

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

**T**he Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The impossible had happened. The mightiest army in the ancient world -- the Egyptians with their cutting-edge, horse-drawn chariots -- had been defeated and drowned. The children of Israel were now free. But their relief was short-lived. Almost immediately they faced attack by the Amalekites, and they had to fight a battle, this time with no apparent miracles from God. They did so and won. This was a decisive turning point in history, not only for the Israelites but for Moses and his leadership of the people.

The contrast between before and after the Red Sea could not be more complete. Before, facing the approaching Egyptians, Moses said to the people: "Stand still and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today... The Lord will fight for you; you need only be silent." (Ex. 14:13) In other words: do nothing. God will do it for you. And He did.

In the case of the Amalekites, however, Moses said to Joshua, "Choose men for us, and prepare for battle against Amalek." (Ex. 17:9) Joshua did so and the people waged war. This was the great transition: The Israelites moved from a situation in which the leader (with the help of God) did everything for the people, to one in which the leader empowered the people to act for themselves.

During the battle, the Torah focuses our attention on one detail. Moses climbs to the top of a hill overlooking the battlefield, with a staff in his hand: "As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites prevailed, but when he let his hands down, the Amalekites prevailed. When Moses' hands became weary, they took a stone and placed it under him, so that he would be able to sit on it. Aaron and Chur then held his hands, one on each side, and his hands remained steady until sunset." (Ex. 17:11-12)

What is going on here? The passage could be read in two ways: The staff in Moses' raised hand -- the very staff which he used to perform mighty miracles in

Egypt and at the sea -- might be a sign that the Israelites' victory was a miraculous one. Alternatively, it might simply be a reminder to the Israelites that God was with them, giving them strength.

Very unusually -- since the Mishnah in general is a book of law rather than biblical commentary -- a Mishnah resolves the question: "Did the hands of Moses make or break [the course of the] war? Rather, the text implies that whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their Father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell." (Rosh Hashanah 3:8)

The Mishnah is clear. Neither the staff nor Moses' upraised hands were performing a miracle. They were simply reminding the Israelites to look up to heaven and remember that God was with them. Their faith gave them the confidence and courage to win.

A fundamental principle of leadership is being taught here. A leader must empower the team. They cannot always do the work for the group; they must do it for themselves. But the leader must, at the same time, give them the absolute confidence that they can do it and succeed. The leader is responsible for their mood and morale. During battle, a captain must betray no sign of weakness, doubt or fear. That is not always easy, as we see in this week's episode. Moses' upraised hands "became weary." All leaders have their moments of exhaustion and at such times the leader needs support -- even Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur, who then helped him to maintain his position. In the end, though, his upraised hands were the sign the Israelites needed that God was giving them the strength to prevail, and they did.

In today's terminology, a leader needs emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, best known for his work in this field, argues that one of the most important tasks of a leader is to shape and lift the mood of the team: "Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions." (Primal Leadership, pg. 3)

Groups have an emotional temperature. As individuals they can be happy or sad, agitated or calm, fearful or confident. But when they come together as a group, a process of attuning -- "emotional contagion" -- takes place, and they begin to share the same feeling.

Scientists have shown experimentally how, within fifteen minutes of starting a conversation, two people begin to converge in the physiological markers of mood, such as pulse rate. "When three strangers sit facing each other in silence for a minute or two, the one who is most emotionally expressive transmits their mood to the other two -- without speaking a single word." (Ibid., 7) The physiological basis of this process, known as mirroring, has been much studied in recent years, and observed even among primates. It is the basis of empathy, through which we enter into and share other people's feelings.

This is the foundation for one of the most important roles of a leader. It is he or she who, more than others, determines the mood of the group. Goleman reports on several scientific studies showing how leaders play a key role in determining the group's shared emotions: "Leaders typically talked more than anyone else, and what they said was listened to more carefully... But the impact on emotions goes beyond what a leader says. In these studies, even when leaders were not talking, they were watched more carefully than anyone else in the group. When people raised a question for the group as a whole, they would keep their eyes on the leader to see his or her response. Indeed, group members generally see the leader's emotional reaction as the most valid response, and so model their own on it -- particularly in an ambiguous situation, where various members react differently. In a sense, the leader sets the emotional standard." (Ibid., pg. 8)

When it comes to leadership, even non-verbal cues are important. Leaders, at least in public, must project confidence even when they are inwardly full of doubts and hesitations. If they betray their private fears in word or gesture, they risk demoralising the group.

