

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Prashat Beshalach
January 27, 2024 *** 17 Sh'vat, 5784

Beshalach in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3262/jewish/Beshalach-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Beshalach," means "When he sent" and it is found in Exodus 13:17.

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: Judges 4:4 – 5:31

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 Power of Ruach: Beshalach by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshallach/the-power-of-ruach/)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshallach/the-power-of-ruach/>

In September 2010, BBC, Reuters, and other news agencies reported on a sensational scientific discovery. Researchers at the US National Center for Atmospheric Research and the University of Colorado were able to show – through computer simulation – how the division of the Red Sea may have taken place.

Using sophisticated modelling, they demonstrated how a strong east wind, blowing overnight, could have pushed water back at a bend where an ancient river is believed to have merged with a coastal lagoon. The water would have been guided into the two waterways, and a land bridge would have opened at the bend, allowing people to walk across the exposed mudflats. As soon as the wind died down, the waters would have rushed back in. As the leader of the project said when the report was published, "The simulations match fairly closely with the account in Exodus."

This is how the Cambridge University physicist Colin Humphreys puts it in his *The Miracles of Exodus*:

Wind tides are well known to oceanographers. For example, a strong wind blowing along Lake Erie, one of the Great Lakes, has produced water

elevation differences of as much as sixteen feet between Toledo, Ohio, on the west, and Buffalo, New York, on the east... There are reports that Napoleon was almost killed by a "sudden high tide" while he was crossing shallow water near the head of the Gulf of Suez. Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus*

To me, though, the real issue is what the biblical account actually is. Because it is right here that we have one of the most fascinating features of the way the Torah tells its stories. Here is the key passage:

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind all night, turning it into dry land and dividing the water. So the Israelites walked through the sea on dry land. To their right and left, the water was like a wall. Ex. 14:21-22

The passage can be read two ways. The first is that what happened was a suspension of the laws of nature. It was a supernatural event. The waters stood, literally, like two walls.

The second is that what happened was miraculous, but not because the laws of nature were suspended. To the contrary, as the computer simulation shows, the exposure of dry land at a particular point in the Red Sea was a natural outcome of the strong east wind. What made it miraculous is that it happened just there, just then, when the Israelites seemed trapped, unable to go forward because of the sea, unable to turn back because of the Egyptian army pursuing them.

There is a significant difference between these two interpretations. The first appeals to our sense of wonder. How extraordinary that the laws of nature should be suspended to allow an escaping people to go free. It is a story to appeal to the imagination of a child.

But the naturalistic explanation is wondrous at another level entirely. Here the Torah is using the device of irony. What made the Egyptians of the time of Rameses so formidable was the fact that they possessed the latest and most powerful form of military technology, the horse-drawn chariot. It made them unbeatable in battle, and fearsome.

What happens at the sea is poetic justice of the most exquisite kind. There is only one circumstance in which a group of people travelling by foot can escape a highly trained army of charioteers, namely when the route passes through a muddy seabed. The people can walk across, but the chariot wheels get stuck in the mud. The Egyptian army can neither advance nor retreat. The wind drops. The water returns. The powerful are now powerless, while the powerless have made their

way to freedom.

This second narrative has a moral depth that the first does not; and it resonates with the message of the book of Psalms:

His pleasure is not in the strength of the horse,

Nor His delight in the legs of the warrior;

The Lord delights in those who fear Him,

Who put their hope in His unfailing love.

Psalm 147:10-11

In Bereishit Rabbah, it is indicated that the division of the sea was, as it were, programmed into Creation from the outset. It was less a suspension of nature than an event written into nature from the beginning, to be triggered at the appropriate moment in the unfolding of history.

Rabbi Jonathan said: The Holy One, blessed be He, made a condition with the sea [at the beginning of creation], that it should split asunder for the Israelites. That is the meaning of "the sea went back to its full flow" – [read not le-eitano but letenao], "the condition" that God had earlier stipulated. Bereishit Rabbah 5:5

A miracle is not necessarily something that suspends natural law. It is, rather, an event for which there may be a natural explanation, but which – happening when, where, and how it did – evokes wonder, such that even the most hardened sceptic senses that God has intervened in history. The weak are saved; those in danger, delivered. More significant still is the moral message such an event conveys: that hubris is punished by nemesis; that the proud are humbled and the humble given pride; that there is justice in history, often hidden but sometimes gloriously revealed.

The elegantly simple way in which the division of the Red Sea is described in the Torah so that it can be read at two quite different levels, one as a supernatural miracle, the other as a moral tale about the limits of technology when it comes to the real strength of nations: that to me is what is most striking. It is a text quite deliberately written so that our understanding of it can deepen as we mature, and we are no longer so interested in the mechanics of miracles, and more interested in how freedom is won or lost.

