

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Beshalach/ Shabbat Shirah
January 15, 2022 *** 13 Shvat, 5782

[Beshalach in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3262/jewish/Beshalach-in-a-Nutshell.htm)
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Soon after allowing the children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert the people suffer thirst and hunger, and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff. He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua. [Haftarah in a Nutshell](#)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/626290/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah describes the fall of the Canaanite general Sisera and his armies, who were swept away by the Kishon River, and Deborah's ensuing song of thanks. This parallels this week's Torah portion which discusses the drowning of the Egyptian forces in the Red Sea and the subsequent songs led by Moses and Miriam.

Deborah the Prophetess was the leader and judge of the Israelites at a difficult time; the Israelites were being persecuted by King Jabin of Canaan and his general Sisera. Deborah summoned Barak son of Abinoam and transmitted to him G-d's instruction: "Go and gather your men toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and Zebulun. 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." At Barak's request, Deborah

accompanied him, and together they led the offensive.

Sisera was informed of the Israelites' mobilization and he gathered his forces and proceeded towards the Kishon River. Barak's army below and the heavens above waged battle against the Canaanites and utterly destroyed them. The river washed them all away; not one of the enemy survived.

The defeated general fled on foot and arrived at the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite. She invited him in and offered to hide him. When he fell asleep, Jael took a tent-peg and knocked it through Sisera's temple.

The next chapter of the haftorah is the Song of Deborah, which describes the miraculous victory and thanks the One Above for His assistance.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Face of Evil (Beshalach) by the Rabbi Sacks z”l Legacy Trust

<https://rabbisacks.org/the-face-of-evil-beshalach/>

After 9/11, when the horror and trauma had subsided, Americans found themselves asking what had happened and why. Was it a disaster? A tragedy? A crime? An act of war? It did not seem to fit the pre-existing paradigms. And why had it happened? The question most often asked about Al Qaeda was, “Why do they hate us?” In the wake of those events an American thinker Lee Harris wrote two books, *Civilization and its Enemies* and *The Suicide of Reason*[1] that were among the most thought-provoking responses of the decade. The reason for the questions and the failure to find answers, said Harris, was that we in the West had forgotten the concept of an enemy. Liberal democratic politics and market economics create a certain kind of society, a specific way of thinking and a characteristic type of personality. At their heart is the concept of the rational actor, the person who judges acts by their consequences and chooses the maximal option. Such a person believes that for every problem there is a solution, for every conflict a resolution. The way to achieve it is to sit down, negotiate, and do on balance what is best for all.

In such a world there are no enemies, merely conflicts of interest. An enemy, says Harris, is simply “a friend we haven’t done enough for yet.” In the real world, however, not everyone is a liberal democrat. An enemy is “someone who is willing to die in order to kill you. And while it is true that the enemy always hates us for a reason, it is his reason, not ours.” He sees a different world from ours, and in that world we are the enemy. Why do they hate us? Answers Harris: “They hate us because we are their enemy.”[2]

Whatever the rights and wrongs of Harris's specifics, the general point is true and profound. We can become mind-blind, thinking that the way we – our society, our culture, our civilisation – see things is the only way, or at least that it is the way everyone would choose if given the chance. Only a complete failure to understand the history of ideas can explain this error, and it is a dangerous one. When Montezuma, ruler of the Aztecs, met Cortes, leader of the Spanish expedition in 1520, he assumed that he was meeting a civilised man from a civilised nation. That mistake cost him his life, and within a year there was no Aztec civilisation anymore. Not everyone sees the world the way we do, and, as Richard Weaver once said: “The trouble with humanity is that it forgets to read the minutes of the last meeting.”[3]

