Beshalach 5785 Volume XXXII Number 17

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

For the first time since their departure from Egypt the Israelites do something together. They sing. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel." Rashi, explaining the view of R. Nehemiah in the Talmud (Sotah 30b) that they spontaneously sang the song together, says that the holy spirit rested on them and miraculously the same words came into their minds at the same time. In recollection of that moment, tradition has named this week Shabbat Shirah, the Sabbath of Song. What is the place of song in Judaism?

There is an inner connection between music and the spirit. When language aspires to the transcendent and the soul longs to break free of the gravitational pull of the earth, it modulates into song. Music, said Arnold Bennett is "a language which the soul alone understands but which the soul can never translate." It is, in Richter's words "the poetry of the air." Tolstoy called it "the shorthand of emotion." Goethe said, "Religious worship cannot do without music. It is one of the foremost means to work upon man with an effect of marvel." Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.

So when we seek to express or evoke emotion we turn to melody. Deborah sang after Israel's victory over the forces of Siserah (Judges 5). Hannah sang when she had a child (1 Sam. 2). When Saul was depressed, David would play for him and his spirit would be restored (1 Sam. 16). David himself was known as the "sweet singer of Israel" (2 Sam. 23: 1). Elisha called for a harpist to play so that the prophetic spirit could rest upon him (2 Kings 3: 15). The Levites sang in the Temple. Every day, in Judaism, we preface our morning prayers with Pesukei de-Zimra, the 'Verses of Song' with their magnificent crescendo, Psalm 150, in which instruments and the human voice combine to sing God's praises.

Mystics go further and speak of the song of the universe, what Pythagoras called 'the music of the spheres'. This is what Psalm 19 means when it says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands... There is no speech, there are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music("kavam", literally "their line," possibly meaning the reverberating string of a musical instrument) carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world.' Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.

So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. There are different tunes for shacharit, mincha and maariv, the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

There are different tunes for different texts. There is one kind of cantillation for Torah, another for the haftorah from the prophetic books, and yet another for Ketuvim, the Writings, especially the five Megillot. There is a particular chant for studying the texts of the written Torah, for studying Mishnah and Gemarah. So by music alone we can tell what kind of day it is and what kind of text is being used. There is a map of holy words and it is written in melodies and songs.

Music has extraordinary power to evoke emotion. The Kol Nidrei prayer with which Yom Kippur begins is not really a prayer at all. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. There can be little doubt that it is its ancient, haunting melody that has given it its hold over the Jewish imagination. It is hard to hear those notes and not feel that you are in the presence of God on the Day of Judgment, standing in the company of Jews of all places and times as they pleaded with heaven for forgiveness. It is the holy of holies of the Jewish soul. (Lehavdil, Beethoven came close to it in the opening notes of the sixth movement of the C Sharp Minor Quartet op. 131, his most sublime and spiritual work).

Nor can you sit on Tisha B'av reading Eichah, the book of Lamentations, with its own unique cantillation, and not feel the tears of Jews through the ages as they suffered for their faith and wept as they remembered what they had lost, the pain as fresh as it was the day the Temple was destroyed. Words without music are like a body without a soul.

Each year for the past ten years I have been privileged to be part of a mission of song (together with the Shabbaton Choir and singers Rabbi Lionel Rosenfeld and Chazanim Shimon Craimer and Jonny

Turgel) to Israel to sing to victims of terror, as well as to people in hospitals, community centres and food kitchens. We sing for and with the injured, the bereaved, the sick and the broken hearted. We dance with people in wheelchairs. One boy who had lost half of his family, as well as being blinded, in a suicide bombing, sang a duet with the youngest member of the choir, reducing the nurses and his fellow patients to tears. Such moments are epiphanies, redeeming a fragment of humanity and hope from the random cruelties of fate.

Beethoven wrote over the manuscript of the third movement of his A Minor Quartet the words Neue Kraft fhlend, "Feeling new strength." That is what you sense in those hospital wards. You understand what King David meant when he sang to God the words: "You turned my grief into dance; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to You and not be silent." You feel the strength of the human spirit no terror can destroy.

In his book, Musicophilia, the neurologist and writer Oliver Sacks (no relative, alas) tells the poignant story of Clive Wearing, an eminent musicologist who was struck by a devastating brain infection. The result was acute amnesia. He was unable to remember anything for more than a few seconds. As his wife Deborah put it, 'It was as if every waking moment was the first waking moment.'

