



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT BESHALACH

Paro pursues, the sea splits, the people sing. The people traveled and complained for water in Mara, for bread and meat in the Desert of Sin and for water in Refidim. Amalek attacked and was defeated.



1ST ALIYA (13:17-14:8)

G-d guides the Jews in the direction of the Sea. Moshe takes Yosef's bones. A cloud guides them by day, fire by night. G-d instructs them to avoid the straight route to the Land of Israel for fear that return to Egypt will be too easy. Rather camp at the sea so that Paro will notice. I will harden his heart and he will pursue, in order that Egypt will know that I am G-d. Paro led his elite chariots in pursuit.

The story of the Exodus, culminating with the splitting of the sea is educational. G-d acts in our history. The plagues. The splitting of the sea.

His Hand is stuck right into our world, guiding our Exodus from Egypt. And that is a pillar of our belief. That G-d acts in our world.

Yet, here He guides the people to avoid their return to Egypt.

But. Why is He concerned that we will return to Egypt? Just manipulate our thoughts. Aren't we learning all about how He manipulates our world, sticks His Hand in our world? Doesn't it say G-d will harden Paro's heart? Then why not soften our hearts? So that we are loyal. And have no interest in returning to Egypt.

The Torah is as its name indicates, to teach us. It will soon teach us mitzvot, how we are to act. But it is also teaching us how to believe. And in particular, the thorniest of theological mysteries: how G-d acts in this world. And how He doesn't.

We see His Hand in the Exodus from Egypt. And in the splitting of the sea. But on the other hand, where was He in the years of suffering in Egypt? And why does He not prevent us from wanting to return to Egypt?

We have to read these stories with both of our eyes. To see where He intervenes. And to see where He does not. While we believe in His involvement in our world, that belief is not facile, naïve, as if we actually know when He intervenes. All we can say is that sometimes He intervenes and sometimes not. Why and when? That is beyond our ken.



2ND ALIYA (14:9-14)

When Paro's army approaches, the people are afraid. They cry to G-d and say to Moshe: why did you bring us out of Egypt to die in the desert? We would have preferred to be slaves in Egypt than die in the desert. Moshe tells them not to fear, for they are about to see G-d's redemption.

The focus of the Torah pivots dramatically here. There have been 4 main players in this story: G-d, Moshe, Paro and the Jewish people. But one has been absent entirely from the narrative of the story; the Jewish people.

In the entire story of the 10 plagues, we did not hear one word from the Jewish people. The central figure was G-d; the Jewish people

completely off stage. Which is perfectly understandable because the plagues are to teach us of G-d's mastery over the world. The Jewish people are passive observers to that display.

All of that changes here. Now we hear of their struggles, their worries, their concerns. The focus is now on the Jewish people. They are frightened and unsure.

And that is the point. While with one eye we see His Hand. With the other we see the lack of intervention in our actions. The Jewish people are free to worry, to be concerned, to be fearful.

What a powerful theological lesson, so beautifully juxtaposed. G-d's dramatic involvement in the world. And His equally dramatic retreat, allowing people to be people, thinking freely, exercising choice. Worrying, concerned, fearful.

3RD ALIYA (14:15-25)

G-d instructs Moshe to raise his hand so the sea will split. And that He will harden the heart of Egypt in order that He be glorified through Paro and his entourage. And Egypt will know I am G-d. Moshe did so; the people entered the dry land in the sea with the waters as walls on both sides. The Egyptians followed; in the morning they became trapped in the sea.

The splitting of the sea renews the theme of water as a symbol of beginnings. Water featured in Creation, in Moshe's cradle in the river and now. Beginning of the world, beginning of the Exodus and now, the beginning of Jewish national life.

4TH ALIYA (14:26-15:26)

The water returned and drowned all the Egyptians. The Jewish people saw the Egyptian dead, saw

the Hand of G-d, feared G-d, believing in Him and Moshe. Moshe and the people sang "Az Yashir: I will sing to G-d, my strength, my savior, my G-d. He is the One of War. Your Hand is powerful, Your Hand vanquishes enemies. Nations will fear Him. G-d will reign forever." Miriam led the women in song. Moshe led the people to the desert to Mara. The people complained about the water. G-d instructed Moshe to throw wood and sweeten the water.

In the great song at the sea, we have emotion released. The people sing. Divine redemption demands a human response. We sensitive souls must be moved to song when the Divine Hand is so apparent. In fact, when we quote the exodus from Egypt in our tefila, we inevitably mention the Shira – people need to sing when blessed with redemption.

Here we find joy, appreciation, elation and faith. And while the entire people sing with Moshe, the song is curiously in the first person singular: I sing, My strength (the English doesn't note singular but in Hebrew "Azi", my, singular, strength.) This is personal, individual – mine, not ours. We all sang the song at the sea; yet in the singular. My G-d saved me.

5TH ALIYA (15:27-16:10)

They traveled to the desert of Sin. They complained: oh, that we would have remained in Egypt with the abundance of bread and meat. The manna was provided in the morning: gather enough for a day, on Friday for 2 days. G-d appeared in a cloud.

It doesn't take long for the complaints to begin.

In fact, our parsha has more stories of complaint and confrontation than any parsha in the entire Torah. There are 4 stories of

complaint and 2 stories of skepticism: the fear at the sea, no water at Mara, no meat or bread in the desert, no water again at Refidim, and the skepticism in trying to save manna until the next day and trying to collect the manna on Shabbat.