This explains the significance of the unusual command at the end of this week's parsha. The Israelites had escaped the seemingly inexorable danger of the chariots of the Egyptian army, the military high-tech of its day. Miraculously the sea divided, the Israelites crossed, the Egyptians, their chariot wheels caught in the mud, were unable either to advance or retreat and were caught by the returning tide. The Israelites sang a song and finally seemed to be free, when something untoward and unexpected happened. They were attacked by a new enemy, the Amalekites, a nomadic group living in the desert. Moses instructed Joshua to lead the people in battle. They fought and won. But the Torah makes it clear that this was no ordinary battle:

Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven.’ Moses built an altar and called it The Lord is my Banner. He said, ‘The hand is on the Lord’s throne. The Lord will be at war with Amalek for all generations.’ (Ex. 17:14-16)

This is a very strange statement, and it stands in marked contrast to the way the Torah speaks about the Egyptians. The Amalekites attacked Israel during the lifetime of Moses just once. The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites over an extended period, oppressing and enslaving them and starting a slow genocide by killing every male Israelite child. The whole thrust of the narrative would suggest that if any nation would become the symbol of evil, it would be Egypt.

But the opposite turns out to be true. In Deuteronomy the Torah states, “Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land” (Deut. 23:8). Shortly thereafter, Moses repeats the command about the Amalekites, adding a significant detail:

Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God ... You shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget! (Deut. 25:17-19)

We are commanded not to hate Egypt, but never to forget Amalek. Why the difference? The simplest answer is to recall the Rabbis' statement in The Ethics of the Fathers: "If love depends on a specific cause, when the cause ends, so does the love. If love does not depend on a specific cause, then it never ends." [4] The same applies to hate. When hate depends on a specific cause, it ends once the cause disappears. Causeless, baseless hate lasts forever.

The Egyptians oppressed the Israelites because, in Pharaoh's words, "The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us" (Ex. 1:9). Their hate, in other words, came from fear. It was not irrational. The Egyptians had been attacked and conquered before by a foreign group known as the Hyksos, and the memory of that period was still acute and painful. The Amalekites, however, were not being threatened by the Israelites. They attacked a people who were "weary and worn out," specifically those who were "lagging behind." In short: The Egyptians feared the Israelites because they were strong. The Amalekites attacked the Israelites because they were weak.

In today's terminology, the Egyptians were rational actors, the Amalekites were not. With rational actors there can be negotiated peace. People engaged in conflict eventually realise that they are not only destroying their enemies: they are destroying themselves. That is what Pharaoh's advisers said to him after seven plagues: "Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?" (Ex. 10:7). There comes a point at which rational actors understand that the pursuit of self-interest has become self-destructive, and they learn to co-operate.

It is not so, however, with non-rational actors. Emil Fackenheim, one of the great post-Holocaust theologians, noted that towards the end of the Second World War the Germans diverted trains carrying supplies to their own army, in order to transport Jews to the extermination camps. So driven were they by hatred that they were prepared to put their own victory at risk in order to carry out the systematic murder of the Jews of Europe. This was, he said, evil for evil's sake. [5]

The Amalekites function in Jewish memory as "the enemy" in Lee Harris' sense. Jewish law, however, specifies two completely different forms of action in relation to the Amalekites. First is the physical command to wage war against them. That is what Samuel told Saul to do, a command he failed fully to fulfil. Does this command still apply today?

The unequivocal answer given by Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch is ‘No’.

[6] Maimonides ruled that the command to destroy the Amalekites only applied if they refused to make peace and accept the seven Noahide laws. He further stated that the command was no longer applicable since Sennacherib, the Assyrian, had transported and resettled the nations he conquered so that it was no longer possible to identify the ethnicity of any of the original nations against whom the Israelites were commanded to fight. He also said, in *The Guide for the Perplexed*, that the command only applied to people of specific biological descent. It is not to be applied in general to enemies or haters of the Jewish people. So the command to wage war against the Amalekites no longer applies.

However, there is a quite different command, to “remember” and “not forget” Amalek, which we fulfil annually by the reading the passage containing the Amalekites command as it appears in Deuteronomy on the Shabbat before Purim, Shabbat Zachor (the connection with Purim is that Haman the “Agagite” is assumed to be a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites). Here Amalek has become a symbol rather than a reality.

