

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Beshalach  
January 31, 2026 \*\*\* 13 Shevat, 5786

Beshalach in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/3262/jewish/Beshalach-in-a-Nutshell.htm](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)

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/626290/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](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

To be a Leader of the Jewish People by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l 5767

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshallah/to-be-a-leader-of-the-jewish-people/>

That day, the Lord saved the Israelites from the Egyptians. And when the Israelites... witnessed the wondrous power the Lord had unleashed against the Egyptians, the people were in awe of the Lord, and they believed in Him, and in Moshe, His servant.

And then Moshe and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord... Exodus 14:30-15:1

The Song at the Sea was one of the great epiphanies of history. The Sages said that even the humblest of Jews saw at that moment what even the greatest of prophets was not privileged to see. For the first time they broke into collective song – Az Yashir - a song we recite every day.

There is a fascinating discussion among the Sages as to how exactly they sang. On this, there were four opinions. Three appear in the tractate of Sotah:

Rabbi Akiva expounded: When the Israelites came up

from the Red Sea, they wanted to sing a song. How did they sing it? Like an adult who reads the Hallel and they respond after him with the leading word. Moses said, "I will sing to the Lord," and they responded, "I will sing to the Lord." Moses said, "For He has triumphed gloriously," and they responded, "I will sing to the Lord."

Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Jose the Galilean, said: It was like a child who reads the Hallel and they repeat after him all that he says. Moses said, "I will sing to the Lord," and they responded, "I will sing to the Lord." Moses said, "For He has triumphed gloriously," and they responded, "For He has triumphed gloriously."

Rabbi Nehemiah said: It was like a schoolteacher who recites the Shema in the synagogue. He begins first and they follow along with him. Sotah 30b

According to Rabbi Akiva, Moses sang the song phrase by phrase, and after each phrase the people responded, I will sing to the Lord – their way, as it were, of saying Amen to each line. According to R. Eliezer son of R. Jose the Galilean, Moses recited the song phrase by phrase, and they repeated each phrase after he had said it. According to Rabbi Nehemiah, Moses and the people sang the whole song together. Rashi explains that all the people were seized by Divine inspiration and miraculously, the same words came into their minds at the same time.

There is a fourth view, found in the Mechilta:

Eliezer ben Taddai said, Moses began and the Israelites repeated what he had said and then completed the verse. Moses began by saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously," and

the Israelites repeated what he had said, and then completed the verse with him, saying, "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and its rider He hurled into the sea." Moses began saying, "The Lord is my strength and my song," and the Israelites repeated and then completed the verse with him, saying, "The Lord is my strength and my song; He has become my salvation." Moses began saying, "The Lord is a warrior," and the Israelites repeated and then completed the verse with him, saying, "The Lord is a warrior, Lord is His name." Mechilta Beshallah Parsha 1

Technically, as the Talmud explains, the Sages are debating the implication of the (apparently) superfluous words *vayomru lemor*, "they said, saying", which they understood to mean "repeating". What did the Israelites repeat? For Rabbi Akiva it was the first words of the song only, which they repeated as a litany. For Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Jose the Galilean, they repeated the whole song, phrase by phrase. For R. Nehemiah they recited the entire song in unison. For Rabbi Eliezer ben Taddai they repeated the opening phrase of each line, but then completed the whole verse without Moses having to teach it to them. Read thus, we have before us a localised debate on the meaning of a biblical verse.

There is, however, a deeper issue at stake. To understand this, we must look at another Talmudic passage, on the face of it unrelated to the passage in Sotah. It appears in the tractate of Kiddushin, and poses a fascinating question. There are various people we are commanded to honour: a parent, a teacher (i.e. a rabbi), the nasi, (religious head of the Jewish community), and a king. May any of these four types renounce

the honour that is their due?

Rabbi Isaac ben Shila said in the name of Rabbi Mattena, in the name of Rabbi Hisda: If a father renounces the honour due to him, it is renounced, but if a rabbi renounces the honour due to him it is not renounced. Rabbi Joseph ruled: Even if a rabbi renounces his honour, it is renounced. . . Rabbi Ashi said: Even on the view that a rabbi may renounce his honour, if a nasi renounces his honour, the renunciation is invalid. . . Rather, it was stated thus: Even on the view that a nasi may renounce his honour, yet a king may not renounce his honour, as it is said, “You shall surely set a king over you,” meaning, his authority should be over you. Kiddushin 32a-b

Each of these people exercises a leadership role: father to son, teacher to disciple, nasi to the community and king to the nation. Analysed in depth, the passages make it clear that these four roles occupy different places on the spectrum between authority predicated on the person and authority vested in the holder of an office. The more the relationship is personal, the more easily honour can be renounced. At one extreme is the role of a parent (intensely personal), at the other that of a king (wholly official).