To be clear, it's good to know how the division of the sea happened, but there

remains a depth to the biblical story that can never be exhausted by computer simulations and other historical or scientific evidence and depends instead on being sensitive to its deliberate and delicate ambiguity.

Just as ruach, a physical wind, can part waters and expose land beneath, so too ruach, the human spirit, can expose, beneath the surface of a story, a deeper meaning beneath.

[Parshat 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)
[Edited by Shoshi Ehrenreich of Grow Torah](https://www.growtorah.org/shemot/2022/01/12-parshat-beshalach-when-the-wood-meets-the-water)

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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 Bnei 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.

Bnei 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 Bnei 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 a 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 wood 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 Bnei 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 can 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 that 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.” (For Rabbi Simenowitz's biography look here: 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.)

Beshalach: No More Solitary Confinement in NYC by Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson

https://truah.org/resources/margo-hughes-robinson-beshalach-moraltorah_2024/

In this week's parshah, the Israelites experience two peak moments of liberation, with a valley of uncertainty and doubt in between. Pharaoh has let them go. But then he changes his mind and gives chase, hemming the people in against the Red Sea. As readers of Torah, we anticipate that the sea will split and the Israelites will triumph; but in the moment, they don't yet know how the story will end.

This kind emotional whiplash is familiar to many in New York City who are fighting to end mass incarceration. We are celebrating a major win: At the end of December, the City Council approved Intro 549, a bill to ban almost all solitary confinement in NYC, with an overwhelming majority. But mere hours before the bill was to become law last week, Mayor Eric Adams issued a veto. The challenge is clear: Can New Yorkers and their representatives see this veto overturned?

This victory was a long time coming. For years, survivors of solitary confinement,

affected families, and advocates have carried this bill, pushing it through repeated legislative cycles and administrations. And that brings me to a moment early in this week's parshah before the sea was crossed, before victory was complete:

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." (Exodus 13:19)

I often find myself turning back to the Joseph story, particularly his early experiences with incarceration and isolation: first in a desert pit, alone until his brothers sell him into slavery, then in an Egyptian jail after a false accusation by Potiphar's wife. While he lived his entire adult life in Egypt, his deathbed wish was to be brought back to the Land of Israel. (Genesis 50:24-26) The rabbis of the Babylonian Talmud inquire:

The Gemara asks: And from where did Moses our teacher know where Joseph was buried? The Sages said: Serach, the daughter of Asher, remained from that generation that initially descended to Egypt with Jacob. Moses went to her and said to her: Do you know anything about where Joseph is buried? She said to him: The Egyptians fashioned a metal casket for him and set it in the Nile River as a charm so that its water would be blessed. Moses went and stood on the bank of the Nile. He said to Joseph: Joseph, Joseph, the time has arrived about which the Holy Blessed One took an oath saying that I (i.e., God) will redeem you. And the time for fulfillment of the oath that you administered to the Jewish people that they will bury you in Eretz Yisrael has arrived. If you show yourself, it is good, but if not, we are clear from your oath. Immediately, the casket of Joseph floated to the top of the water. (Sotah 13a)

I often say that in my role as T'ruah's New York Rabbinic Organizer, I don't perform many funerals. Instead, I attend a lot of emergency rallies. Our longtime partners at the HALT Solitary and Jails Action Coalitions hold an emergency public gathering each time there is a death on Rikers Island. And all too often, these tragic losses are connected directly to the human rights violation that is solitary confinement. People detained at Rikers have died from lack of access to their regular medication, neglect during medical emergencies, and self-inflicted injuries — all while enduring a treatment that is recognized by the UN as a gross violation of human rights.

When I show up at these emergency protests and want a Jewish text to share, I reach for this scene of Joseph's metal coffin buried in the Nile. In death, Joseph is once again incarcerated and isolated from his people in a small, cold, hidden, dark

box. And I've learned from the folks we organize alongside how powerful it is to make sure those we've lost in this struggle, like Joseph, are still present with us, how we must actively seek to make their memories a blessing.

One moment stands out in particular: A few months ago, a HALT and JAC rally in support of Intro 549 fell on Layleen Polanco's (z"l) birthday. A young trans woman of color, Layleen was held in solitary and denied medical care when she had a seizure — recordings have since emerged of officers taunting her as she struggled, rather than coming to her aid. One coalition member named Candie Hailey, a survivor of torture and solitary on Rikers, brought cupcakes and arrived at the rally wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with Layleen's image. As we concluded our action, she passed out the cupcakes not only to coalition members but to the media who had gathered to cover the event, and insisted that we sing happy birthday in Layleen's honor. This, to me, is what Moses and Serach do for Joseph. He did not live to see liberation, but those who did made it their mission to make sure he was not left behind. At the moment when his descendants burst into song on the shore anticipating liberation, they made every effort to bring Joseph along with them.