By dividing the response in this way, Judaism marks a clear distinction between an ancient enemy who no longer exists, and the evil that enemy embodied, which can break out again at any time in any place. It is easy at times of peace to forget the evil that lies just beneath the surface of the human heart. Never was this truer than in the past three centuries. The birth of Enlightenment, toleration, emancipation, liberalism and human rights persuaded many, Jews among them, that collective evil was as extinct as the Amalekites. Evil was then, not now. That age eventually begat nationalism, fascism, communism, two World Wars, some of the brutal tyrannies ever known, and the worst crime of man against man.

Today, the great danger is terror. Here the words of Princeton political philosopher Michael Walzer are particularly apt:

Wherever we see terrorism, we should look for tyranny and oppression ... The terrorists aim to rule, and murder is their method. They have their own internal police, death squads, disappearances. They begin by killing or intimidating those comrades who stand in their way, and they proceed to do the same, if they can, among the people they claim to represent. If terrorists are successful, they rule tyrannically, and their people bear, without consent, the costs of the terrorists’ rule.[7]

Evil never dies and – like liberty – it demands constant vigilance. We are commanded to remember, not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the future,

and not for revenge but the opposite: a world free of revenge and other forms of violence.

Lee Harris began *Civilization and its Enemies* with the words, “The subject of this book is forgetfulness,”[8] and ends with a question: “Can the West overcome the forgetfulness that is the nemesis of every successful civilisation?”[9] That is why are commanded to remember and never forget Amalek, not because the historic people still exists, but because a society of rational actors can sometimes believe that the world is full of rational actors with whom one can negotiate peace. It is not always so.

Rarely was a biblical message so relevant to the future of the West and of freedom itself. Peace is possible, implies Moses, even with an Egypt that enslaved and tried to destroy us. But peace is not possible with those who attack people they see as weak and who deny their own people the freedom for which they claim to be fighting. Freedom depends on our ability to remember and, whenever necessary, confront “the eternal gang of ruthless men,”[10] the face of Amalek throughout history. Sometimes there may be no alternative but to fight evil and defeat it. This may be the only path to peace. [1] Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies: The Next Stage of History*, New York: Free Press, 2004. *The Suicide of Reason*, New York: Basic Books, 2008. [2] *Ibid.*, xii–xiii. [3] Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 176. [4] Mishnah Avot 5:16. [5] Emil L. Fackenheim and Michael L. Morgan, *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987, p. 126. [6] Rabbi N L Rabinovitch, *Shu”t Melumdei Milchama* (Maale Adumim: Maaliyot, 1993), pp. 22-25.[7] Michael Walzer, *Arguing About War*, Yale University Press, 2004, 64-65. [8] Harris, *Civilization*, p. xi. [9] *Ibid.*, p. 218. [10] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

Redemptive Relationship, Part 2: Leaving and Coming (Back) Home – Parashat Beshalach 5782 by Rabbi Aviva Richman

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/aviva-richmans-divrei-torah>

In Parashat Bo, we began an exploration of the different stories of how Israel “fell in love” with God. Whatever our own relationship with God may or may not be, the different moments accentuated in alternate versions of this love story bring our attention to different ways transformative relationship can take shape. Far from a naive picture of the beloved who swoops in to make everything better, digging deeper into these texts we find a more rugged texture of how redemptive relationship interfaces with complex realities. This week we explore the relationship between parents and children, their respective relationships with God, and how these webs of relationship shape each other.

Parashat BeShallah brings us to the second scene of the formative moment in Israel's relationship with God: on the banks of the Reed Sea. Instead of lingering in the darkness of Egypt, as we saw in Parashat Bo, this encounter comes in a state of full view and vision, as the people of Israel witness revelation when the Sea splits, "point" and exclaim, "This is my God!"—erupting in the Song of the Sea: Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:1

Another interpretation: "I am a rose (havatzelet) of Sharon[, a lily of the valleys]." I am she and I am beloved (havivah). I am she who was beloved in the shadow (tzeil) of the Sea, and in a short time I bloomed with good deeds like "a lily," and I pointed to God with my finger,¹ as it is said, "This is my God and I will glorify Him" (Exodus 15:2).

