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**Rabbi Dr. David
Sabato**
Ram at Midreshet
Nishmat

A Therapeutic Journey

Parshat Beshalach describes Israel's first steps in the desert after the drama of the Exodus. The people of Israel may have left physical bondage behind, but the long process of healing still lies ahead and the people's main challenge now is recovering from the trauma of slavery engraved in their souls, and discovering the inner forces that will help them complete the journey to their land.

This point is key to understanding parshat Beshalach, and in the following lines I will focus on the beginning of that process.

The Parsha opens with God's surprising decision not to take the people by way of the shortest path to Canaan, "Now

when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not **guide them**, **וַיְהִי**, by way of the land of the Phillistines, although it was nearer; for God said, "The people may have a **change** of heart **וַיִּחַן** when they see war, and return to Egypt."

According to Maimonides, these verses express a fundamental religious principle: healing takes time, and the process of Israel regaining freedom should not be shortened miraculously, or even accelerated -even if that decision comes at the cost of delaying the divine plan.

Later in the parsha, however, the same verb 'guide' appears in another context: "And the LORD went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to **guide them** **וַיִּהְיֶה** along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night."

Healing need not take place in a vacuum

or alone and here, God accompanies the people by guiding them in the form of a pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that accompany them on their way. *“The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night **did not depart** [שָׁרָף לֹא] from before the people.”*

Even as God guides the people, the parsha describes human initiative, *“And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the **children of Israel**, saying, ‘God will be sure to take notice of you: then you shall carry up my bones from here with you.’”*

This verse links the national story of the Book of Exodus to the family’s roots in the Book of Genesis to teach us that the Exodus from Egypt and the process of national healing are incomplete

without the healing of the deep family rift of Joseph and his brothers. In the closing verses of Genesis, Joseph asks **Bnei Yisrael** (his brothers), to take an oath that they will restore his bones. Now Moshe, the representative of **Bnei Yisrael** (this time a people, not a family) fulfills Yosef’s last request.

Joseph descended to Egypt through the betrayal of his brothers. Centuries later, his brother’s descendants raised his bones from the land into which he was sold. At the final moment of redemption, the parsha emphasizes Jewish solidarity -as if to remind us that it is only as one people, looking out for one another and willing to atone for the sins with which we betray one another, that we will leave our slavery behind. ■



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