I suggest that this was the issue at stake in the argument over how Moses and the Israelites sang the Song at the Sea. For Rabbi Akiva, Moses was like a king. He spoke, and the people merely answered “Amen” (in this case, the words “I will sing to the Lord”). For Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Jose the Galilean, he was like a teacher. Moses spoke, and the Israelites repeated, phrase by phrase, what he had said. For Rabbi Nehemiah, he was like a nasi among his rabbinical colleagues

(the passage in Kiddushin, which holds that a nasi may renounce his honour, makes it clear that this is only among his fellow rabbis). The relationship was collegial: Moses began, but thereafter, they sang in unison. For Rabbi Eliezer ben Taddai, Moses was like a father. He began, but allowed the Israelites to complete each verse.

This is the great truth about parenthood, made clear in the first glimpse we have of Abraham:

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Bereishit 31:11

Abraham completed the journey his father began. To be a parent is to want one's children to go further than you did. That too, for Rabbi Eliezer ben Taddai, was Moses' relationship to the Israelites.

The prelude to the Song at the Sea states that the people "believed in God, and in His servant Moses" – the first time they are described as believing in Moses' leadership. On this, the Sages asked: What is it to be a leader of the Jewish people? Is it to hold official authority, of which the supreme example is a king ("The rabbis are called kings")? Is it to have the kind of personal relationship with one's followers that rests not on honour and deference but on encouraging people to grow, accept responsibility and continue the journey you have begun? Or is it something in between? There is no single answer.

At times, Moses asserted his authority (during the Korach rebellion). At others, he expressed the wish that "all God's

people were prophets”. Judaism is a complex faith. There is no one Torah model of leadership. We are each called on to fulfil a number of leadership roles: as parents, teachers, friends, team-members, and team-leaders.

There is no doubt, however, that Judaism favours as an ideal the role of parent, encouraging those we lead to continue the journey we have begun, and go further than we did. A good leader creates followers. A great leader creates leaders. That was Moses’ greatest achievement – that he left behind him a people willing, in each generation, to accept responsibility for taking further the great task he had begun.

[When Prayer is Not Enough: Beshallah by Cantor Rabbi Shoshi Levin Goldberg](https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/when-prayer-is-not-enough/)

<https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/when-prayer-is-not-enough/>

You may know this joke: a man is drowning in the ocean and several people with boats come to rescue him. He responds to each of them, “No, thank you. I’ve been praying, and God will save me.” When the man arrives in heaven, angry with God, God asks him, “Why didn’t you get on the boats I sent?”

Prayer is rarely enough. Jewish leaders are acutely aware of this reality today. Cantors, in particular, know that there is far more to our jobs than leading prayer.

When the Israelites notice the Egyptian army chasing them, they cry out to God (Exodus 14:10), complain to Moses (Exodus 14:11–12), and Moses reassures them that they will be saved (Exodus 14:13–14). Then, there is a gap in the narrative between verses 14 and 15, when God responds to Moses, saying:

Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.

A close reading of these verses reveals a lack of clarity both regarding the order of events and our characters' behavior. The following questions can illuminate the successes and failures of Moses' leadership at this pivotal moment for the future Jewish People:

First, if the Israelites felt comfortable praying directly to God, why did they subsequently complain to Moses? And did Moses initially pray to God with the Israelites?

These two questions, in different ways, paint Moses as accessible. While it is natural and common for leaders to field complaints, maybe Moses invited their criticism by being too approachable. Or perhaps he lacked confidence in his role, understanding himself as one of the Israelites rather than as their leader. Although Seforno does not write this explicitly, he comments on verse 15 that:

“Moses' outcry was one of concern with the rebellious attitude of the people who not only were afraid—something that could be forgiven—but who had dared to be sarcastic in their hour of danger, ridiculing Moses' leadership to the point where he was afraid that they would refuse to enter the sea when told to.”

When leaders are too accommodating or lack confidence, they risk losing their constituents, facing excessive complaining and far worse outcomes, especially in moments of crisis.

Next, if Moses did indeed cry out to God with the Israelites, why would he also reassure them that God would deliver them? This question also points to a possible lack of clarity about Moses' position. Moses seems unsure of himself, stuck

between God and the people. In vital communal moments, leaders' role confusion can be catastrophic.