To be able to point and identify someone means you must have known them before. How is it possible that the people of Israel already knew God?

Midrash relates that for the most part they didn't—but some of their children did.

Otzar HaMidrashim² p. 305, #17

How do we know that the sons thrown into the Nile River went up with their parents out of Egypt?

The Holy Blessed One signaled to the angel appointed over the water and it spit them out into the wilderness. They ate and drank and flourished there.

Unable to imagine that the boys thrown into the river were left behind, this tradition posits a divine hand of love and care that rescued and nourished these children so they could be reunited with their families. Two distinct versions of how this reunion happens offer diverging pictures of the relationships between parents, children, and God.

In one version, these children came back to their families at the crossing of the Sea. The first act of recognition in this scene is not Israel pointing at and recognizing God, but the children pointing at and recognizing their parents.

Ending 1 (continuation of Otzar HaMidrashim)

And when the people of Israel were on the banks of the [Reed] Sea, their children came in front of them and opened their mouths and said, "These are our fathers!" It is this moment of reunification, when the parents realized that their children were not lost but cared for, that led them to claim God as their God, the one who cared for their children.

מִיד פִּתְחוּ אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ זֶה אֱלֹהֵי וְאֹנֶה

Their fathers opened their mouths and said, "This is my God and I will glorify Him." Upon seeing their parents enter into relationship with God, these children now sense a new dimension in their own relationship with God. This God who has cared

for them is not entirely separate from the rest of their lives, but integrated into their relationship with their families. They give voice to the next part of the verse.

אמרו הבנים אלהי אבי וארוממנהו.

Their children said: “God of my father and I will exalt Him.”

We learn that the people of Israel leaving Egypt had no prior knowledge of God, and that the slew of miracles they had experienced did not automatically lead them to say, “This is my God” at the divine revelation at the Sea. In fact, according to this midrash, it seems like they wouldn’t have claimed this relationship with God so long as they thought they had lost some of their children. Leaving Egypt didn’t matter if their children were left behind. What made them open their mouths to want “this God” is when they realized God had cared for their children and brought them back. Perhaps similarly, these children, as indebted as they may have felt to God, couldn’t bring themselves to “exalt” God so long as they were separated from their parents. Being close with God and being close with loved ones are deeply intertwined in this text: children and parents don’t know each other without God, and each is only ready to fully step into relationship with God when they are also in relationship with each other. Crucial in this picture is that the two groups do not have the same experience of God, but their diverging religious journeys still ultimately bring them closer together.

A different ending to the story highlights a different dynamic in the relationship between parents, children, and God. In this version, the children raised by God in the middle of nowhere came home to their parents *before* the Exodus from Egypt, and they left Egypt together with their parents. At the Sea, then, the children were able to recognize God first, because they had already been in prior relationship with God.

Ending 2:

Shemot Rabbah 1:13

When they grew up they would come to their homes, in flocks... when the Holy Blessed One was revealed at the Sea, they recognized [God] first, as it says, “This is my God and I will glorify [God].”

The children “introduce” God to their parents, as it were. The parents can only see God through the eyes of their children.

Behind these dramatic tellings of the Exodus story, there are profound implications for knowing the limits of our own understanding of who God is, and what might open our eyes to recognize God differently. In this second version, there is what may feel like a reversal from the way we usually conceive of religious education. Instead of parents teaching children to recognize God, children are the ones able to bring their parents to identify who and what God is.