Unable to thread experiences together, he was caught in an endless present that had no connection with anything that had gone before. One day his wife found him holding a chocolate in one hand and repeatedly covering and uncovering it with the other hand, saying each time, 'Look, it's new.' 'It's the same chocolate', she said. 'No', he replied, 'look. It's changed.' He had no past at all. In a moment of awareness he said about himself, 'I haven't heard anything, seen anything, touched anything, smelled anything. It's like being dead.'

Two things broke through his isolation. One was his love for his wife. The other was music. He could still sing, play the organ and conduct a choir with all his old skill and verve. What was it about music, Sacks asked, that enabled him, while playing or conducting, to overcome his amnesia? He suggests that when we 'remember' a melody, we recall one note at a time, yet each note relates to the whole. He quotes the philosopher of music, Victor Zuckerkandl, who wrote, 'Hearing a melody is hearing, having heard, and being about to hear, all at once. Every melody declares to us that the past can be there without being remembered, the future without being foreknown.' Music is a form of sensed continuity that can sometimes break through the most overpowering disconnections in our experience of time.

Faith is more like music than like science. Science analyzes, music integrates. And as music connects note to note, so faith connects episode to episode, life to life, age to age in a timeless melody that breaks into time. God is the composer and librettist. We are each called on to be voices in the choir, singers of God's song. Faith teaches us to hear the music beneath the noise.

So music is a signal of transcendence. The philosopher and musician Roger Scruton writes that it is "an encounter with the pure subject, released from the world of objects, and moving in obedience to the laws of freedom alone." He quotes Rilke: "Words still go softly out towards the unsayable / And music, always new, from palpitating stones / builds in useless space its godly home." The history of the Jewish spirit is written in its songs. The words do not change, but each generation needs its own melodies.

Our generation needs new songs so that we too can sing joyously to God as our ancestors did at that moment of transfiguration when they crossed the Red Sea and emerged, the other side, free at last. When the soul sings, the spirit soars. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel* ***zt"l*** *© 2025 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry out in prayer to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them start moving.'" (Exodus 14:15) How does Judaism orchestrate action and prayer, which are actually two contradictory directives? It has often been said that when we act, we must act as if everything depends on us, and when we pray, we must pray as if everything depends on God. What does this mean in theological terms?

The portion of Beshalach presents a terrifying picture. After Pharaoh has supposedly freed the Israelite slaves, the Egyptian charioteers relentlessly pursue them. If the Israelites continue their flight, the Red Sea will drown them. If they stay put, the chariots will crush them. The Bible records: "Vayitzaku" – "they cried out in prayer" (Ex. 14:10). Rashi adds: "Tafsu omanut avotam" – "they grabbed onto the artistry of their ancestors," a poetic reference to the prayers established by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whose "art" is apparently the "art of prayer."

Moses then confronts God, apparently entreating for the safety of his people. Answers God: "Why do you cry out in prayer to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and let them start moving" (Exodus 14:15). Here, Rashi is even more explicit than in the previous verse. He comments: "This teaches us that Moses too stood and prayed. God said to him, 'It is not the time now, when Israel is in danger, for you to engage in lengthy prayers [leha'arikh ba-tefila].'" (Rashi 14:15)

What else should Israel do when in danger but pray? Isn't prayer the most obvious and mandatory course for a religious society to take in time of trouble?

But perhaps Rashi is telling us that the Almighty is not chiding Moses and the Israelites for praying; rather, He is chiding them for their overly lengthy prayer, for their prayer without action in a situation which calls for both prayer and action. Indeed, all of life requires a combination of prayer and action, a realization that history is the unfolding of a magnificent partnership between human action and divine intervention.

There is a fascinating Talmudic passage which may well be the source for Rashi's condemnation of lengthy prayer devoid of action. "R. Yosi said, 'Once I was traveling on the road and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah appeared, and after I finished my prayer, he said to me, "My son, why did you go into this ruin?" I said, "To pray." He said, "You ought to have prayed on the road." I answered, "I feared that a passerby would interrupt me." He said, "You ought to have prayed a short prayer."' I learned three things from him: One must not go into a ruin, one must pray on the road, and when one recites a prayer on the road, one recites a short prayer."