Finally, if Moses did not pray to God with the Israelites, why does God tell him to stop? The Babylonian Talmud (Sotah 37a) fills in the gap by imagining that Moses prayed separately:

At that time, Moses was prolonging his prayer. The Holy One, Blessed be God, said to him: My beloved ones are drowning in the sea and you prolong your prayer to me?

There is a time for prayer and a time for action. Both the Torah and the Talmud caution that praying extensively in a moment that calls for decisive action can have devastating consequences.

As a cantor, I believe in the power of prayer. Personal and communal prayer can be transformational. Both we and God need our prayers. Yet there is a limit to what prayer can accomplish. As Jewish leaders, cantors embody both prayer and action.

I am proud that Conservative cantors are ambassadors for the education they receive at JTS, which is simultaneously academic, deeply meaningful, and relevant. Conservative cantors model how to hold both tradition and change in their prayer-leading, especially as they balance and blend traditional Jewish music—including but not limited to hazzanut—and new developments in Jewish music. Today's cantors do much more than lead services. The following five pillars describe what I believe it means to be a 21st-century cantor, defined more by our overall service to our communities than through our prayer-leading alone:

1. Cantors are spiritual leaders: full members of a clergy team and staff team, who collaborate with lay leaders. They are team players who model authentic engagement with Conservative Judaism.
2. Cantors are community builders. Our current moment calls for a relationship-centered approach to building communities. Cantors respond to the needs of our constituents, which necessitates knowing our people well and finding ways to help them learn, grow, connect with one another, and bask in their accomplishments. Empowering congregants to take an active role in the ritual life of a community through service-leading; reading Torah/Haftarah and chanting megillot; serving as gabbaim; and offering words of Torah are all essential to building community.
3. Alongside their rabbinic colleagues, cantors are pastors and officiants . Furthermore, as the roles of rabbi and cantor increasingly overlap, supporting people in the highs and lows of their lives has become a bigger part of the cantorate. To ameliorate rabbinic burnout and pipeline challenges, cantors can be available to respond to bereavements, to lead lifecycle events, and to officiate services independently. In fact, an increasing number of cantors in the Conservative Movement now serve as sole clergy members (Kol Bo) of their synagogues.
4. Cantors are educators for every age and stage, from singing with children in an early childhood center and tot service, to running a children's choir and religious school tefillah, to training b'nei mitzvah and inviting teens back after b'nei mitzvah to participate in synagogue life, to staffing teen trips and running HaZamir chapters, to adult education.
5. Last but certainly not least, cantors are experts in music

and tefillah. These are the nitty-gritty skills taught in the H. L. Miller Cantorial School: Hebrew, musicianship, liturgy, nusah (modes and motifs of prayer services), chanting, hazzanut, Jewish music history, Yiddish and Ladino repertoire as well as old and new Israeli and American Jewish music.

We recently surveyed the past ten years of JTS' Cantorial School alumni. One of our survey questions reads: "Which roles have taken a significant amount of your time since your ordination?" Here are the many roles that at least one third of the respondents checked, not including prayerleader:

Administrator, b'nei mitzvah preparation, choir director, community programming, educator, Torah reader, lifecycle officiation, organizational leader, pastoral visits, planning and performing in concerts, public speaking, religious school/nursery school, song leader, spiritual guide, Torah/prayer coordinator, and writer.

Because of the breadth of cantors' training and experience, I urge Jewish day schools, Hillels, and Ramah camps to also consider cantors for positions that are typically held by rabbis. In Exodus 14, Moses lacked the wisdom of knowing when to pray and when to get going. Like the Israelites stepping into the sea, we too are entering unknown territory, many of us plagued with anxiety. We cannot know where we are headed or what the future will bring. Yet there will still certainly be times for prayer and times for action. And in both scenarios, cantors will be there, alongside their many partners, leading the way. *(Cantor Rabbi Shoshi Levin Goldberg is Director of the H.L. Miller Cantorial School at JTS)*

[Beshalach: Scarcity and Sustenance – What is Enough? By Rabbi Madeleine Fortney](#)

[https://truah.org/resources/madeleine-fortney-beshalach-moraltorah\\_2026\\_/](https://truah.org/resources/madeleine-fortney-beshalach-moraltorah_2026_/)

Moses would have been foolish to expect the Israelites, newly freed from slavery in Egypt, to adjust easily to their new circumstances, wandering in the desert. But they had just witnessed the miraculous parting of the Sea of Reeds, the cool mist from those walls of water still clinging to their hair and clothes, when they started grumbling about food. So, during this week's parshah, Beshalach, God and Moses present them with another miracle: manna falling daily from the sky.