The power of this way of knowing God, embedded in children and parents losing and finding each other, provides a striking intertext to the origins of our relationship with God in the book of Genesis, where Avram leaves home to pursue God and never returns.³ If Avram's relationship with God represents the ways we need to **leave** home, to detach and dissociate from an earlier generation that "got God wrong," the scene at the Sea is a kind of counterbalance, where coming to know God involves **coming** home. The statement, "This is my God," comes only when children come home to be with their parents. At the same time, there is an element of Avram's story here, where the children—not of any willful act of their own—have had an experience of God totally separate from their parents. Indeed, there are strands of biblical text and many *midrashim* that assume the people of Israel worshiped idols in Egypt, not so different from Avram's father.⁴ However, quite different than the story of Avram, the children who have come to an authentic experience of God are able to bring that back home to their parents, and catalyze their parents' coming into a new understanding and relationship with God.⁵ What emerges is a dynamic picture of how our own deep learning and identity diverges from and converges with our parents'. Sometimes we feel we want to leave behind aspects of our religious upbringing, like Avram leaving home. This may not be because there was anything "wrong" with what we have inherited, but because this divergence is necessary for continued growth. When we are open to where these journeys take us, and when we are open to where the journeys of our children or parents take them, these experiences of distance can be a source of deeper understanding and relationship. Our own religious journeys might lead us deeper into relationship with our parents or children, rather than making us grow further apart, even as we don't see exactly eye to eye. And, our relationship with our parents or children might lead us into deeper knowledge of our own religious identities, our own sense of being able to point at "who God is," even as what we see may differ from our parents our children.

Shabbat Shalom.

¹ The word "זֶה - this" in the Torah is by default understood by our rabbis to refer to something that you can point to, that is right in front of you, and not something abstract or ephemeral. This is the impetus for the midrash of highlighting the "pointing with the finger" in response to a verse which uses the word "this." Another great example of this is in the Haggadah, where Exodus 13:8 ("Because of זֶה - this") refers to the symbols of the Seder plate and the rituals of Seder night. ² Otzar HaMidrashim is an anthology of midrash compiled by Julius Eisenstein, printed in 1915. ³ The only way in which he is shown reaching for home is when he tells his servant to find a wife for his son from his homeland (Genesis 24). ⁴ See, for example, the discussion in Ezekiel 20 and Vayikra

Rabbah 22:8. ⁵ Maimonides in his *Guide of the Perplexed* 3:32 talks about sacrifices in a way that is resonant with this discussion. Although the system of *korbanot* are mandated by God and the Torah, they were only supposed to be a stepping stone to deeper *avodah*. In the end, sacrifices are no better than *avodah zarah* once the next stage, *tefillah* (and ultimately: meditation) has been reached.

[Parashat Beshalach: When the Wood Meets the Water by Rabbi Shmuel Simenowitz](https://www.growtorah.org/shemot/2022/01/12-parshat-beshalach-when-the-wood-meets-the-water)
<https://www.growtorah.org/shemot/2022/01/12-parshat-beshalach-when-the-wood-meets-the-water>

No parsha is as intimately aligned with water as Parshat Beshalach. From the miraculous parting of the *Yam Suf*, the watershed event of Jewish history, to the sweetening of the bitter waters at *Marah*, to the oasis in *Elim*, and to the rock at *Rephidim* giving forth water, Beshalach gushes forth at every corner.

This Shabbat read is referred to as Shabbat Shira—the Sabbath of Song – on account of the song sung by Moshe and B’nei Yisrael after crossing the sea. [1] This song is called “Shirat Hayam,” “The Song of the Sea” in English. This positive association with the sea seems obvious from our parsha; however, upon further contemplation, it could seem a bit surprising.

B’nei Yisrael have had a tenuous relationship with water until now – always digging new wells, moving around due to drought, and, most recently, having their children drowned in the Nile. With the parting of the Yam Suf in Beshalach, this relationship reaches a climax. Although the water initially seems to limit B’nei Yisrael, Hashem shows his power, and the sea becomes a weapon to facilitate their escape and redemption from Mitzrayim. “Shirat Hayam” is an ultimate expression of our appreciation for Hashem and the water.