In effect, Elijah, the herald of Israel's ultimate redemption, is teaching R. Yosi, a Talmudic sage who is suffering the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple, the true act of Jewish prayer. Do not merely pray in the place of destruction and wallow in misery. Start out on the road, on the path towards redemption. There will be attempts by passersby to stop you; they may even shout at you and make war with you, and you must certainly pray. But pray while you are in the process of achieving your goal. Pray while you are rebuilding your state. Of necessity, make it a short prayer so that there is adequate time and energy for human initiative.

The Talmudic passage continues, illuminating one of the most popular and poignant of our prayers, the Kaddish. "I heard in the ruins a divine voice mourning like a dove and saying, 'Woe to My children, because of whose sins I have destroyed My house.' And Elijah said to me, 'Not only that, but whenever Israel enters their synagogues and study houses, and responds "May His great name be blessed," the Holy One, blessed be He, shakes His head in assent and declares, "Happy is the King who is praised in such a manner."'"

The reference is to the Kaddish prayer, a central feature of our synagogue liturgy and recited by mourners at the gravesites of their loved ones. "May [God's] name become great and holy," it begins, referring to the prophetic words of Ezekiel and Zekhariah, who teach that as long as the world is not yet redeemed, as long as tragic suffering and death remain an integral part of the world's landscape, and as long as God's name and essence are diminished, God is not yet manifest in the fullness of His greatness and sanctity. God's name is yet to become great and holy, and the achievement of redemption depends in no small measure upon our actions and repentance. As long as Israel merely weeps in the ruins, God weeps as well and continues to mourn for the destruction of the Temple.

When does God describe Himself as a happy king? When the Jews leave the ruins, when they set out on the path of rebuilding, when they enter their re-established synagogues and study houses in Israel and declare that it is His great name which is to be blessed. His name will be one and manifest to all only at the time of a more perfect society. Since the Jews recognize this truth, they also recognize their role in helping to bring it about. God rejoices when He realizes that He has partners in His great task of redemption, when He sees that Israel has started out on the road to renewal.

The road is also the road to the Land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem. Let us explore the link between prayer, action and the settlement of Israel as it appears in the words of two giants of Jewish law and theology, Maimonides and Nahmanides.

In his opening halakha in his section on prayer, Maimonides sets down the biblical necessity of praying each day. "To pray is a positive commandment, as it says, 'And you shall serve the Lord your God" (Exodus 23:15).' (Laws of Prayer, 1:1)

Examining the section in the Torah cited by Maimonides, we discover that the verse appears in a sequence dealing with God's guarantee to Moses when Israel was on the path towards conquering Israel, the land of the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizites the Canaanites, the Hivites and the Jebusites: "Behold I send an angel before you, to guard over you on the road [baderekh] and to bring you into the place I have prepared [the Land of Israel]… Do not bow down to their gods… but you shall utterly overthrow them and break into pieces their pillars. And you shall serve the Lord, your God." (Exodus 23:20–25)

In effect, Maimonides is teaching us that prayer must be linked to the very concrete action of settling Israel and combating the evil of idola- try in the world.

Nahmanides disagrees with Maimonides ('Strictures on Maimonides' Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 5), insisting that the Bible commands prayer only when an individual feels endangered. His proof-text: "And when you go to war in your land against the nation that is oppressing, then shall you sound the alarm with the trumpets and you shall be remembered before the Lord your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies." (Numbers 10:9)

Clearly, prayer is seen as an adjunct to an obligatory war, which is legitimate only for self-defense.

We can see a striking example of this tension between prayer and action in the following vignette. In

the beginning of the twentieth century, the city of St. Petersburg was blessed with a chief rabbi who was a saintly scholar named Isaac Blazer, affectionately called Reb Itzele Petersburger. He became an avid religious Zionist, and in response the community announced that he was to be fired for heresy. After all, the community leaders argued, do not our prayers recited thrice daily entreat the Almighty to return to Jerusalem, and do they not conclude "Blessed art Thou, O God, the builder of Jerusalem"? This declares quite explicitly that any return to Zion must depend solely on God! How dare Reb Itzele attempt to build Jerusalem with his own hands, and with the help of non-religious Jews at that!

