

TorahFax: Beshalach

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Monday, Shevat 8, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / January 30, 2023

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, B'Shalach, we read how the Jewish people, who only a few days earlier left Egypt, were now being chased by the Egyptians. They were trapped between the Egyptians, behind them; the desert to their sides, and the sea before them.

The people and Moshe screamed to G-d for help. G-d told Moshe, why are you screaming at Me? Tell the children of Israel that they should go forward into the sea.

Nachshon, head of the tribe of Yehuda (Judah), was the first to take the plunge. As soon as he did, the sea split, and everyone followed him into the sea.

We all know the rest of the story. For the Jewish people the sea was a lifesaver, while for the Egyptians the sea became their death trap and they drowned.

The Torah tells us that after sending the people out of Egypt, Pharaoh and the Egyptians had a change of heart and chased after them.

Q. Why did they have a change of heart?

A. When Moshe pleaded with Pharaoh to let the people go, he told Pharaoh that they will be gone for three days to serve G-d in the desert. The Egyptians gave them their gold, silver, and expensive clothing, as the people requested, knowing that they will get it all back when the people return.

When Pharaoh realized, after three days, that they were not coming back, he and the Egyptians chased after them.

Q. Why was G-d's final punishment to the Egyptians through drowning them in the sea?

A. This was measure-for-measure punishment for their decree that Jewish boys should be drowned by throwing them into the Nile River.

Q. Why did G-d wait to split the sea only after the first Jew jumped into it when He could have made it split before?

A. Our sages point out that G-d could have made it much easier for the Jewish people. He could have split the sea as soon as they came there. Then they wouldn't have to fear the Egyptians, who were chasing after them, and wouldn't have to "scream" for help.

But there was a lesson in this for Jews then and all generations. There are times when G-d waits for us to make that first move and take that plunge of faith in Him. Even when we are in a situation in which we do not see our way out, G-d may be waiting for OUR actions in order to bring about His miracles.

Tuesday, Shevat 9, 5783 (Hakel Year) / January 31, 2023

Parshat B'Shalach begins, "When Pharaoh had sent away the people [of Israel] and G-d did not lead them through the land of Phlishtim, although it was near, for G-d said, The people might regret [leaving Egypt] if they encounter war and will want to return to Egypt.' G-d led the people around by way of the wilderness by the sea."

After spending two hundred and ten years as slaves in Egypt, many Jews couldn't imagine any other way of life, and thus wouldn't appreciate the benefit and value of freedom. Many even refused to leave Egypt.

Even those who left Egypt had not acquired complete faith in G-d. As we read in this Parsha, each time the people of Israel encountered hardship, they immediately regretted the Exodus and wanted to go back to Egypt. As a result, G-d didn't want them to encounter war, which may cause them to want to return to Egypt. So, instead of leading them by the short route, He led them through a longer route.

It took seven weeks from the Exodus until the Giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. During this time, the people went through several tests, as recorded in this Parsha:

1) The Egyptians chased after them, trapping them between the desert and the sea. Seeing the Egyptians behind them, they became frightened and cried, even wanting to return to Egypt. Moshe told them, "Do not fear them, you will see G-d's salvation, which He will perform for you today. For as you see the Egyptians today, you will not see them again forever. G-d will fight for you, and you stay silent."

2) After crossing the sea, they traveled for three days and had no water. Coming to Mara, they found water, but it was bitter and not drinkable. They complained against Moshe. G-d showed Moshe a stick and instructed him to throw it into the water and it became sweet.

3) One month after they left Egypt, they ran out of food. Again, again they complained against Moshe and Aaron, "Why did you take us out of Egypt to die in this desert from hunger?" G-d supplied them with Manna from heaven every day (except Shabbat) for the next forty years, throughout their stay in the desert.

4) Reaching Refiddim they were again without water and G-d supplied them with water from a rock.

5) At the end of the Parsha we read about the war which Amalek fought against them and lost.

Lesson: Our sages emphasize that G-d introduced the Jewish people to freedom and nationhood through constant miracles. This was a lesson that for our existence we are always dependent on G-d. Our survival throughout the past three thousand years until today is only due to Divine Providence and G-d's constant miracles. Yes, it is a mitzvah to be strong and defend ourselves and stand up to our enemies, but at the same time, we must know that it is G-d Who guides us, shields us, and protects us.

Thursday, Shevat 11, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / February 2, 2023

This Shabbat we will read Parshat B'Shalach. The Parsha begins, "When Pharaoh had sent away the people [of Israel] G-d did not lead them through the land of Phlishtim, although it was near, for G-d said, 'the people might regret [leaving Egypt] when they encounter war and will return to Egypt. So G-d led the people around in the wilderness by the Sea [Yam Suf]."

