



Parshas Beshalach

For the week ending 11 Shevat 5758
6 & 7 February 1998

Dear Reader:

We hope you enjoy this week's edition of Torah Weekly, Parshas Beshalach.

We are taking this opportunity to "check-in" with you to make sure that we are publishing Torah Weekly in a format that is most useful to you. Is the font OK? How about the paper size? Could we expand to 3 pages, or would that create havoc for you? If you have any suggestions on how we could improve this publication, or make it easier for you to work with it after we publish it, please let us know!

If you could also tell us what you do with Torah Weekly after you download it, we would be most interested! Do you reprint it *as is* and share it with a few friends? Do you reformat it completely and then include it in some synagogue bulletin?

We hope to hear from you.

Lev Seltzer
Torah Weekly Production Design
levs@virtual.co.il

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel ☎ 972-2-581-0315 fax: 972-2-581-2890 ✉ info@ohr.org.il
38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA ☎ 1-212-213-3100 fax: 1-212-213-8717 ✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com
613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada ☎ 1-905-886-5730 fax: 1-905-886-6065 ✉ Somayach@MSN.com

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Overview

Pharaoh finally sends the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Hashem leads the Jewish People towards *Eretz Yisrael* with pillars of cloud and fire on a circuitous route which avoids the *Pelishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but Hashem protects them. Moshe raises his staff, and Hashem splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by Hashem, commands his army to pursue them, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song thanking Hashem. After traveling for three days only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe miraculously produces potable water for them. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvos*. The people complain to Moshe and Aharon that they ate better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quails so they can have meat and provides them with manna. It is a miraculous bread that falls from the heavens every day except Shabbos. However, on Friday a double portion descends to supply the Sabbath needs. Nobody is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbos. Some of the manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. After the Jews complain again about the lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Amalek then attacks the Jews. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

Insights

FLYING SOLO

“Then Moshe and the Children of Israel will sing” (15:1)

Have you ever been inside a music recording studio?

The first time you walk into the control room you might think you were on the bridge of the Starship Enterprise. Surely this myriad of lights and buttons must be so we can “boldly tread” where no one has trod boldly before.

The control room is dominated by what is referred to as the “desk”— the fifteen-foot long recording console. Even though it looks very impressive, the console basically consists of multiples of one channel. Out in the studio where the band plays, every instrument has its own microphone, and the sound from each microphone comes up separately on its own channel in the desk. Sometimes an instrument may have several channels. A set of drums, for example, may have eight separate microphones, each giving a slightly different part of the sound picture.

Having all the instruments divided into different channels affords the maximum control over the sound. If you want to have more bass drum — more “thud” — you turn up the bass drum. More strings? Bring up the faders marked “strings.”

When the sound is properly balanced, when all the channels are at their correct levels and tone settings, each sound coalesces into one cohesive whole. When this happens, the parts themselves become difficult to discern. They seem to have been replaced by just one new overall sound.

There’s another button on each of those channels in the console. It’s called the solo button. And it does just that. It solos any one of the channels, isolating that particular instrument from the context of the overall sound picture.

If you isolate the bass guitar you’ll hear “*Boom p’doom. Boom p’doom...*” When you solo any instrument by itself you’ll hear something that might make no musical sense at all.

Art reflects Life.

Sometimes, it’s very difficult to see sense in world events. It’s difficult to believe that the world is being run by Someone. Everything sounds like a mad cacophony. You hear about suffering and evil, and you wonder how this can be the handiwork of a Merciful G-d.

Don’t think you’re alone if you feel like that. You’re in good company. One of history’s greatest people shared your feelings.

Moshe, our greatest teacher, had difficulty understanding how the Jews’ suffering in Egypt fit into Hashem’s overall plan.

In last week’s Parsha, Moshe went to Pharaoh to ask him to let the Jewish People go. Pharaoh was not the easiest negotiating partner. In reply to Moshe’s request Pharaoh told the taskmasters to stop giving the Jews straw. However, the Jews were still required to produce the same quantity of bricks as before.

The Jews complained bitterly to Moshe. So Moshe went to Hashem and said “My L-rd, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me? *From the time* I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he did evil to this People, but You did not rescue Your people.”

Moshe wasn’t just complaining about the problems he was having *now* with Pharaoh, rather he was saying that “*from the time*” — *from its very beginning* — the whole plan to take the Jews out of Egypt was fatally flawed. Moshe didn’t see the order in it.

When you take one event out of context, when you isolate one instrument from the orchestra, you can’t hear the symphony of world events and its inevitable climax. You don’t hear how all the instruments combine into a cogent, coherent, harmonious whole. All you hear is “*Boom, p’doom. Boom, p’doom!*” It sounds like madness!

Moshe was pushing the solo button on the concerto called the “Exodus from Egypt.”

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FLYING SOLO, TAKE TWO

"Then Moshe and the Children of Israel will sing" (15:1)

The Midrash says that just as Moshe erred (see above) with the expression "mei-az" — "from the time" — so too, with that same word "az" Moshe rectified his mistake.