There is no more powerful example of this than the episode in which King David's son Absalom mounts a coup d'etat against his father, proclaiming himself king in his place. David's troops put down the rebellion, in the course of which Absalom's hair gets tangled in a tree and he is stabbed to death by Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

When he hears this news, David is heartbroken. His son may have rebelled against him, but he is still his son and his death is devastating. David covers his face crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" News of David's grief quickly spreads throughout the army, and they too -- by emotional contagion -- are overcome by mourning. Joab regards this as disastrous. The army have taken great risks to fight for David against his son. They cannot now lament their victory without creating confusion and fatefully undermining their morale: "Then Joab went into the house to the King and said, 'Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and

the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now.'" (2 Samuel 19:6-8)

King David does as Joab insists. He accepts that there is a time and place for grief, but not now, not here, and above all, not in public. Now is the time to thank the army for their courage in defence of the King.

A leader must sometimes silence their private emotions to protect the morale of those they lead. In the case of the battle against Amalek, the first battle the Israelites had to fight for themselves, Moses had a vital role to perform. He had to give the people confidence by getting them to look up.

In 1875 an amateur archaeologist, Marcelino de Sautuola, began excavating the ground in a cave in Altamira near the north coast of Spain. At first, he found little to interest him, but his curiosity was rekindled by a visit to the Paris exhibition of 1878 where a collection of Ice Age instruments and art objects was on display. Determined to see whether he could find equally ancient relics, he returned to the cave in 1879.

One day he took his nine-year-old daughter Maria with him. While he was searching through the rubble, she wandered deeper into the cave and to her amazement saw something on the wall above her. "Look, Papa, oxen," she said. They were, in fact, bison. She had made one of the great discoveries of prehistoric art of all time. The magnificent Altamira cave paintings, between 25,000 and 35,000 years old, were so unprecedented a finding that it took twenty-two years for their authenticity to be accepted. For four years Sautoula had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

This is one of the enduring themes of Tanach: the importance of looking up. "Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things," says Isaiah (Is. 40:26). "I lift up my eyes to the hills. From there will my help come" said King David in Psalm 121. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will not be like the flat plain of the Nile Delta where water is plentiful and in regular supply. It will be a land of hills and valleys, entirely dependent on unpredictable rain (Deut. 11:10-11). It will be a landscape that forces its inhabitants to look up. That is what Moses did for the people in their first battle. He taught them to look up.

No political, social or moral achievement is without formidable obstacles. There are vested interests to be confronted, attitudes to be changed,

resistances to be overcome. The problems are immediate, the ultimate goal often frustratingly far away. Every collective undertaking is like leading a nation across the wilderness towards a destination that is always more distant than it seems when you look at the map.

Look down at the difficulties and you can give way to despair. The only way to sustain energies, individual or collective, is to turn our gaze up toward the far horizon of hope. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle". The fly is trapped in the bottle. It searches for a way out. Repeatedly it bangs its head against the glass until at last, exhausted, it dies. Yet the bottle has been open all the time. The one thing the fly forgets to do is look up. So, sometimes, do we.

It is the task of a leader to empower, but it is also their task to inspire. That is what Moses did when, at the top of a hill, in full sight of the people, he raised his hands and his staff to heaven. When they saw this, the people knew they could prevail. "Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit," said the Prophet." (Zechariah 4:6) Jewish history is a sustained set of variations on this theme.