Reb Itzele greeted his accusers with a smile, saying to them, "You are right." He then said to the judge (dayan) of the city, "But then, what about you, Reb Shmuel?" "Me?" the judge responded, aghast at the suggestion that he too was a heretic. "I am not a Zionist."

Countered Reb Itzele, "But when your daughter recently had an asthma attack, did I not see you take her to a doctor, a non-religious Jew at that! Yet we pray thrice daily, 'Heal us O God and we shall be healed… Blessed are you O God, who heals the sick among your people Israel.'" And then Reb Itzele turned to Reb Moshe, the president of the congregation. "You are also a heretic. Did I not see you keep your business open until ten o'clock last night? And yet you also pray three times a day: 'Blessed are you God who blesses the years with good sustenance.'"

Apparently, as in health and sustenance, prayer can only begin after we have done whatever it is possible for humans to do. And that must be the rule for all challenges of life! *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Shemot: Defining a Nation, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid.*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The miracle of the manna that fell from heaven and nurtured millions of people for forty years is one of the focal points of this week's parsha. The obvious reason for the miracle's occurrence is that the Jewish people had to have daily nourishment simply to survive. However, the rabbis of the Talmud injected another factor into the miracle of the falling manna. They stated that "the Torah could only have been granted to those that ate manna daily." Thus, the necessity for the manna was directly associated with the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. No manna, no Torah. Why is this so?

Most commentators are of the opinion that only a people freed from the daily concerns of earning a living and feeding a family could devote themselves solely to Torah study and acceptance of the life values that acceptance of the Torah mandates.

The Torah is a demanding discipline. It requires time and effort, concentration and focus to appreciate and understand it. Cursory glances and even inspiring sermons will not yield much to those who are unwilling to invest time and effort into its study and analysis. This was certainly true in this first generation of Jewish life, newly freed from Egyptian bondage and lacking heritage, tradition and life mores that would, in later generations, help Jews remain Jewish and appreciate the Torah.

The isolation of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai coupled with the heavenly provision of daily manna and the miraculous well of Miriam all together created a certain think-tank atmosphere. This atmosphere enabled Torah to take root in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people.

In his final oration to the Jewish people, recorded for us in the book of Devarim, Moshe reviews the story of the manna falling from heaven. But there Moshe places a different emphasis on the matter. He states there that the manna came to teach, "… that humans do not live by bread alone but rather on the utterances of God's mouth."

To appreciate Torah, to truly fathom its depths and understand its values system, one has to accept its Divine origin. Denying that basic premise of Judaism compromises all deeper understanding and analysis of Torah. The manna, the presence of God, so to speak, in the daily life of the Jew, allowed the Torah to sink into the depths of the Jewish soul and become part of the matrix of our very DNA.

The Torah could only find a permanent and respected home within those who tasted God's presence, so to speak, every day within their very beings and bodies. The rabbis also taught us that the manna produced no waste materials within the human body.

When dealing with holiness and holy endeavors there is nothing that goes to waste. No effort is ignored and no thought and attempt is left unrecorded in the heavenly court of judgment. Even good intent is counted meritoriously. Let us feel that we too have tasted the manna.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah gives a clear message about the value of Jewish life, as we are reminded that no one should be permitted to murder Jews with impunity.

In the Shirat Hayam (Song at the Sea), Moses and the Jewish People use three expressions to

describe the drowning of the Egyptians. First, the Egyptians "descended in the depths like stone" (Exodus 15:5). Second, Moses describes the defeat this way: "You sent forth Your wrath, it consumes them like straw" (15:7). Finally, the Jews sing out that the Egyptians "sank as lead in the mighty waters" (15:10). One could claim that these phrases seem contradictory. Did the Egyptians sink like stone, like straw, or like lead? Which was it?

Rashi notes that these variant similes are descriptive of different Egyptians who were punished in accordance with what they deserved. The most wicked were tossed around like weightless straw and allowed to suffer miserably. The best of the group drowned like lead, which of course sinks immediately and therefore suffered the least. Those who did not fall into any clear category sank like stones (Rashi, Exodus 15:5, based on the Mechilta).

