher conclusions with even a more minute world than the one we grew up with.

²⁵ Midrash Tehilim 90:10, Pirkei d'R' Eliezer 34:1.

servant, survives, thinks and recognizes His greatness. And I am struck silent.

"And what is the route to the love and awe of Him? When one contemplates His great and wonderful deeds and creations, and sees His inestimable, unending talent, immediately he loves, praises, glorifies and longs, with great longing, to know His Great Name."²⁶

The Men of the Great assembly understood that true prayer and praise is born of this awe and silence. This is the awe of *yotzer hameoros* which leads to the love of *ahava rabba* it is the recognition of *echad (ayn od milvado)*, and the true liberation (*geula*) of *mi komocho ba'ilmim*, and only then, *tefila*. *Tefila* only after asking G-D to, "open my lips," for true prayer is, as is the song of praise, born of silence. © 1998 Rabbi JB Love and Young Israel of Passaic-Clifton

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

After the Jews made it across the sea, this week's Parsha (Beshalach) introduces the first and only time in the Torah that anyone sings, and it happens twice. 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 this: "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 by telling him that the horses were punished just like the soldiers on the 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 roles. Miriam's message couldn't be more true today: Helping someone follow the Torah's laws is as important as following the Torah's 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. © 2002 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



<http://www.jewish-holiday.com/mirtambourine.html>

²⁶ Rambam, Yad, Yesodei Hatorah 2:2.