A small people that, in the face of difficulty, continues to look up will win great victories and achieve great things. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l 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, 'God will surely remember you; bring up my bones with you from this [place].'" [Exodus 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 God 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 God'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 God 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...God 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. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**his week we read in the Torah the final chapter of the liberation of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage and slavery. After centuries of servitude, the children of Jacob are finally freed from their Egyptian taskmasters and embark on their journey of building a civilization. Yet, the Torah goes to great lengths to point out to us that freedom as a concept cannot exist in a vacuum.

The people must have food to eat and water to drink. Though the Jewish people will live for 40 years in an unnatural environment in the desert of Sinai, they do not escape the constant necessities of human life. The Lord will provide these necessities through miracles – bread from heaven and water from the flint rock. These miracles, perhaps like all other miracles, will require human participation – the gathering of the heavenly bread that falls to the earth, and the striking of the rock to force it to give forth waters.

It can be asked that if Lord is performing miracles for the Jewish people anyway, then why aren't the miracles complete, why are they always somehow dependent upon human action as well? The answer to that question lies in the question itself. The adage that God helps those who help themselves is a basic tenet and value in Judaism. Miracles provide opportunities, but these, like all opportunities, must be initiated by humans for them to be beneficial and effective.

It is difficult for the Jewish people over the 40-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai to appreciate their newfound freedom. People become accustomed to almost anything, and this includes slavery and servitude. An independent people create their own

society, provide their own needs and continually jostle in a contentious world to retain that freedom.

A people accustomed to slavery will find this to be particularly challenging. Slavery induced in their minds and spirit a false sense of regularity that bordered upon security. The president of the United States once remarked that if one wants to be certain of having three meals a day, then one should volunteer to spend the rest of one's life in prison. He will receive this throughout his incarceration.

In the story of the Jewish people in the desert, when faced with difficult circumstances and upsetting challenges, there was always the murmur that they should return to Egypt and 'go back to prison', for at least then they would be certain of having their three meals a day.

According to many Torah commentaries, this was the fundamental reason why the generation that left Egypt could not be the generation that would enter and conquer the land of Israel and establish Jewish independence in their own state and under their own auspices. Psychologically they were not ready to be a free people with all the burdens that accompany freedom and independence. They could accept the Torah, be intellectually religious, admire Moshe and believe in the Almighty. But they were unable to free themselves from the psychological shackles of Egyptian bondage. And there are no miracles that can do that for human beings. Only human beings can do that for themselves. ©2021 *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

**"W**here is God?" asked Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, one of the great chassidic masters. "Everywhere," replied his students. "No, my children," he responded, "God is not everywhere, but only where you let Him enter."

The Kotzker's answer reinforces a distinction that Rabbi Ahron 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 God's words -- *ve-hitzalti etchem*. (Exodus 6:6) God and God alone, says the Haggadah, 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 God.

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, God 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. (Mechilta, 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) And so, the sea, according to the Talmud, only splits after Nachshon, followed by others, jump in, trying to swim across. (Sotah 37a)

At the beginning of Jewish history, God acts unilaterally. As Am Yisrael matures, the onus shifts as the Jewish people assumes greater responsibility and acts to help itself. Perhaps for this reason, the Passover Haggadah, which recounts the birth of the Jewish nation, contains only a single mention of Moses' name. At the beginning of Jewish peoplehood, God and God alone plays a central role.

But, in the Book of Esther, which records the Jewish people's victory over Haman, God is not mentioned at all. Having matured, the Jewish nation takes an active role in determining its future.

Of course, God still plays a hidden role in the Megillah story. And so, every time the noun *ha-melech* (the king) appears – and in some megillot it's the word that begins each column – it not only refers to King Achashverosh (Ahasuerus), but to the Ruler of rulers, to God Himself. (Megillah 15b)

Today, we cannot expect hatzalah, wherein God alone intervenes on behalf of our people and the world, but we must also do our share to bring about a new era, one of genuine partnership between heaven and earth-- a true yeshuah. ©2021 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

