

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**T**he splitting of the Reed Sea is engraved in Jewish memory. We recite it daily during the morning service, at the transition from the Verses of Praise to the beginning of communal prayer. We speak of it again after the Shema, just before the Amidah. It was the supreme miracle of the exodus. But in what sense?

If we listen carefully to the narratives, we can distinguish two perspectives. This is the first: The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left...The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. (Exodus 14:22, 28-29)

The same note is struck in the Song at the Sea: By the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; The deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. (Ex. 15:8)

The emphasis here is on the supernatural dimension of what happened. Water, which normally flows, stood upright. The sea parted to expose dry land. The laws of nature were suspended. Something happened for which there can be no scientific explanation.

However, if we listen carefully, we can also hear a different note: Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. (Ex. 14:21)

Here there is not a sudden change in the behaviour of water, with no apparent cause. God brings a wind that, in the course of several hours, drives the waters back. Or consider this passage: During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come

off so that they had difficulty driving. The Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." (Ex. 14:24-25).

The emphasis here is less on miracle than on irony. The great military assets of the Egyptians—making them almost invulnerable in their day—were their horses and chariots. These were Egypt's specialty. They still were, in the time of Solomon, five centuries later: Solomon accumulated chariots and horses; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem...They imported a chariot from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. (I Kings 10:26-29)

Viewed from this perspective, the events that took place could be described as follows: The Israelites had arrived at the Reed Sea at a point at which it was shallow. Possibly there was a ridge in the sea bed, normally covered by water, but occasionally—when, for example, a fierce east wind blows—exposed. 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.*<sup>1</sup>

In the case of the wind that exposed the ridge in the bed of the sea, the consequences were dramatic. Suddenly the Israelites, traveling on foot, had an immense advantage over the Egyptian chariots that were pursuing them. Their wheels became stuck in the mud. The charioteers made ferocious efforts to free them, only to find that they quickly became mired again. The Egyptian army could neither advance nor retreat. So intent were they on the trapped wheels, and so reluctant were they to abandon their prized war machines, the chariots, that they failed to notice that the wind had dropped and the water was returning. By the time they realised what was happening, they were trapped. The ridge was now covered with sea water in

<sup>1</sup> Colin Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus*, Continuum, 2003, 247-48. For a similar analysis see James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, Oxford University Press, 1996, p199-215.



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either direction, and the island of dry land in the middle was shrinking by the minute. The mightiest army of the ancient world was defeated, and its warriors drowned, not by a superior army, not by human opposition at all, but by their own folly in being so focused on capturing the Israelites that they ignored the fact that they were driving into mud where their chariots could not go.

We have here two ways of seeing the same events: one natural, the other supernatural. The supernatural explanation—that the waters stood upright—is immensely powerful, and so it entered Jewish memory. But the natural explanation is no less compelling. The Egyptian strength proved to be their weakness. The weakness of the Israelites became their strength. On this reading, what was significant was less the supernatural, than the moral dimension of what happened. God visits the sins on the sinners. He mocks those who mock Him. He showed the Egyptian army, which revelled in its might, that the weak were stronger than they—just as He later did with the pagan prophet Bilaam, who prided himself in his prophetic powers and was then shown that his donkey (who could see the angel Bilaam could not see) was a better prophet than he was.

To put it another way: 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.

This idea can be taken further. Emil Fackenheim has spoken of “epoch-making events” that transform the course of history.<sup>2</sup> More obscurely, but along similar lines, the French philosopher Alain Badiou has proposed the concept of an “event” as a “rupture in ontology” through which individuals are brought face to

face with a truth that changes them and their world.<sup>3</sup> It is as if all normal perception fades away and we know that we are in the presence of something momentous, to which we sense we must remain faithful for the rest of our lives. “The appropriation of Presence is mediated by an event.”<sup>4</sup> It is through transformative events that we feel ourselves addressed, summoned, by something beyond history, breaking through into history. In this sense, the division of the Reed Sea was something other and deeper than a suspension of the laws of nature. It was the transformative moment at which the people “believed in the Lord and in Moses His servant” (Ex. 14:31) and called themselves “the people You acquired” (Ex. 15:16).

Not all Jewish thinkers focused on the supernatural dimension of God’s involvement in human history. Maimonides insisted that “Israel did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the signs he performed.”<sup>5</sup> What made Moses the greatest of the prophets, for Maimonides, is not that he performed supernatural deeds but that, at Mount Sinai, he brought the people the word of God.

In general, the sages tended to downplay the dimension of the miraculous, even in the case of the greatest miracle of all, the division of the sea. That is the meaning of the following Midrash, commenting on the verse, “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its full flow [le-eitano]” (Ex.14:27): 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.<sup>6</sup>

The implication is that the division of the sea was, as it were, programmed into creation from the outset.<sup>7</sup> 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.