The people quickly understand that each of them is to gather just enough manna to eat for one day — or as the Torah describes it, “d’var yom b’yomo,” “a day’s portion on its day.” (Exodus 16:4) They are told not to leave any of it over until morning. Remarkably, Pharaoh’s taskmasters used that very same phrase, “d’var yom b’yomo,” just a few chapters before, referring to the heavy labor burdening the Israelites after Moses’ first (failed) intervention on their behalf. (Exodus 5:13) So, the last time the Israelites heard that phrase, they were feeling betrayed, angry, and exhausted. Their already back-breaking workload had been arbitrarily increased, and Pharaoh the tyrant was profiting more from their suffering each day. It is no wonder, then, that they have a hard time trusting that this time, the manna will miraculously appear every day. Sure enough, the people ignore Moses’ warning about leaving the manna overnight, and when they wake up, it is spoiled and crawling with worms.

In a midrash, Rabbi Eliezer explains why the people were required to collect only enough manna for each day, saying:

“One who has what to eat today and says — ‘what shall I eat tomorrow?’ — this is one of those who lack faith, as it says: a day’s portion on its day (Exodus 16:4) — The One who created the day created one’s sustenance.” (Mekhilta d’Rashbi Beshallah 16) In Rabbi Eliezer’s view, the purpose of making the people wait each day for the manna to appear was to cultivate their sense of faith and trust in God — after all, God is the ultimate source of all our sustenance. It was a difficult lesson for them to grapple with; after lifetimes of abuse and exploitation at the hands of Pharaoh and his taskmasters, God and Moses would have to earn their trust. But beyond that, is it really fair of Rabbi Eliezer to criticize those who wonder where their next meal will come from? As wonderful as the ideal of putting our faith in God is, scarcity was a reality for the Israelites, and food insecurity remains one of the most pervasive ills of our society today.

I’d like to believe that the main objective of the daily quest for manna was to show the people that beyond Egypt, where hoarding — of grain, of wealth, of labor, of bodies — was the name of the game, there was another way. While systems of slavery depend on fear, control, and manufactured scarcity, the manna system ensured that there was enough for everyone. We are told that “**anyone who had gathered much had no excess, and anyone who had gathered little had no deficiency.**” (Exodus 16:18) The miracle of the manna was not only that it fell from the sky, but also that it made inequality impossible. Manna could not be hoarded, traded, or converted into power, and so the Israelites were able to imagine a new type of society as they learned to trust that the manna would keep appearing day after day.

How can we be part of bringing to fruition this other type of society? Every day, on the streets of New York City, I am faced

with the stark juxtaposition of extreme excess and extreme poverty. We have ways of responding to hunger, as my fellow volunteers do at Hebrew Union College's community kitchen, which has been running for nearly 40 years. As we serve sandwiches and pour coffee for our guests, we allow them to trust our institution to provide a weekly meal and a moment of dignity. But the manna story reminds us that our work is incomplete when hunger persists in this world of plenty.

As our parshah continues, Shabbat emerges as the one day when no manna falls. The Israelites are no longer able to gather their daily portion, and yet, there is enough to eat. Along with food, rest is highlighted as a human right rather than a reward. In a time when manna no longer falls from the sky, its ethic becomes our responsibility. By rejecting the culture of excess, using Shabbat as a tool of resistance, and fostering communities of care, we can work toward building the society that our parshah invites us to imagine. Beshalach reminds us that we must not only trust God, but also trust ourselves to build systems where "a day's portion on its day," means everyone truly has enough. *(Rabbi Madeleine Fortney (she/her) serves as an admissions recruiter at HUC-JIR in New York.)*

[Lighting the Way: Beshallah by Cantor Sandy Horowitz](https://ajr.edu/parashat-beshallah-5786/)  
<https://ajr.edu/parashat-beshallah-5786/>

In our busy, often digital-driven lives, we tend to forget to pause and take note of the wonders of creation around us and above us. Yet, opportunities abound: when we pray the words from the morning liturgy "yotzer or u'vorei hoshekh" ("Creator of light and Fashioner of darkness"), we might pause and look out the window; when we are out at night, we could look up and take note of the phase of the moon, reflecting on its

connection to the Hebrew month. Taking the time to watch the sun set can be a wondrous and profound experience – the sky slowly changing color as the sun gradually sets behind the horizon and disappears, and the colors continue to change until it is finally fully dark.