What emerges from Rashi is the precision of punishment, and moreover, the clear statement that only those who were guilty of oppressing and murdering Jews would receive such penalties. While one may imagine that a large part of the Egyptian population drowned in the sea, such is not the case. Ibn Ezra seems to support this point when he notes that the Egyptian chariots pursuing the Jews had three officers on each (Ibn Ezra, Exodus 14:7); a small percentage of the Egyptian population (Ibn Ezra, Exodus 14:13).

In 1956, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik wrote that with the establishment of the State of Israel, "God…suddenly manifested Himself." One such manifestation was that "Jewish blood is not free for taking, is not hefker" (Kol Dodi Dofek). During the Shoah, Jewish life, for most of the world, was worthless. It was reported that, at times, Jews were not even gassed before being incinerated, as the cost was too high.

And what was that cost? Rabbi Yitz Greenberg asks. It was a fraction of a penny. Even in death, we were considered to be worth nothing. With the establishment of the state, Rabbi Soloveitchik declared that one could sense God's presence in that Jews would be protected. No one would be able to spill blood in Israel without a strong response.

Now, of course, Judaism mandates that we not gloat in the defeat of our enemy. The rabbis make this point when declaring that only the half Hallel (celebratory prayer of praise) be recited on the last days of Passover, the anniversary of the drowning of the Egyptians. Indeed, the Midrash notes that God silences the angels who sang in celebration of the Egyptian defeat, telling them, "How dare you sing for joy when my creations are dying?" (Megillah 10b). During the Passover Seder, too, as we list the plagues, we spill a little bit of wine, symbolic of the sadness of spilling Egyptian blood.

So too, in contemporary times, Israel does not gloat in attaining victory through the loss of enemy life. While doing all they can to spare the lives of innocent civilians, it defends itself with strength, with the understanding that Jewish blood is not cheap. *Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale*

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

I've always found it delightful that the term we use for when the amniotic sac ruptures, releasing the fluid within and beginning the birth process, is "breaking of the waters." Because the birth of the Jewish nation, after its gestation for centuries in Mitzrayim, also involved the "breaking" of the waters of the Yam Suf.

The comparison is not whimsical. A newborn is empty of worldly experiences and intelligence, unable to speak or move in willful ways. What it is, though, is a dynamo of potential. So was the nation that was comprised of our ancestors. They had sunk to the penultimate rung of tum'ah in Mitzrayim and they still pined, when trapped at the sea, to return to their nation-prison. Their worthiness lay in their potential, which began to emerge weeks later at Har Sinai.

The Maharal (in his Gur Aryeh supercommentary on Rashi [Beraishis 26:34] and in his sefer Ner Mitzvah) assigns a stage of human life to each of the year's seasons. We tend to associate nature's awakening in spring with childhood, the heat of summer with petulant youth, autumn with slowed-down middle age and cold, barren winter with life's later years.

The Maharal, however, describes things differently. He regards autumn, when leaves are shed and nature slows down, as corresponding to older age; summer's warmth, to our productive middle-years; spring, to reflect the vibrancy of youth. And winter, to... childhood.

It seems counterintuitive, to put it mildly. Winter is, after all, stark, empty of vibrancy, activity and growth. Childhood is, or should be, full of joy, restlessness and development.

But spring's new plants and leaves don't appear suddenly out of nothingness. The buds from which they emerge were developing for months; the sap in the seemingly dormant trees was rising even as the thermometer's mercury fell. The evidence of life that presents itself with the approach of Pesach was developing since Chanukah. In the deadest days of deepest winter, one can see branches' buds, biding their time, readying to explode into maturity when commanded.

Winter, in other words, evokes potential. And so, what better metaphor could there be for childhood, when the elements that will emerge one day and

congeal into an adult roil inside a miniature prototype? When chaos and bedlam may seem to be the norm but when potential is at its most powerful? "The Child," after all, as Wordsworth famously put it, is indeed "father of the Man." Every accomplished person was once an unbridled toddler.

And we read of the potential that lay in our ancestors at the "breaking of the waters" of the sea while winter still envelops us. And as the days are few until Tu B'Shvat, the Rosh Hashanah of the trees.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Yosef's Casket

One of the interesting aspects of the Exodus from Egypt is the taking of Yosef's bones out of Egypt to be reburied in the Holy Land. This was a result of the oath that Yosef extracted from his brothers prior to his death at the end of Sefer Bereishit. As the Torah said there: "Yosef said to his brothers, 'I am about to die, but Elokim will surely remember you and bring you up out of this land to the land that He swore to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov.' Then Yosef adjured the children of Yisrael, saying, 'When Elokim will indeed remember you, then you must bring my bones up out of there.'" Yosef declared his bones to be a surety to the B'nei Yisrael that they would be remembered by Elokim and taken out of Egypt. Yosef would never be at rest until his bones were taken to the Holy Land.