We even find an extraordinary debate among the sages as to whether miracles are a sign of merit or the opposite. The Talmud<sup>8</sup> tells the story of a man whose wife died, leaving a nursing child. The father was too poor to be able to afford a wet-nurse, so a miracle occurred and he himself gave milk until the child was weaned. On this, the Talmud records the following difference of opinion: Rav Joseph said: Come

<sup>3</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham, Continuum, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p255.

<sup>5</sup> Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Yesodei ha-Torah 8:1.

<sup>6</sup> *Genesis Rabbah* 5:5.

<sup>7</sup> In general, the sages said that all future miracles were created at twilight at the end of the six days of creation (*Mishnah*, *Avot* 5:6).

<sup>8</sup> *Shabbat* 53b.

<sup>2</sup> Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, New York, Schocken, 1982, p14-20.

and see how great was this man that such a miracle was wrought for him. Abaye said to him: On the contrary, how inferior was this man, that the natural order was changed for him.

According to Abaye, greater are those to whom good things happen without the need for miracles. The genius of the biblical narrative of the crossing of the Reed Sea is that it does not resolve the issue one way or another. It gives us both perspectives. To some the miracle was the suspension of the laws of nature. To others, the fact that there was a naturalistic explanation did not make the event any less miraculous. That the Israelites should arrive at the sea precisely where the waters were unexpectedly shallow, that a strong east wind should blow when and how it did, and that the Egyptians' greatest military asset should have proved their undoing—all these things were wonders, and we have never forgotten them. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**"T**his is my God ve-anveihu, my father's God, and I will exalt Him." (Exodus 15:2) What is the best way to give thanks to God? As the walls of the sea come crashing down on the elite Egyptian chariots, and the Israelites realize that the Egyptians will never be able to attack or subjugate them again, a spontaneous song of gratitude and praise bursts forth. The Shira is Israel's magnificent cry of religious awe, an acknowledgment of God's "great hand" (Ex. 14:31) and direct involvement with their destiny.

To say that the Israelites were grateful would be a gross understatement. The accepted custom in most synagogues throughout the world, and for virtually all of Jewish history, is for everyone to rise when the Shira (Song of Praise at the Reed Sea) is read from the Bible. That Shabbat is known as Shabbat Shira. Every single day observant Jews recite the Shira, because it is included in the "Verses of Song" with which the morning prayer liturgy begins. The language of the Shira is highly charged and intense. The climactic exclamation of Israelite adoration and commitment is obscured by one word which is difficult to translate: "This is my God ve-anveihu, my father's God, and I will exalt Him" (Ex.15:2).

What does ve-anveihu mean?

Targum Onkelos translates the phrase as "This is my God, and I shall build a Temple for Him," "naveh" (from ve-anveihu) being the Hebrew word for home.

Rashi prefers "This is my God, and I shall declare His beauty and praises [in prayer]," "na'eh" or "noy" (from ve-anveihu) being the Hebrew word for beauty and goodness.

An anonymous Talmudic sage builds on the same verb root as Rashi, but gives it a somewhat different twist: "This is my God, and I shall beautify [His commandments before] Him by serving Him with a beautiful sukka, a beautiful shofar" (Shabbat 133b).

The opposing Talmudic view, in the name of Abba Shaul, divides the Hebrew into two words: I and Thou, ani ve-hu, turning the verse into a ringing endorsement of proper ethical conduct: "This is my God, and I shall be like Him: Just as He is compassionate and loving, so must I be compassionate and loving..." (ibid).

These four views may be seen as an ascending order of commitment. The first opinion has the Israelites commit to building a temple for God. The second view, sensitive to the fact that an external structure says nothing about the nature of the spirituality within it, insists that the Jews declare their intent "to declare God's beauty and praise to all of those who enter the world" (Rashi, ad loc.), in other words, to publicly pray to Him. The third level is not satisfied with prayers alone, but prefers a whole panoply of adorned rituals. The final position maintains that the most important issue is not what we build, what we pray, or even what we do; it is rather who we are – the personality and character which make up our essential being – that really counts.

Perhaps there is an even deeper level to this difference of opinion. The Midrash Mekhilta (chapter 3), cited by Rashi (ad loc.), mystifyingly declares that a lowly maidservant at the moment of the splitting of the Red Sea had a deeper vision of the divine than even the great mystical prophet of the supernal chariot (ma'aseh merkavah), Ezekiel the son of Buzi. The sages of the Talmud make another comparison involving Ezekiel, when they declare: "To whom may Ezekiel be compared? To a town dweller. To whom may Isaiah be compared? To a city dweller" (Hagiga 13b).