Like the Israelites, we cannot move toward this moment of liberation without those we've lost. There is a deep and abiding power in saying to those who have died as a result of solitary confinement, "The moment of redemption has arrived! And we are bringing you with us." This is the promise our partners have made with every phone call, every lobby meeting, every backroom negotiation to get this bill passed. We cannot bring back those we lost, but we can sanctify their memories by continuing to fight for a city that is dedicated to human rights for all.

The New York City Council and Speaker Adrienne Adams have committed to bringing Intro 549 up for a veto override vote in the coming days. Whether or not you live in New York, you can use this tool from our partners at HALT Solitary Coalition to make your voice heard and demand an end to solitary confinement.

(Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson is T'ruah's New York Rabbinic Organizer.)

[Beshalach: Song of the Sea by the Accidental Talmudist](https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/featured/2024/01/23/beshalach-song-of-the-sea-2/)

<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/featured/2024/01/23/beshalach-song-of-the-sea-2/>

On Shabbat Shirah, "Shabbat of Song," we chant the Song of the Sea, a jubilant ballad the Israelites sang after God parted the Red Sea for them. There are actually two songs of the sea, one sung by the men and another by the women. Only one line is common to both, and therefore this line is presumed to convey the distilled essence of the song: "I will sing to God for He is exalted above all

exaltedness, a horse and its rider He heaved into the sea.” (Ex. 15:1, 15:21)

Why does the Torah cite a “horse and rider heaved into the sea” as evidence of God’s exaltedness? Why not summon a more dramatic image, like the sea’s miraculous parting or the destruction of the world’s mightiest army? The Sefas Emes (Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, 1847-1905) explains that the horse and rider are mentioned to emphasize that God runs the world. Just as a rider thinks he controls his horse, so do humans often think we are solely responsible for our successes in life (and our failures.) In reality, God controls everything, and all that happens is part of God’s plan. Both humans and animals are clay in the hands of our Molder.

The Egyptians denied the existence of the One God, instead worshipping the human Pharaoh, who was unable to protect them from the overpowering force of the God of Israel. We are taught to emulate not the idolatrous Egyptians but the righteous Hebrew women who celebrated by the sea. Why the women specifically? Because while both the men and the women sang and danced, only the women – led by the prophetess Miriam – had musical instruments. They believed with such perfect faith that God would continue to perform miracles for them that before leaving Egypt, they grabbed their tambourines.

Beshalach: Divine Protection – Fire and Cloud

Table for Five: Beshalach

Edited by Salvador Litvak, the Accidental Talmudist

<https://www.accidentaltalmudist.org/table-for-five/2024/01/23/beshalach-divine-protection/>

It came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel and there were cloud and darkness — while it illuminated the night — and one did not draw near the other all the night
— Ex. 14:20

Elan Javanfard L.M.F.T., Professor & Author, Psycho-Spiritual Insights blog

The Gemara in Megillah 10b discusses Rabbi Yohanan’s understanding of the words “and one did not draw near the other all the night.” He explains that the ministering angels wanted to sing their song to Hashem, but Hashem stopped them saying my creations are being drowned – showing us that Hashem does not rejoice at the downfall of even the wicked. The Or HaChaim writes that for this exact reason we do not say full Hallel on the 7th day of Pesach.

Not rejoicing in the suffering of your enemies suggests an ability to empathize with others, even those you may consider adversaries. Empathy involves understanding

and sharing the feelings of others, even if you don't agree with them or despise them. Empathy becomes a beacon of light during the storm, guiding us through difficult times with the power to heal, connect, and remind us that, even in darkness, understanding one another's struggles can be the illumination that leads us to shared strength. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks writes, "Empathy is not a lightweight, touchy-feely, add-on extra to the moral life. It is an essential element in life." Hashem is providing us a powerful lesson on how cultivating empathy brings us closer to others and ultimately towards him. Let us take the opportunity to follow in his ways.

Sarah Pachter, Author and Speaker

When I think about the two clouds that protected the Jews in the desert and their function, it reminds me of two parents protecting their children. The clouds blocked Egyptian arrows sent towards the Jews. The clouds gave personal attention based on individual needs. And the clouds provided illumination, while also darkening the way for the Egyptians. This is similar to parenthood. We protect, attend to, and illuminate the correct path for our children.