## This is My G-d and I Will Glorify Him

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The title of this essay (*zeh Keli ve-anvehu*) is taken from a verse in Parshat Beshalach, and we derive from it the concept of beautifying a mitzva (*hiddur mitzva*). This includes such diverse practices as decorating the *sukkah*, buying a nice *lulav* and *etrog*, using an exquisite *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, wearing a beautiful *tallit*, and more. Not only should we beautify mitzva objects themselves (*sukkah*, *lulav*, *shofar*), but we should also beautify the objects which come into contact with them. Therefore, not only were ribbons tied around the first fruits that were brought to the Temple,

but the wagons transporting the fruit were also decorated, and even the ox leading the procession. Although *hiddur* usually involves beautifying an object, sometimes it refers to increasing appreciation for a mitzva. So, for example, we are forbidden to eat in the afternoon before the Pesach *seeder*, so that we will have a hearty appetite for matzah at the *seeder*.

Our Sages disagree as to whether the obligation to beautify *mitzvot* is biblical (hence the verse cited above) or rabbinic. An intermediate opinion is that the mitzva is biblical, but the rabbis are empowered to define the specifics of what qualifies as a *hiddur*. This difference in opinion has practical ramifications in situations when the obligation of *hiddur* conflicts with other obligations, whether they are biblical or rabbinic.

For example, what if a person's current *etrog* is a simple one, but he knows that in the course of the day he will have access to a more beautiful one? Should he fulfill the mitzva of *lulav* and *etrog* in the morning, following the general principle that those who are enthusiastic perform *mitzvot* as soon as possible (*zerizim makdimim le-mitzvot*), or should he wait in order to use the more beautiful *etrog*? Of course, in this case he has the possibility of doing the mitzva of *lulav* and *etrog* twice that day. However, there are other cases where this is not a possible solution. For example, let us say a person is planning to use plain wax candles in his Chanukah menorah, and he has already melted the bottoms into the holders to make sure the candles are stable. Now someone brings him quality olive oil, which is the preferred (*mehudar*) fuel for lighting. Should he remove the candles, or would doing so be considered treating a mitzva disrespectfully? ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## Isolation & Abandonment

Immediately following the Parting of the Sea of Reeds (Red Sea) and the Song of Moshe, we find an unusual set of events. Moshe leads the people away from the Sea and three days later the people come upon a well with bitter water. The Torah teaches us, "And Moshe caused Yisrael to journey from the Sea of Reeds and they went out to the Wilderness of Shur and they went on a three-day period in the Wilderness but did not find water. And they came to Mara and they were not able to drink water from Mara because it was bitter, therefore they called the name of the place Mara (Bitter). And they complained against Moshe saying, 'what shall we drink.' And he cried out to Hashem and Hashem taught him about a tree and he threw the tree into the water and the water became sweet; there He established for Himself a statute and a judgment and there He tested it. He said, if you will listen diligently to the voice of Hashem your Elokim, and you will do what is straight in His eyes and you will give ear to His

commandments and observe His statutes then any of the diseases that I placed on the Egyptians I will not place upon you for I am Hashem your Healer.”

What is this miraculous tree that sweetens the water to make it potable? What is meant by the statute and judgment with which Hashem tests the people? And what are the diseases that Hashem did to the Egyptians that He will not do to Yisrael? It seems clear that there must be a message here, but without careful analysis, it is hard to imagine what that message is.

Our Rabbis tell us that the experience of K'riyat Yam Suf was almost too much for the mind to comprehend. According to HaRav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, the different vowelization of the word vayasa (he caused them to journey) from its normal form, indicates that it was an unusual situation. More than ordinary insistence had to be used to move the people from Yam Suf. The people had become spiritually and physically bound to this place where their freedom was guaranteed after so many years of slavery. They saw Hashem's presence here and feared that He would not accompany them through the desert. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin indicates that the people were reluctant to leave at this time because it was Moshe instructing them to go rather than Hashem. In all future travels in the wilderness, it is Hashem who leads them.

The Midrash explains that this three-day journey without finding water was really three days during which the people did not study Torah which is likened to life-saving water. It was this lack of Torah study that made the people bitter. The strange “tree” that was thrown into the water to make it sweet was the Tree of Life, namely, the Torah in symbolic form. Another Midrash says that there was a miracle within a miracle, as the tree itself was bitter, yet two bitters combined to make the water sweet. Perhaps that Midrash is indicating that the Torah, when it is abandoned, becomes bitter yet is still the sweetness of Torah which can never be changed.