I heard a fascinating interpretation of this statement in the name of Rabbi Isaac Bernstein. When a city dweller from London, for example, has an appointment in New York, they go straight to the agreed-upon point of rendezvous. They are oblivious to the tall buildings and impressive plazas they are used to seeing at home anyway. Not so the unsophisticated town dweller. They are liable to become so distracted by the novelty of big-city architecture that they can miss their meeting altogether.

Isaiah and Ezekiel both have uplifting visions of divine splendor. Isaiah, the prophet of the Land of Israel, is likened to the city dweller who, used to living with spirituality all the time, goes straight to the heart of his vision: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isaiah 6:3).

Ezekiel, on the other hand, lives in Babylon, and is therefore compared to the town dweller. He is so

wonder-struck by his exalted picture of the divine that he seems to get lost in the myriad of details. Verse after verse describes the angels, the merkavah (mystical chariot), the accoutrements, with no mention of the Divine Presence itself, as it were.

From this perspective, the miraculous experience of the maid-servant at the Red Sea enabled her, Isaiah-like, to have an even deeper perception than Ezekiel; she got straight to the central core of the issue when she declared "This is my God." She did not get distracted by the details surrounding the divine.  
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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**his week the Torah introduces us to the miraculous heavenly food – the manna that fell from heaven and sustained the Jewish people for 40-years during their sojourn in the desert of Sinai. This food had miraculous qualities; it could acquire whatever taste the person eating it desired, it produced no waste material, but it had a very limited shelf life. It could not be stored for the next day and rotted away if not consumed daily.

This changed in preparation for the Sabbath, when the second portion collected on Friday in honor of the Sabbath remained fresh, to be eaten on the Sabbath day though the manna fell beforehand. This heavenly food however proved to be a source of constant controversy and tension within the camp of the Jewish people. Despite it being an obvious gift directly from heaven, or perhaps ironically, because it was such an obvious gift from heaven, the Jewish people tended to grumble about it.

We will see throughout the narrative of the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai that there were constant complaints about this heavenly gift. It became the focal point directed against Moshe and the God of Israel throughout the years of wandering in the Sinai desert. There is a streak within human nature that is present regarding unwanted and unasked for gifts. Such gifts always carry with them a sense of responsibility and even obligation to the donor.

In the words of God to original man that, 'you will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow,' there lies not only a curse but also an implicit blessing as well. By earning our bread by working we feel a sense of accomplishment and, more than that, of the right to eat bread that it is truly earned. When the Lord gives us free bread, so to speak, we resented it.

It is the nature of young children to attempt to do everything by themselves even when they are physically unable to do so, and to resent adult interference. Human beings are born with self-confidence and self-reliance. We believe from our youngest years to our old age that we can do it all by ourselves. So, when the Jewish people were presented with a gift of bread from heaven, they resented it for

they realized that in this world there truly is no free lunch. That gift always comes with obligations and responsibilities, spoken or unspoken, to the one who granted the gift

They remembered the food of Egypt, even though they were slaves, because they felt that they had earned it and it was rightfully theirs. The manna that fell from heaven carried with it not only the sense of being a gift, but also the realization that it carried with it duties and obligations. They realized that it was not free but was always controversial in their minds and hearts. © 2019 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**"W**here is God?" asked Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, one of the great Hasidic masters. "Everywhere," replied his students. "No, my children," he responded, "God is not everywhere, but only where you let Him enter."

The Kotzker's answer reinforces a distinction that Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik makes between two terms of redemption-both relate to being saved-hatzalah and yeshuah. Hatzalah requires no action on the part of the person being saved. Yeshuah, on the other hand, is the process whereby the recipient of salvation participates in helping him or herself.

In the portions read during the last few weeks, the Torah describes how the Jewish people, emerging from Egypt, experienced the process of hatzalah. Note God's words -- ve-hitzalti etchem. (Exodus 6:6) God and God alone, says the Hagadah, took us out of Egypt. Just as a newborn is protected by her or his parents, so were the newly born Jewish people protected by God.

Much like a child who grows up, the Jewish people, having left Egypt, were expected to assume responsibilities. While Moshe thought that the process of hatzalah would be extended into the future, God does not concur-the sea will split, but you will be saved only if you do your share and try to cross on your own. (Rashi on Exodus 14:15) As the Jews stand by the sea, the Torah suddenly shifts from the language of hatzalah to that of yeshuah as it states va-yosha Hashem. (Exodus 14:30)

I remember my son Dov, as a small child at the Seder table, asking: "Why do we have to open the door for Eliyahu (Elijah) the prophet? He has so much power! He gets around so quickly and drinks a lot. Couldn't he squeeze through the cracks?"

At the Seder table, in addition to re-enacting the redemption from Egypt we also stress the hope for future redemption. This part of the Seder experience

begins with the welcoming of Eliyahu, who the prophet says, will be the harbinger of the Messianic period. But for the Messiah to come, says Rav Kook, we must do our share and so we open the door and welcome him in. Sitting on our hands and waiting is not enough.