Finally, after two hundred and thirty years of slavery, it was time for the B'nei Yisrael to leave that slavery, leave Egypt and its corruption, and be brought to the land that Hashem promised their forefathers. Now, four parshiot later, Moshe reminded them of the promise they had sworn to Yosef. The Torah says, "Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, for he (Yosef) had surely made the B'nei Yisrael swear, saying, 'Elokim will surely remember you, and you will bring my bones up from here with you.'"

Rashi explains that Yosef made his brothers swear that they would have their children swear to bring his remains and his brothers' remains with them when they left Egypt. Rashi understood that the oath demanded of the brothers was to take his bones "with" them, namely with their bones, too. Even though Yosef was the first of the brothers to die, he knew that this was the beginning of the exile promised to Avraham which would last until long after all his brothers would also die. Rashi questions why Yosef did not make his brothers swear to take him out immediately to Canaan and bury him as Ya'akov had done. Rashi explains that Yosef understood that he was a leader of Egypt and his oath to his father would not be countermanded by Par'aoh. Yosef's brothers did not have that same power over Par'aoh and would not have that power until Par'aoh was humbled by the plagues.

Often, the English translation from the Hebrew misses the fine point of the use of words and phrases. The Hebrew, either for emphasis or to teach a particular lesson, will use a double form of a verb, which in English we can only translate to show emphasis, using the word "surely" as part of the translation. Two such examples occur in our sentence: (1) hashbei'a hishbi'a, he surely made swear, and (2) pakod yiphkod, He will surely remember you. The nuance of the first double verb indicates that Yosef made his brothers swear, and his brothers made their children swear, also. The second double verb indicates that Hashem would remember the B'nei Yisrael after their long exile and will again remember the B'nei Yisrael after their two-thousand-year exile and return them to their land.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin quotes Mishlei (Proverbs), "One who is wise of heart takes (upon himself) mitzvot." He points out that while the B'nei Yisrael were busy plundering the Egyptians, Moshe was busy with the bones of Yosef. Even though the plundering was also a command from Hashem, there was a benefit also for the person who took gold and silver from the Egyptians. Only Moshe chose the true Chessed Shel Emet, the Kindness of Truth, as the preparation and concern for a corpse has no reward. HaRav Sorotzkin also asks why the language of the original oath was changed. Moshe used the word "im" to mean "with," whereas the original oath used "et" for "with." Yosef used the form "et" to indicate that the B'nei Yisrael would go to the land to serve Hashem, but he would go with a different purpose, burial. Moshe used the form "im" to imply that they both would go for the same purpose, as Yosef's Aron (casket) would go alongside the Aron Kodesh (the Holy Ark of the Torah) to show that Yosef served Hashem through the mitzvot of the Torah.

Several commentators ask why this sentence appears here after the B'nei Yisrael were turned around from the land of the Philistines, instead of earlier, when they left Ramses at the beginning of the exodus. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains: "Six hundred thousand armed men on their way to take possession of the land promised to them by Hashem could not be trusted to have sufficient confidence in this promise to face human opposition, and fight, feeling secure that victory must be theirs by virtue of this promise. Whereas the true Jew – like Yosef – looks with full assurance, even beyond his death, to the fulfilment of Hashem's promises, and finds his trust has not been misplaced." Hirsch continues by saying, "the bones of Yosef carried at the head of the train preached a constant sermon to the people who had to be led this detour through the wilderness on account of their lack of spirit and fortitude." HaAmek Davar explains that this sentence was moved to this place because of the mention of the Clouds of Hashem, which may indicate that these Clouds appeared

because of the worthiness of Yosef.