Often, we're too involved in the business of our daily life to stop and take note. We may feel as if we are slaves to our obligations or to our worries; we forget to look up.

When our biblical ancestors were actual slaves in Egypt, one imagines that they wouldn't have had the time or the inclination to pause and look up. When we think of them, we tend to use words and phrases like "downtrodden" or "beaten down". Perhaps though, just perhaps, some might have looked up at the sky and dared to hope for a better future – hardly imagining that a better future was indeed in store for them.

In this context, our Torah portion Beshallah begins, five verses in, with the following words with regard to the newly liberated Israelites who have just been led out of Egypt:

God went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, ... and in a pillar of fire by night, ...

The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex. 13:21-22)

As beautiful as this sight must have been, what exactly was the intention of placing these amudim, these pillars in the sky?

Rashi writes: "This tells us ... that the pillar of cloud handed over the camp to the pillar of fire and the pillar of fire handed it over to the pillar of cloud — that before the one set the other rose (Shabbat 23b)."

It is as if the amudim are acting as guardians of the Israelite

people. Thus the sky was never empty of Divine Guidance and Protection.

This notion of protection is reinforced a few verses later, when Pharaoh has once again changed his mind and sends chariots to chase after the Israelites and bring them back. In Exodus 14:19 we read that the pillar of cloud “[shifted from in front of them and took up a place behind them](#)” – acting as a Shield of Protection, placed in such a way that the approaching Egyptian army could not see the Israelites.

As for the pillar of fire, this is not the first time that fire has played a significant role in the Exodus narrative. We recall that Moses first encountered God amid a burning bush. (Exodus 3:2)

The unconsumed fire through which God first spoke to Moses has now become a full-on pillar of fire for all the Israelites to see. This public display acts as a visual declaration that the Presence of God is no longer limited just to Moses; everyone has collective access.

Unfortunately, even as a free people they would have had to remember to look up in order to perceive these signs of the Divine Presence. Later in the narrative, in Parashat Ki Tissa, Moses will depart from the Israelites in order to commune with God at the top of Mount Sinai; without their leader the people will become restless and afraid, and they will demand the building of a golden calf as a substitute deity.

If only they had looked up and noticed the ever-present pillars of fire and cloud! Imagine if they had just taken a moment to watch the hand-off from cloud to fire in the evening, or the transfer of fire to cloud in the morning – perhaps they would have recognized that they had in fact not been abandoned at all.

Much later, when Nehemiah recounts to God the many sins of the people while in the wilderness and in the promised land, he mentions this moment, and declares that although the people had made for themselves a golden calf,

“You, in Your abundant compassion, did not abandon them in the wilderness.

The pillar of cloud did not depart from them to lead them on the way by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to give them light in the way they were to go.” (Nehemiah 9:19)

The amudim reflect Divine Compassion.

By placing the pillars of cloud and fire ahead of the people at the outset of their journey, it is as if God is saying to them, “I know there will be times when you will forget Me, when you will disobey My commandments, when you will lose faith in Me. I know that. And I will be angry with you. Yet – know this – I will never abandon you, for My Compassion is greater than my anger.”

In our time, we do not have Divine pillars to guide us. We do, however, have the whole world of creation, the world of natural light and natural darkness and all that is contained within. It is up to us to choose to take note.

May we as b'tzelem Elohim — beings created in the Divine image – may we strive to act as beacons of compassion as we go through our lives in this fiercely beautiful and complicated world. (*Cantor Horowitz received Cantorial Ordination from the Academy for Jewish Religion, holds a Masters in Jewish Studies from Gratz College, and completed the Aleph Alliance's Davvening Leadership Training Institute. She holds a B.A. in Literature and Composition from Colgate University.*)

Parshat Beshalach and the Blessing of Being Remembered by  
Hannah Greenberg

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Most of us know what it feels like to be forgotten. A friend forgets to call back. A birthday goes unnoticed. You speak in a meeting and no one seems to hear. These tiny fractures accumulate and leave us wondering whether our presence truly matters. Judaism does not shy away from this experience. In fact, the Talmud argues that, at the edge of the Red Sea, an entire nation wondered whether they, too, had slipped through the cracks of history. At that moment, they realized that they had gone on a journey to be remembered. The Talmud connects this moment of remembrance to the following brakha: **“Blessed are You, God, Who remembers the forgotten.”**

Appearing in Masechet Ta’anit (15a), as part of the special blessings recited on communal fast days, the Gemara connects the meaning of this blessing to the moment when the Israelites stood before the Red Sea, trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the water. When God splits the sea and provides them safe passage out of Egypt, the Israelites finally see that God has not forgotten them. But what would it mean for the Israelites to be “forgotten?”