The pasuk states, "and one did not draw near the other all the night." The clouds did not interfere with one another, working together. This is an important tenet in parenting. A couple may get along great...until the dynamics of raising a child begin. It starts during infancy: "Don't hold him that way- it's too rough!" As the child grows, the stakes get higher. (Little kids, little problems; big kids, big problems.) Teens may play their parents against one another, or parent shop to get their desired answer.

A renowned therapist shares one easy way to prevent interference. "I'm blowing you a kiss" is a code couples can use to enhance their shalom bayit. It means "Let's talk about this at another time" or "Let's not undermine each other in front of the children." This helps the couple navigate the situation smoothly and inconspicuously.

The clouds of glory attended to the needs of the Jewish people, while working together in harmony. May Hashem's protection only grow in strength during these challenging times for Jews worldwide.

Rabbi Adam Kligfeld, Senior Rabbi, Temple Beth Am

The full corpus of Jewish wisdom is endlessly interwoven. "Zeh el zeh", the Hebrew for the words "one...near the other" is evocative of Isaiah's image—canonized in daily prayer— of the heavenly angels host "to one another," giving permission to one another, to proclaim God as holy. Spiritual life is meant to be intimate, partnered, experienced in unity, with voices and souls joined together in sacred purpose.

The presence of light in the Israelite camp, and the absence of light for the Egyptians, is resonant of the 9th plague, when darkness made it so that “no one could see his brother.” To remove the light that permits humans to be in relationship is indeed a life-robbing plague, rather close to the death itself in the 10th plague.

In our verse, the Israelites/Jews are at war. With a ruthless enemy, a tyrant that will pursue them/us until our demise. God imposes separation, darkness and the absence of contact upon these Biblical terrorists in what Kierkegaard may have described as a teleological suspension of the ethical. In order to coax the world back to its normal state, where brothers and neighbors and even adversaries bathe in the same light, and even find ways to meet across vast ideological divides, sometimes there must first be a brutal removal of normative living circumstances. It may be the only way to defeat evil.

But still we pray, every day, that we—all of us—will emulate the angels. And be, and bestow honor, “zeh el zeh”, upon one another. Living among one another. Sharing the same land and light.

[Rabbanit Alissa Thomas-Newborn, BCC/ Rabbanit and Chaplain / Congregation Netivot Shalom and a hospital in NYC](#)

Our verse speaks about the pillar of fire and the cloud of darkness, which God used to protect B’nai Yisrael. The Mekhilta offers a parable: A parent and child are walking a path, with the child walking in front. Suddenly robbers attack them, so the parent moves to stand in front of the child. Then wild animals come from the back, so the parent moves behind the child. When the robbers and wild animals attack simultaneously from in front and behind, the parent picks up the child, shielding the child while fighting off the external threats.

This is how God guided us out of Egypt, with the pillar of fire in front and the cloud of darkness behind. God as our Parent picks us up and fights off our enemies, showing us that we can fight and win against evil. As parents, it is hard to digest that we cannot shield our children from every “attack” in life. But we can and should strive to prevent unnecessary pain— for our children and for our wider human family. This is part of how we defeat evil as a free and moral people. With our parsha and the Mekhilta’s parable in mind, we pray that God— our Ultimate Parent— once again protects us as He did when we left Egypt. May the hostages return home, swiftly and safely; may our brave soldiers be protected with a safe embrace; and may Am Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael be surrounded with peace and security on all sides.

[Sara Blau, Author of 30 books](#)

In today’s healing-obsessed society, one can come to the mistaken conclusion that

a life of “healing” will yield a life free of struggles and challenges. Similarly, when one is on a journey of spiritual growth and fulfillment, one can come to the mistaken conclusion that a life of spirituality will yield a life free of struggles and challenges.

That could not be further from the truth.

In this week’s Torah Portion of Parshat Beshalach, the verse describes G-d’s protective cloud and pillar of fire that surrounded the Jews. “It came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel and there were cloud and darkness — while it illuminated the night — and one did not draw near the other all the night — Ex. 14:20

To explain the cloud and fire, Rashi shares a parable of a man traveling with his son who encounters bandits and wolves along the way. Regardless of the scenario, the father does what it takes to protect his son. The journey of the Jews is symbolic of the journey of life, a journey to Torah and to a heightened connection with G-d. Life, even filled with spirituality and meaning, is not guaranteed to be free of struggle. On the contrary, struggle is to be expected. However, G-d Himself is right at your side, ready to protect you and lift you up like a loving father. You will have your setbacks – but Someone’s got your back. So keep focused on your destination.

YAHRTZEITS

Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her grandmother Rose Rosenfeld on Sat. Jan. 27

Elaine Berkenwald remembers her husband's father Charles Klughaupt on Thurs. Feb. 1