The Torah continues, "The heart of Pharaoh and his servants changed toward the people, and they said: 'What is this that we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?'" Pharaoh and his men pursued the Children of Israel and caught up to them by the sea. Trapped between the sea and Pharaoh's army, "The Children of Israel lifted up their eyes and, behold the Egyptians were marching after them; and they feared exceedingly, and the Children of Israel cried out to G-d..."

Moshe prayed and G-d responded, "Tell the Children of Israel that they go forward. Lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it and they shall go into the sea on the dry ground."

After crossing through the sea and seeing their enemies drown, their faith was greatly strengthened. "And Israel saw the great hand with which the L-rd brought on the Egyptians and the people feared the L-rd; and they believed in the L-rd and in Moshe his servant.

Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang a song of praise to G-d ("Az Yashir"). The song which Moshe and the Jewish people sang after crossing the sea was incorporated into our daily morning prayers.

The morning prayers begin with verses of praise to G-d (P'sukei D'Zimra) which describe the wonders of G-d's creations and that G-d rules the world through the laws of nature. We recite the "Az Yashir," because it shows how G-d can change nature whenever He sees fit.

Q. What is the daily lesson of "Az Yashir"?

A. The Exodus from Egypt wasn't complete until Jews were rid of the Egyptians. This occurred only after they crossed the sea. Thus, the song of Az Yashir represents the culmination of the Exodus. The Torah commands us, "Remember the Exodus each day of your life." By reciting the "Az Yashir", we fulfill the mitzvah of remembering the Exodus each day.

There is another reason: Reciting the "Az Yashir" every day teaches us an important lesson. The splitting of the sea occurred when Jews couldn't see any way out of

their grave situation. The last thing they would think of doing was going into the sea. Yet, that is what G-d chose for their salvation.

Similarly, we are reminded each day that no matter how difficult things may seem, even when we don't see how our help will come, we must not give up. Instead, we should continuously have faith in G-d and pray to Him. For, just as with the splitting of the Sea when Jews came out of Egypt, His help and salvation can occur at any moment and from a most unexpected place. We should never give up.

Friday, Shevat 12, 5783 (Hakhel Year) / February 3, 2023

One of the greatest miracles which G-d performed for the Jewish people after the Exodus was the miracle of the Splitting of the Sea. We read about this great miracle in this week's Parsha, B'Shalach.

After the Exodus, when the Jewish people realized that the Egyptians were chasing after them, they prayed to G-d for a miracle. G-d told Moshe to raise his staff over the waters of the sea and they will split. Moshe did as instructed and the waters parted.

The waters stood like a wall on both sides, while the people of Israel crossed through the dry land between them. But when Pharaoh and his army chased after them, the waters rushed back to their original form, and they drowned.

In the Parsha we also read about the "Shira," the song of praise, which Moshe and the Jewish men sang, after crossing the sea, praising G-d for this great miracle. Moshe's sister, Miriam, took a tambourine and led all the women, who followed her with their tambourines and with dancing.

Another great miracle G-d performed for the Jewish people after the Exodus, which we read in this Parsha, is, the miracle of the manna - "Bread from heaven" - which G-d provided for the people each day throughout their forty years in the desert.

The manna began exactly one month after the Exodus. Until then they still had food that they took out of Egypt. On the fifteenth of Iyar their food supply was depleted, and they began receiving a daily portion of manna from heaven.

Each day they received one portion of manna per person. On Fridays, they received a double portion - for Friday and for Shabbat, because on Shabbat the manna did not come down. Shabbat was a day of rest for the manna. The manna was a testimonial to the holiness of Shabbat. Some of our Shabbat customs, which are observed to this day are associated with the manna.

* We use two Challot (Shabbat breads), to recite the blessing for the Shabbat meals. This symbolizes the double portion of manna which G-d sent each Friday in honor of Shabbat.

* The two Shabbat Challot are covered until we recite the blessing over them. The reason is to remember the manna which was covered with a layer of dew.

* It is customary to prepare a stew (some call it Cholent) which is placed on the stove before Shabbat in order to stay hot and delicious for the Shabbat afternoon meal. This custom is to remember the manna. On all other days of the week one wasn't allowed to leave over any manna from one day to the next. If they did it would spoil. On Friday morning they received a double portion which stayed just as fresh, warm and delicious for the next day, Shabbat, as when it came down on Friday.