After this magnificent miracle, the Jews arrive thirsty at Marah and cannot drink because the waters are bitter. “Vayorehu Hashem etz-” Hashem instructs Moshe to take a certain wood and throw it in the water - the waters are sweetened.[2] This incident brings the uncertainty and necessity of water back into focus - while there may be water all around, we rely on Hashem to make it beneficial for us.

In a world where water has become increasingly scarce, where despite its seeming ubiquity, less than 1% of the world’s water supply is potable. Manufacturing has left its heavy imprint on the water supply and quality, rendering the parsha’s message critical.[3]

The wood used to sweeten the waters also reminds us of our forests and the toll that they have taken. The worldwide demand for raw materials, aggressive logging, and unprecedented development have severely impacted our forests. [4] The

biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate, stomped out both for the valuable timber and to make room for increased cattle grazing. We cannot forget the necessity of water or woods in our lives, and we cannot take our resources for granted.

On another level, this parsha tells about the waters themselves. “Shirat Hayam” can also be “The Sea’s Song” – the miracle can be appreciated not just for what it accomplished for B’nei Yisrael, but for the power and wonder of the sea and the wall of water itself. The incident at Marah is somewhat more cryptic and elusive. In showing Moshe the wood to sweeten the waters, the Midrash offers several opinions as to the type of wood Moshe used, and what type of transformation was effected. R’ Yehoshua (a charcoal maker by trade) posited that it was willow. R’ Natan said it was a type of bitter ivy. R’ Elazar Hamoda’i, an olive tree. And R’ Yehoshua ben Korcha, a thistle bush. To all opinions, the consensus seems to be that the wood was bitter.[5] This represents a form of “self-realization,” as the bitter wood makes the waters realize how bad it is to be bitter, and convinces them to become sweet of their own accord. The waters at Refidim flow forth after Moshe hits a rock. The natural world is alive, and even water can be powerful, reticent, and even growing and changing.

Even though the modern environmental situation has reached a point where the waters seem too bitter to drink, Beshalach reflects the dynamism of our environment, asking us to trust nature and respect it. Beshalach reminds us that our water and our world have agency outside of us, and that to heal the world, we need to work with the environment, not merely upon it.

Together with our environment, we have the capacity to change, react, and improve. On our path towards a better world, we can keep in mind this parable from the Alter Rebbe:

A distraught father whose son was beginning to stray from the path of his forefathers once brought his son to the Alter Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Liadi. R’ Shneur Zalman asked the boy what he enjoyed doing. The boy responded that he liked riding horses.

“And what qualities do you look for in a horse?” R’ Shneur Zalman asked him.

“Speed,” the boy replied.

“And what if you are on a fast horse which takes a wrong turn in the road?” the sage continued.

“You can get very lost in a hurry,” was the boy’s response.

“And what if you turn the horse around?” the elderly sage pressed on.

“You can get back just as fast.”

A slight smile crept across R’ Shneur Zalman’s face as the boy nodded his head,

indicating that he understood the Alter Rebbe's message.

The power that we have as humans, that our major industries and corporations have used to cause environmental destruction can, together with the power of our environment itself, be harnessed to promote a cleaner and healthier future. The energy and tools needed for change are within our reach. We just need the will to utilize them, and a deep appreciation and understanding of that which Hashem has taught us - "Vayorehu Hashem etz."