In Parshat Beshalach, we meet a people newly freed from slavery. After 410 years in Egypt, generations of suffering and silence, this is a group that has no memory of having a relationship with the Divine and has no framework for what freedom means. They are a group seemingly abandoned by

those who hold power, both human and Divine; destined to be stuck in Egypt and left in slavery.

When they finally leave Egypt, God could have chosen to take the Israelites on a more direct route through the land of Philistines. Instead they go on a roundabout journey. Why? In the fog and chaos of war, emotions are high. With Egypt on their heels, God anticipates a change of heart and knows that fear could fuel a desire to return to the familiarity of Egypt. God therefore chooses to bring them on a longer path without a possibility of return, because it is the kinder, gentler way for a vulnerable people. The Israelites have been enslaved for centuries; they have no confidence and no experience of faith. They have been forgotten, and they have forgotten what it means to have faith and be taken care of by a higher power. This miraculous route, which leads to the splitting of the sea, becomes an act of return to having a relationship with the Divine. God teaches them how to slowly trust again and sets the stage for one final encounter with Pharaoh (Shemot 14:3).

Ibn Ezra, a 10th century Spanish commentator, notes that God's choice is striking. Instead of bringing the Israelites through a human war, which they were not yet prepared to fight, God brings them into circumstances where the Divine can be revealed. It is, in a sense, a controlled trial; a passage through fire and water, to transform fear into faith. The people must see and act to learn that they are not forgotten. When the Israelites panic at the Egyptian display of power, Moshe cries out to God and God responds sharply, asking: "Why do you cry out to me!? Speak to the Children of Israel, and march forward! (Shemot 14:15)."

According to Sforzo, an Italian commentator from the 14th century, Moshe's cry highlights how he feared that the people

would refuse to enter the sea and fail this test of faith. God rebukes him: Do not assume the worst; the people are ready. God rejects this panicked prayer without action; return and redemption begins when they step forward into the water. And so, God's remembrance becomes visible through action, through power, and through presence. The Israelites learn that they were never truly forgotten. But something else happens too; they remember God. This mutual remembering restarts their relationship.

Remembering, in the Torah, is not a quiet or internal act. It takes the form of movement, intervention, or renewed relationship. When God “remembers—*vayizkor*,” God acts: God remembers Noah and causes the floodwaters to recede (Bereishit 8:1); God remembers Rachel and opens her womb (Bereishit 30:22); God remembers the covenant and begins Israel's redemption (Shemot 2:24).

Here at the Red Sea, God remembers Israel by acting decisively: splitting the sea, protecting them, and revealing the Divine presence. It is this action that the Gemara in Ta'anit invokes when stating “God remembers those who are forgotten,” a reminder that actions inspire belief. Here, the Israelites, in turn, remember God by acting on faith, and stepping forward into the water before it parts. That first act of courage renews the relationship. Remembering becomes a proactive choice to re-engage.

Every day in davening we recall this act of faith, and each week we act on our remembering by reciting Kiddush. Throughout the year we remember by doing: when we eat matzah at Seder, when we build our Sukkah, and when we say Yizkor. Each act becomes another moment of stepping in or stepping up toward God, trusting that the Divine will support

us, meet us, and bring us through the other side.

“Blessed are You, God, Who remembers the forgotten.”

This blessing is not only about Divine memory. It is about relationships restored through action. At the Red Sea, God remembered Israel, and Israel remembered God. And ever since, when we feel abandoned or unseen, we are reminded that remembering is not a passive act. It is stepping forward, even when the sea has not yet parted. Like our ancestors, we are called to move forward and to trust that even in moments of silence, we are never truly forgotten. *(Hannah Greenberg, originally from Bucks County, PA, is a Maharat rabbinical student and Jewish educator in NYC who specializes in working with students with disabilities. She holds a Master’s in Education in Exceptional Children and Youth from the University of Delaware and a certificate in advanced Judaic studies from the Pardes Institute.)*

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### Yahrtzeits

Larry Ozarow remembers his father Boris Ozarow on Saturday  
January 31st

Bob Woog remembers his mother Nina Frankel Woog on  
Monday February 2nd