HaRav Sorotzkin also tells us that the Aron of Yosef served several purposes. The nations of the world were destined to reject the Torah on the grounds that it was unnatural for a human to be restricted because Man was incapable of restraining his desires. Even the B'nei Yisrael were influenced by this idea. But when they saw the Aron of Yosef together with the Aron HaTorah, they understood that "this one observed the Laws found in this one." Man was capable of controlling his desires just as Yosef had done. Secondly, when the B'nei Yisrael were discouraged and said, "it is better for us to be slaves in Egypt (than die here)" or "Let us choose a leader and return to Egypt," they were reminded by seeing Yosef's bones that the Egyptians acted evilly to the Jews even though Yosef had saved them during the famine. Thirdly, those who left Egypt thought of themselves as slaves. When they looked at Yosef, they saw that Moshe had taken Yosef from the land of Kings, and now they were also Kings.

From this section, we see that Yosef brought the B'nei Yisrael safely to Egypt, and his bones safely guided them on their return to the Holy Land. Safely does not mean without strife and hardship, but it demonstrates that Yosef protected us in life and in death through his holiness. May Hashem continue to protect us and bring us Peace in our land.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Preparation

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Numerous laws are derived from the verse: "On the sixth day they shall prepare what they bring in...." (*Shemot* 16:5). First, we derive from it that one should prepare properly on Friday for Shabbat, so that everything will be ready by the time Shabbat starts.

Second, we derive the rule of *muktzah*: if an item was not prepared or set aside for Shabbat use in advance, it may not be used or moved on Shabbat.

Third, our Sages derive from the verse that one may prepare on a weekday for Shabbat, but may not prepare on Shabbat for a weekday. For this reason, many people do not wash dishes or pots following Shabbat lunch, because they know they will not need to use them again until after Shabbat. Some people do not fold their *tallit* after *shul*, as they consider it preparing for a weekday since they will not be wearing a *tallit* again until Sunday.

Based on the requirement to prepare during the week for Shabbat, our Sages derive that if Yom Tov is on Friday, it is prohibited to prepare on Yom Tov for Shabbat. The only way this preparation becomes permitted is if a person sets aside food for an *eruv tavshilin* before Yom Tov. By doing so, he is beginning preparations for Shabbat on the day preceding Yom Tov.

Up to this point, we have addressed preparation undertaken by people. However, why do we need the verse cited above to tell us about such preparation? We have another verse which makes the same point: "Tomorrow is a day of rest . . . so bake what you want to bake now" (*Shemot* 16:23).

Therefore, the Gemara posits that our verse is speaking about something that was "prepared by heaven," such as an egg that was laid on Shabbat. (This is one of the main subjects of the beginning of *Tractate Beitzah*). Such an egg may not be used on Shabbat or the Yom Tov that follows it on Sunday. Similarly, if Yom Tov is on Friday, an egg laid on Yom Tov may not be used for Yom Tov or the Shabbat following it. Since these eggs did not exist before Shabbat or Yom Tov, they could not have been prepared or set aside beforehand.

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And G-d detoured the nation by way of the desert to the Reed Sea, and the Children of Israel went up from Egypt armed. (Shmos 13:18) There are a number of seeming contradictions in this posuk and its understandings. The previous verse said Hashem didn't let the Jews go through inhabited lands lest they see war, become afraid, and return to Egypt. Now, it says that they were armed, implying they were battle-ready.

The Yerushalmi says they had no less than fifteen types of weapons, and Rashi points out that they took the weapons from Egypt, as they were going to be in isolated areas (so it seems they knew they would not be going through inhabited lands.) The Ohr HaChaim suggests that they needed to have weapons not only for the future battles in conquering Canaan, but to feel comfortable in their travels so that if they did meet an enemy (such as Amalek) they would not flee back to Egypt.

All these ideas suggest that they had military might, yet Rashi also offers the explanation of "chamushim" which means they were 1/5 of what they had been previously, because 80% of the Jews were unworthy of the redemption and died during the plague of Darkness. This makes it sound like they now had much less manpower, and would have a disadvantage in battle. How can we approach this verse, and its various explanations, holistically?

Perhaps the best way to understand it is by recognizing the balance between "natural" occurrences and Divine Providence. How much does Hashem do in our lives, and how much do we accomplish through our own efforts? The Jews had weapons, but they lost 4/5ths of their fighting force. They were smaller in number, but that smaller number were people who were more worthy, by virtue of their trust and belief in

Hashem.