(To find out about Rabbi Shmuel Simenowitz click on: https://www.torahcafe.com/scholar/rabbi-shmuel-simenowitz_0000000432.html)

[1] **Shemot** 15:1-18 [2] Shemot 15:25 [3] <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/water-scarcity>

[4] <https://www.worldwildlife.org/threats/deforestation-and-forest-degradation>

[5] Mekhilta Shemot 15:25. Also see Rashi, Ramban and Ibn Ezra on Shemot 15:25. On the other hand, R' Shimon bar Yochai explains the phrase "Vayorehu Hashem etz" as "Hashem taught Moshe Torah"—the "etz" referring to Torah as in "etz chaim hee- it (the Torah) is a tree of life." In a similar vein, the Toras Menachem brings a beautiful literal reading from the Zohar suggesting that it was a piece of wood from the Etz Chayim—the original Tree of Life. This is based on Likutei Sichos 6:393. (Toras Menachem is a compilation culled by Rabbi Chaim Miller from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talks on Rashi. Citations here are from the Gutnick Edition 2002.)

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**I found the above commentary on a website called Grow Torah: Their mission at GrowTorah aims to cultivate a more passionate, compassionate and sustainable future driven by Torah values. For more info go to: (<https://www.growtorah.org/about1>)**

### **[Parashat Beshalach by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin](https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-parshat-beshalach-5782/)**

**<https://ots.org.il/shabbat-shalom-parshat-beshalach-5782/>**

*Efrat, Israel* –**"And when Israel saw the great hand that God had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared God; they had faith in God and in His servant, Moses" (Exodus 14:31)**

Why does the heart of the Haggadah almost completely omit mention of Moses, limiting him to one "cameo" appearance? Moreover, even that brief reference – a verse from this week's portion, Beshalach, dealing with the splitting of the Reed Sea – seems to mention Moses in an incidental manner: "And when Israel saw the great hand that God had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared God; they had faith in God and in His servant, Moses" (ibid. 14:31). Certainly the leader of the Exodus should have merited more prominent billing in the Haggadah. After all, he was God's "point man" in implementing the Exodus from Egypt!

That said, if the lone mention of Moses is in a verse about the splitting of the Reed Sea, we must uncover its significance. Birth is intimately associated with water: the

fetus is surrounded by amniotic fluid, the mother's water breaking is a sign of imminent birth, and a person who converts to Judaism—whom the Talmud analogizes to a newborn—must completely immerse him/herself in a mikveh of water.

If the birth of the Jewish People occurred at the time of God's Covenant Between the Pieces with Abraham [*Gen. 15*], then our rebirth took place at the splitting of the Reed Sea. Paralleling our national birth and rebirth is the birth and rebirth of Moses. Carefully studying his emergence onto the stage of history, we find parallels to the miracle and message of the splitting of the Reed Sea inspiringly apparent.

The birth of Moses is described early in the Book of Exodus: born to parents from the tribe of Levi, he is hidden for the first three months of his life. When keeping him hidden from Egyptian authorities is no longer sustainable, he is placed in an ark smeared with clay and pitch, with the ark set afloat "in the reeds" (*ba-suf*) of the Nile River (Exodus 2:1-3).

The rebirth of Moses begins when Pharaoh's daughter goes down to bathe in the Nile. As her maidens walk along the river, the princess sees Moses' basket among the reeds. She sends her maidservant, takes the Hebrew baby, has compassion for him, and allows Miriam, who had been carefully following the events, to find a Hebrew wet-nurse for him (*ibid.*, v. 5-9).

Pharaoh's daughter does not give birth to Moses, but she does save his life, in the process endangering her own life by defying her father's decree to cast all Hebrew baby boys into the Nile. History confirms that totalitarian despots never hesitate to execute their closest family members who dare rebel against them. Pharaoh's daughter thus emerges as a courageous heroine!

This fortunate rebirth culminates with the giving of a name: "And the lad grew, and [the wet-nurse, Yocheved; his biological mother] took him to Pharaoh's daughter; he became the son [of Pharaoh's daughter], and she named him Moshe, saying, 'It is because I drew him out (*meshi'tihu*) from the water'" (*ibid.*, v. 10).

The most commonly accepted interpretation of the name "Moshe" is that he was drawn forth from the river, in the passive form. But if so, Hebrew grammar would dictate that his name be *Mashui*, referring to he who was drawn forth. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (a.k.a. the Netziv) offers a sharp insight, noting a very different way of understanding these Biblical words: *moshe* is an Egyptian word that means "son", as can be seen in the family name of Pharaohs, "Ramses": "Ra" was the Egyptian sun god and in Egyptian, "Mses" means "son".