After they emerged from the splitting of the sea, the Jewish People stood on the shore. Before them lay the mighty Egyptian army, strewn across the beach like so many broken toy soldiers. Every last man and woman, from the greatest to the most humble, reached a level of insight into the workings of the world that has never been repeated.

That perception moved Moshe and the Jewish people to song. Song in Jewish thought represents the ability to harmonize all the disparate events in our world and plug them back into the One — *Hashem Echad*.

"Then (az) Moshe and the Children of Israel sang a song."

That song is part of the prayers we say every day of the year, to remind ourselves that even when it seems that chaos is conducting the orchestra and life sounds like the First National Cacophony, it is Hashem Who wields the baton of world events as no maestro can.

If we listen carefully, we will hear how everything in Creation sings together in one sublime concerto.

FLASHBACK

"Then Moshe and the Children of Israel will sing" (15:1)

Film is a language. It has its own vocabulary and syntax.

One of the most remarkable film devices is the flashback. A character will be speaking, and suddenly the music becomes dreamy. His voice starts to echo. The picture seems to shimmer as though we were looking into a pond with ripples coursing across it. "Yes! It only seems like yesterday, but it's over twenty years ago since I was walking down this same road...."

The film ellipsis takes us back to the character as he was twenty years ago. Essentially, we have changed tense from past to present.

EL PACIFICADOR

Just as the subject of this week's *Parsha* is the *Song at the Sea*, so the subject of the *Haftorah* is the *Song of Devorah the Prophetess*. Both the *Parsha* and the *Haftorah* depict the holiness of the Jewish Woman.

In Egypt, Yocheved and Miriam were instrumental in saving Moshe who was the agent of the redemption. After crossing the sea, the Jewish women, led by Miriam, wanted to voice their total trust in Hashem with their own song of praise.

In the time of Devorah, the Jewish People had forgotten their mission. They had intermarried with the Canaanites among whom they lived and had served their gods.

Hashem decreed that they should undergo suffering as a result of this. Part of this suffering came in the form of an immensely cruel Canaanite general named *Sisera*, literally "The Pacifier" or "The Silencer."

A flashback is usually employed by filmmakers when they want to impart a sense of importance to an event. They want us to be right there. On the spot. Not just listening to a reported event.

Could there be an event more important than the splitting of the Red Sea? With this analogy, maybe we can understand why the Divine "script-writer" seemingly makes a grammatical error in this week's *Parsha*.

"Then Moshe and the Children of Israel *will sing*." Surely the Torah should have written "Then Moshe and the Children of Israel *sang*?"

The Torah imparts a special importance to the splitting of the sea and the song that followed. It wants us to feel as if we are actually standing on the beach with Moshe and the Jewish People. It wants us to experience the excitement, that in a few seconds Moshe and the Jewish People will raise their voices in a song uniting Heaven and Earth.

"Then Moshe and the Children of Israel *will sing*!"

It's happening now!

JUST ONE HEART

"And behold Egypt was journeying after them..." (14:10)

Rashi says that the Egyptians were united "with one heart, like one person" in their desire to overtake and subdue Israel.

A phrase almost identical to this — "like one person with one heart" — is used to describe the Jewish People as they are about to receive the Torah at Sinai. An almost identical expression, but in reverse order. Why are the words reversed when describing the Jewish People?

The Jewish People are in essence a unity — like one person — because they are all offshoots of the same spiritual root. When they are divided, their schisms are superficial, and what they lack is only unity of purpose, one heart. Fundamentally, however, they are "like one person." An indivisible unit.

The nations of the world, on the other hand, are essentially separate. All that can bind them is pragmatism — one heart — and then, temporarily, they become like one person. However, their unity is based only on expediency. It dissolves as soon as the common purpose is no longer.

The Jewish People are in essence one person. When they are also of one heart, the world stops and Heaven meets Earth.

Haftorah: Judges 4:4 - 5:31

However, in this extremity the Jewish People turned their hearts to Hashem.

In the *Song of Devorah* we see this change in heart brought about by the awakening and purifying power of suffering.

All was due to the unforgettable merit of a glorious woman borne up by the Spirit of Hashem, fired through and through with enthusiasm, who with her "flaming words" inflamed the courage and steeled the Jewish People's power.

Not the sword of Barak, but the spirit of Devorah won the victory.

Sources:

Flashback - Ramban

Just One Heart - Avnei Ezer and Gaon of Vilna - Kol Eliyahu

El Pacificador - adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



THE LAND OF RETURN

When the Babylonian king Nevuchadnetzar sent his general, Nevuzradan, to take the Jews out of *Eretz Yisrael*, he instructed him to prevent them from praying so that they would not be able to repent and be re-accepted by Hashem. Only when they reached the Babylonian border did the general tell his soldiers that they could stop driving their Jewish captives, because it was less likely that their repentance would be so readily accepted outside their land.

This Midrash on Eicha is cited as an explanation of the statement by Rabbi Elazar that one who resides in *Eretz Yisrael* lives without sin. There certainly have been sinners in *Eretz Yisrael*, but their repentance there is more readily accepted than anywhere else.

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