There is a difference of opinion concerning the statute and judgment introduced to the B'nei Yisrael. The Gemara indicates that these were Shabbat, honoring one's parents, and laws of justice. Rashi substitutes the Red Heifer (used to purify people) in place of honoring one's parents. His reasoning appears to be that the Heifer is the quintessential statute. Hirsch explains that a statute is a law dealing with the spiritual-material nature of Man which limits the caprice of the individual such as laws dealing with sexual content or types of food which are unkosher. Judgments are laws which deal with the social order of Man such as business law or man's relationship to his fellowman. The Ramban did not see these laws as binding at Mara, but instead were given for Man to study prior to receiving the Torah. The controversy is extended to include the meaning of the phrase, “He tested it or them”. Were the people being tested or was

the law itself being tested? It is not clear whether Hashem wanted to see if the people would observe the law or whether they would study the law.

The three-day journey still poses a problem for us. How could the B'nei Yisrael be expected to study Torah during these three days if they had not received the Torah before this time? How did their lives become embittered between Yam Suf and Mara that the waters of Mara were now bitter to them? We must review the events that took place. As the Jews crossed the Yam Suf, they observed miracles both from the walls of water, to the dry land, to the destruction of the Egyptians and their bodies floating up to the shore. They did not need to search for Hashem. But Moshe moved them from this spot quickly so that they could proceed to Har Sinai and receive the Torah. The Jews left the comfort of Hashem's presence, and proceeded into the wilderness at Moshe's insistence. The Jews had become unaccustomed to search for Hashem as He had been so visible at the Sea. The “Torah” they were to study was to notice Hashem's presence even in the wilderness where His signs were hidden. The Jews failed in that test and became bitter since they were afraid that Hashem had abandoned them. That is why Hashem gave them the bitter waters of Mara which turned sweet with the words of Torah.

The Torah uses the word machala which Rashi translates as disease. The different translations all involve suffering which carries with it the concept of abandonment. When Hashem punished the Egyptians, we did not find any disease that Hashem placed on them. But we do find that every plague that was given the Egyptians carried with them the idea that their gods had abandoned them. When a person experiences suffering, he will experience a sense of abandonment if he does not see Hashem beside him. This is what the Egyptians lacked and this is what caused them the greatest pain. This is Hashem's message to each of us in this passage. When you are filled with Torah, you can never be alone. You can never have the suffering of abandonment that the Egyptians experienced. That is not to say that you are free from illness and suffering. But they are significantly different when you sense Hashem's presence. May we learn to sense Hashem's presence always so that our suffering will be minimal and we will never feel abandoned. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

**"A**nd they lifted their eyes and behold, Egypt was traveling after them, and they were very frightened and the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem.” (Shmos 14:10) In a dramatic moment of visual imagery, the Torah tells us that the Jewish People collectively lifted up their eyes and saw “Egypt” chasing them. What is meant by Egypt? Either they saw the unified nation of Egypt, bound by a burning

common desire to massacre the escaping Hebrews, or, as the Midrash says, they saw the Heavenly angel representative of Egypt coming after them to destroy them.

Either way, the sight terrified them with its finality. They were being followed by an irresistible force, the singular will of millions of people forged together into one, or else the Divinely ordained might of an angel representing those people. What happened next was very telling: the Children of Israel cried out to Hashem.

Though Rashi says they all did so, the Ramban says that there were different groups. How could the same people cry out to Hashem one moment and despair and blame Moshe the next? Therefore, he says that some people did cry and were afraid and resigned themselves to their fate. There were others, though, who cried out to Hashem. These are the ones described as the "Children of Israel."

These are the ones Rashi describes as taking their fathers' craft, as it says that Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov davened to Hashem. What is the connection? When it says that Avraham stood in the place he had stood, it refers to the fact that after Hashem told Avraham He was going to destroy Sodom, Avraham arose early in the morning to pray for them. He had been unable to find a merit for them but he still planned to ask for mercy.