In essence, Hashem does everything in our lives. The first of the Ani Maamins, the Thirteen Principles of Faith, says we firmly believe that, "…He alone did, does, and will do, all actions." So wherein comes our effort? It is our willingness to be a tool for Hashem's acts; to attempt to carry out His will. When we "do" things, we are not guaranteed the desired result. All we can do is let Hashem decide what He wants the outcome to be.

Our efforts are instead aligned towards partnering with Hashem in His will. Therefore, when the Jews left Egypt, as a smaller, but more spiritually-connected group, they had with them the weapons – the tools – they needed to take on the world. They were armed with the knowledge that Hashem, not they, would win the battles and wars, and conquer their enemies. The weaponry they brought with them was a means to share in that warfare, but it was not what brought them confidence. Instead, they were reassured by having Hashem in their midst, and they were ready to face whatever lay ahead.

The Maskilim of Brisk once put on a "Purim Shpiel," in which they depicted a typical Jewish war. Before the war, the kohain announced all the various exemptions from war, as spelled out in the Torah. As each category was called out, more and more people left the ranks. In the end, only two people were left to fight the battle - the Gaon of Vilna and Rav Aryeh Leib, famed author of 'Sha'agas Aryeh'. They began to argue about who had the zechus to fire the first shot, and then curtain came down amid uproarious laughter.

Some people then went to the rabbi of Brisk and complained about the audacity of the maskilim to mock the Torah with a play of this nature. The Rav, however, said that it was a very good play, except that the final scene was left out - the scene in which the two remaining soldiers, the Vilna Gaon and the Sha'agas Aryeh, won the war.

RABBI ARI WEISS

Tu b'Shevat

[Ed. note - this was written several years ago. Tu b'Shevat will be this upcoming Thursday]

This shabbat, besides being Shabbat Shirah, is also Tu b'shevat, the Jewish new year for trees. The importance of trees in Jewish life is expressed in many areas, not the least of which is in this week's parsha, B'Shalach. In it we read how Moshe used a tree to sweeten the waters at Marah, and how the Jews found seventy date palms waiting for them in the oasis of Elim.

Interestingly, the Talmud makes the statement that one who is studying Torah and stops to admire a tree, is worthy of death (although not literally punishable by death). Additionally, we read that no trees were allowed to be planted or cultivated anywhere on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. From these sources, one might question the perspective the sages had regarding trees and their importance, but in truth these statements relate the depth of their understanding regarding the specialness of trees.

Throughout the Torah and Talmud, trees have profound mystical symbolism. The Torah itself is referred to as the "Etz Chaim" - the tree of life. The righteous are likened to the date palm and the mighty cedar, while the book of Shir HaShirim is replete with metaphoric representations of the nation of Israel as trees. Indeed, the connection that a tree has with the ground, while constantly reaching skyward with its limbs is symbolic of the human condition: grounded in the physical, yet striving for the spiritual. In trees we see not only a model of our own spiritual growth, but in fact a representation of our connectedness to our history and G-d Himself.

The meaning, therefore, of the previously mentioned sources, is not, G-d forbid, that our sages didn't appreciate the importance and necessity of the trees. Rather, they understood that our appreciation of plant life needs to be utilized as a method of connecting with the Divine, not as an end in itself. One who loses that connection between G-d's creations and G-d Himself, Heaven forbid, is referred to as a "kotzetz B'nitiyot" - one who severs a tree from that which sustains it. In a similar way, the idolatrous religion of Asheira, involving the worship of trees, evolved when people began to disassociate the trees with G-d, and worshipped the trees as an end in itself. Therefore, on the temple mount, the location of the ultimate connection with G-d, it is not appropriate for there to be representations and symbols. Why notice a tree as a symbol of the connection with the Divine, when you can partake in the real thing? The same is true with Torah study; one who is connecting with G-d through Torah, but then stops to focus instead on a metaphor of that connection, is missing the proverbial point.

So this Shabbat, on Tu B'Shevat, please take the time to appreciate the beautiful and vital role trees play in our world, but then be sure to thank Hashem for creating them. Indulge in the delicious and nutritious fruits and vegetables with which we've been blessed, but be sure to begin and end with the appropriate blessings, giving praise and thanks to the Creator who saw fit to grace us with His abundance. Use the wonderful creations of this world as stepping stones to bring us even closer to our loving and caring G-d, and our appreciation of those creations will be that much more profound.