Therefore, Pharaoh's daughter names the baby "Moshe", meaning "son". And it is not without cause that she has the right to call him her son. After all, having drawn him forth from the Nile River on pain of death, she has earned this right. Every biological mother puts her life on the line with every birth; and Pharaoh's daughter endangered her life by going against her father's decree and saving this Hebrew baby.



While his insight is compelling, it leaves us without a verbal connection between the Egyptian name "Moshe" and the Hebrew word, *meshi'tihu*, "I drew him out". To solve this dilemma, the Torah employs a double-entendre: Moshe the son (in Egyptian), reborn in the midst of reeds, will decisively draw forth (*moshe*, in Hebrew) his people, the Israelites, at the Reed Sea, facilitating their rebirth. This is why Moses' lone appearance in the Haggadah occurs at the splitting of the Reed Sea. Far from merely citing a verse that happens to include Moses' name, the Haggadah is alluding to that most profound parallel of the leader and his people both experiencing rebirth, Moses by Pharaoh's daughter (in the reeds of the Nile), and the Jewish People by God at the Reed Sea.

And perhaps even more significant is what Moses and the Jewish People did with these additional opportunities of rebirth. From the shores of the Reed Sea, they journeyed to Sinai and received the Torah, becoming messengers of truly revolutionary teachings to the world, such as the moral obligations of universal freedom and human dignity that are as important today as they have ever been.

### Yahrtzeits

Rich Cohen remembers his mother Ida Cohen on Sat. Jan.8 (Shevat 6)

Elaine Berkenwald remembers her husband Stanley Klughaupt on Fri. Jan.14 (Shevat 12)

### Coming Up At Kol Rina

#### Friday Torah Study and Service via Zoom

On Friday, January 14, we will begin with Torah study led by Lenny Levin, starting at 5:00, followed by Kabbalat Shabbat at 5:30, also led by Lenny Levin, and Maariv led by Rebecca Greene. Our featured presenter will be Barry Goldenberg, who will speak on "Growing Up Jewish in Irvington in the 50s and 60s." We hope you will join us!

**Use the following Zoom link to attend:**

<https://zoom.us/j/533517572?pwd=dVFHR2NGZFBCYWp1Yzd6ald0bzFRdz09>

Meeting ID: 533 517 572

Password: 003293

### \*Monday evening minyan SPECIAL TU BISHEVAT EDITION\*

Monday, January 17, is **Tu BiShevat**, the New Year of the Trees. We will have a brief Tu BiShevat "seder" beginning at 7:30 and led by Lenny Levin, followed by our regular weekday evening minyan, beginning at 8:00, all via Zoom.

If you would like to eat and drink the traditional foods during our "seder," have on hand the following:

- 1) Red grape juice AND white grape juice, which you will be mixing in various proportions.
- 2) One or more fruits or dried fruits with one large pit or seed in the middle, such as dates, olives, apricots, peaches and plums.
- 3) One or more fruits that have many small seeds, such as figs, strawberries, kiwis, and pomegranates.
- 4) One or more fruits or nuts that have a hard or tough outer portion hiding the fruit inside, such as oranges, almonds or pistachios.
- 5) One or more foods or herbs with a pleasant smell, such as cinnamon, rosemary or bay leaf. Or, if you prefer, choose examples from the category of fruits that are entirely edible, such as grapes, raisins, blueberries, raspberries and figs.

We hope you will join us for this mini-seder, and that you will stay for the minyan afterwards. Your presence at weekly minyan allows mourners and those observing yahrzeits to say Kaddish. Please support your Kol Rina friends by attending.

**Use the following Zoom link to attend:**

<https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09>

Meeting ID: 976 6398 7468 Password: 080691