Yitzchak davened in the field upon his return from bringing Hagar back to his father to marry. Meanwhile, he awaited news of his own marriage partner. Finally, Yaakov was running away from his brother Esav and on the way he passed the place of the Akeida, and as night fell, he prayed.

The Avos davened at times when they didn't have any other options. They had no steps they could take at that moment to help themselves, so they davened to Hashem. This is the "craft" of our Avos, knowing that no situation is ever hopeless even when you can do nothing about it.

When the people leaving Egypt saw something that seemed to signal the end for them, some were terror stricken. They were angry and upset and began to blame Moshe. Their end would come and they would be lost. Not so the true "Children of Israel," the heirs to our forefathers. We are maaminim b'nai maaminim, believers, children of believers, and no matter what, we can cry out to Hashem and He can save us. People like that do not break. They survive, overcome, and never, ever, despair.

*Many years ago, late talk show host Larry King was in Israel and brought to meet Rabbi Noah Weinberg. They got into a spirited discussion about spirituality, with Larry the skeptic. R' Noah finally asked him why he doesn't believe in G-d.*

*Larry told him that growing up in Brooklyn, he was a big Dodgers fan. One year, they were in the*

*World Series against the Yankees. He prayed so hard the Dodgers should win, but they lost. After that, he realized there was no point in believing in G-d.*

*With a twinkle in his eye and a mischievous smile on his face, R' Noah, also from Brooklyn, leaned across the desk and said, "You know what, Larry? I remember that World Series too. And I was praying for the Yankees." (h/t Lori Palatnik) ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states: "The entire assembly of the Children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the Wilderness... "You have taken us out to this Wilderness to kill this entire congregation by famine." G-d said to Moses, "Behold! -- I shall rain down for you food from heaven; let the people go out and pick each day's portion on its day." (Ex. 16:2-4).

Rabbi Mendel of Rimanov taught that the manna was a necessary precursor for accepting the Torah. The Torah forbids stealing and coveting others' possessions. It forbids lying, cheating, taking usury and all methods of unlawful enrichment. These laws are in opposition to the innate acquisitive drives within people. How can people abide by laws that defy innate drives?

The manna served as a lesson that a person would get only that which he actually needed. If he had less, G-d would increase his portion to meet his needs. If he took more than his needs, his greed would result in the excess portion rotting. Once the Israelites developed the trust that G-d would provide for their needs and that accumulating excess was futile, they could accept laws that opposed their acquisitive drives. *Excerpted from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. ©2015 Rabbi M. Twersky & The TorahWeb Foundation*





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### "Yitz, are you crazy?"

by Yitz Weiss

Well, if you already know me, you didn't need me to sign up to run a half-marathon to answer that. 😊

In all seriousness, what the heck am I doing running a half-marathon?

I'm not, actually. At least not the way I see it.

What I'm doing is going beyond *my* comfort zone (WELL beyond, actually) to give some comfort and support to my nephew Binny and his awesome family.

Binny was diagnosed with a brain tumor five years ago, at eight years old, had brain surgery, and since then he and his family have dealt with the continuing challenges that ordeal has brought into their lives.

Throughout that process, Chai Lifeline has been there.

It's unreal how much good one organization can do. With dedicated staff and incredible volunteers, Chai Lifeline has been a beacon of hope and help in their lives.

So, yeah, I'm running a half-marathon because if that can help the cause in some small way, then I've gotta do it.

If YOU could please help the cause in some small way, or in some large way, please do.

For Binny. And for all the other kids who are fortunate enough to have Chai Lifeline in their family's lives.

Also, if you're a Toras Aish subscriber and donate at least \$36, we'll recognize your contribution by dedicating an issue of Toras Aish to you (or to whomever you designate)!

Thanks so much and I look forward to greeting you from the finish line!

[teamlifeline.org/team-lifeline-without-borders/binnysuncle](http://teamlifeline.org/team-lifeline-without-borders/binnysuncle)