What an irony. In the parsha of the greatest expression of G-d's intervention in this world, the splitting of the sea and the saving of the people, in this very parsha we have the most complaints of any parsha in the Torah.

And added irony, right after the sublime song, in the first person, of our appreciation to Him for all He has done.

Now, the complaints are justified; no water, no food. But the complaints are nonetheless noticeable.

It could be that the Torah is deliberately noting the mundane, pedestrian nature of man in close juxtaposition to the lofty, noble achievement of prophecy at the sea.

We are not angels. We are human. Human beings can be majestic, elevated, holy beings. But human we remain. The story of the Torah is not the story of myth, of angelic people, of perfection. It is a real story of real people. Their greatness. And their prosaic and mundane pettiness.

6TH ALIYA (16:11-36)

Meat will come in the evening.

Each person shall gather manna daily for their needs. Some people saved for the next day; it spoiled. And some went to gather on Shabbat. G-d questioned: how long will you resist doing My commands? G-d has given you Shabbat, hence gives you double on Friday. Aharon, take a portion of manna to preserve forever. The Jewish people ate the manna for 40 years.

The manna is a further lesson in G-d's

involvement in our world. He is involved not only in the miraculous, the dramatic, the splitting of the sea. He is also involved in the prosaic meanderings of man; our food.

Though, again we need to note not only what is said, but what is not. He provides the manna. But He did not intervene to prevent man from feeling hunger.

The Torah is teaching us His Ways, but in broad sweeps. It does not unlock all mysteries of when He intervenes. That He Intervenes, yes. When He Intervenes remains a mystery.

Shabbat precedes the giving of the Torah. The mitzvah of Shabbat is the 4th of the Ten Commandments. Yet, here already, before Mt. Sinai, is the notion of Shabbat. Prepare what you need on Friday. Gather double on Friday. Do not gather on Shabbat. Because none will fall.



7TH ALIYA (17:1-16)

There was no water in Refidim.

The people complained, as did Moshe. Moshe was instructed to hit the rock; water was produced. Amalek attacked in Refidim. Yehoshua defeated Amalek. A remembrance of this war needs to be recorded.

The juxtaposition of the war of Amalek with all that came before is instructive. The Divine provided us with: redemption from slavery, intervention at the sea, water, food, meat, water again. It would seem that Amalek is attacking that reality. A people with a G-d that protects and provides – that is a people I attack.

The enemies of the Jewish people view us as the people of G-d. A people protected by His Hand. That provokes jealousy, resentment and denial. Of that we need no commentary.

HAFTORAH: SHOFTIM 4:4-5:31

This week's *haftorah* describes the decimation of the army of the Canaanites along with its general Sisera. In response to this awesome event, Devorah offers a song of thanks. This is a parallel to the song sung by Moshe and the Israelites with the drowning of the Egyptian forces in the Red Sea.

Devorah, who was a prophetess, relays a message to Barak son of Avinoam conveying the precise instructions from Hashem: "Go and gather your men toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and Zevulun. And I shall draw to you, to the brook Kishon, Sisera, the chieftain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will give him into your hand." Barak requests that Devorah remain at his side and together head into battle.

Although Sisera was aware of the Israelites' mobilization, Barak's army, with the help of Heaven, utterly destroyed Sisera and his troops.

When Sisera saw that his end was near he quickly fled on foot and arrived at the tent of Yael, wife of Hever the Kenite. Yael invited the general in and offered him a place of refuge. When he fell asleep, Yael took a tent-peg and with it killed the powerful general, the dangerous enemy of the Israelite nation.

The soaring song of Devorah describing the miraculous victory is undoubtedly the highlight of this Shabbat's magnificent haftorah! ■



STATS

16th of 54 sedras; 4th of 11 in Shemot.

Written on 215.33 lines (17th).

14 parshiot; 9 open, 5 closed.

116 pesukim - rank: 23 (6th in Shemot).

681 words - rank: 19 (4th in Shemot).

6423 letters - rank: 18 (4th in Shemot).



MITZVOT

Beshalach contains a single mitzvah of the 613, the prohibition of leaving one's Shabbat boundary - *T'chum Shabbat*.

A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

"'לֹחֵם לְכֶם וְאַתֶּם תְּחִרְשֵׁנִי (דָּבָר)'" (14:14) - The Mechilta explains that G-d will **always** assist you in fighting your enemies, not only now.

Why the command to stay silent and hold our peace? Is it not enough for the verse to say "G-d will fight for you"?

The Meshech Chochmah (Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen (1843-1926) illuminates us by stating that, now perhaps, our request for help by G-d is justified as the Exodus from Egypt. However, even at times when we must remain silent and refrain from asking G-d's assistance because we are unworthy due to sinful behavior, G-d will continue to fight our enemies for us.

Rabbi Avrohom Bornsztain (First Rebbe of the Sochatchover Chasidut 1838-1910) goes one step deeper. As opposed to the actual Exodus where the Israelites were commanded to actively do a mitzvah of Korban Pesach, here at the Crossing of the Yam Suf, the Israelites were not commanded to do anything, but to remain silent. When there is total devotion or readiness for self-sacrifice to the Almighty, the merit is so spiritually great, there is no need for further action. Silence is enough to garner the support of G-d.

Shabbat Shalom