I often asked my parents where their generation was sixty years ago when our people were being murdered and destroyed. Although many stood up, not enough people made their voices heard. Let us bless each other today that when our children and our grandchildren ask us similar questions such as, "Where were you when Jews were mercilessly murdered in Israel" we will be able to answer that we did stand up and did our best to make a difference.

Let us pray that we will have done our share and opened the door to let God in. We must recognize that we can't only ask for halzalah, where God alone intervenes, but we must also do our share to bring about a new era, one of genuine partnership between heaven and earth-- a true yeshuah. ©2019 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. 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

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Preparation

*Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**here are numerous laws that one may derive from this week's Parsha when it states "and it will be on the sixth day when they prepare what they bring" (Shmot 17:5)

Firstly, one should prepare properly on Friday for the Shabbat so that one has enough to eat on Shabbat. Secondly, the food that was not prepared for the Shabbat would be forbidden to use on Shabbat

Our sages also learn from this that one is permitted to prepare on Friday for Shabbat but not from Shabbat to Sunday. Thus many people do not wash dishes or pots on Shabbat because they will not use them again until after Shabbat. Some people also don't fold their Tallit after prayers and wait until after Shabbat for the same reason.

From the implications of this law, our Rabbis also derive that one is not permitted to prepare from Yom Tov to Shabbat. The only way they permit this is by making an "Eruv Tavshillin" which in essence requires the individual to begin some preparation on the weekday before Yom Tov for Shabbat. (In addition a declaration must be said before Yom Tov, designating certain cooked foods for use on Shabbat).

The situations cited are all examples of preparations by man. However why do we need a special sentence quoted above for this, for it states later in the Torah "Et asher Tofu eifu" (bake what you wish to bake 17:23 in preparation for Shabbat) ?

Therefore our Rabbis posit that here we are

speaking about something that was prepared by the heavens such as an egg that was laid on Shabbat (which is one of the main subjects in Tractate Beitzah, ) which one may not use on Shabbat and the Yom Tov that follows or from Yom Tov to Shabbat because there was no designated preparation before Shabbat or Yom Tov. ©2018 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**T**he Torah states, "And the Children of Israel came to Marah. And they were not able to drink the water at Marah for they were bitter" (Exodus 15:23). Why does the Torah use the word "they" were bitter rather than specifying "the waters were bitter"?

The Kotzker Rebbe explains that "they were bitter" refers to the people themselves. When someone is bitter, then everything tastes bitter. To a bitter person nothing in life is positive. He makes himself miserable and those around him suffer. He thinks that he has valid reasons for his bitterness, but the source is within himself.

Our lesson: Take responsibility for your own life! Work on seeing the positive -- keep a running list of positive things you have to be grateful for from large to small and then prioritize them. This will focus you on the positive. Sweeten your outlook and you'll live in a much sweeter world! ("You can complain because roses have thorns, or you can rejoice because thorns have roses" -- Ziggy.) *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

#### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Out of Bounds

**I**n this week's parsha the B'nai Yisrael are given the manna. It falls every day from Heaven -- except on the Sabbath. The Jews may not collect it on the Shabbos and thus a double portion falls from heaven on Friday. "See that Hashem has given you the Sabbath; that is why He gives you on the sixth day a two-day portion of bread." In addition the Torah proscribes the Jews from traveling distances on the Shabbos. "Let every man remain in his place; let no man leave his place on the seventh day" (Exodus 16:29).

Rashi explains that this refers to the t'chum Shabbos, a Shabbos ordinance that confines one's boundaries under certain settings to 2,000 cubits from the initial point of origin. One cannot walk farther than that distance on Shabbos.

Though this is not the forum for a discussion of the intricate laws of Sabbath borders, including certain limitations to the restrictions, one basic question arises: There are many intricate laws regarding Shabbos activities. None were yet mentioned. Why discuss the

concept of confinement to an approximate one-mile radius before the Jews learned about the most basic prohibitions of the Sabbath such as lighting new fires or carrying in the public domain? In fact, this law of t'chum does not carry the severe penalties associated with other transgression. Why, then, is it the first Shabbos law that is introduced?

Once a religious man came to the Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchok Zev Soleveitchik, and asked him whether he should join a certain organization comprised of people whose views were antithetical to Torah philosophy. Well intentioned, the man felt that his association would perhaps sway the opinions of the antagonists and create harmony among the factions. He would be able to attend meetings and raise his voice in support of Torah outlook.

The Rav advised him not to get involved. The man unfortunately decided to ignore the advice. Within a few months, he was in a quagmire, because policies and actions of the theologically-skewed organization were being linked to him, and were creating animus toward him throughout the community.

For some reason he could not back out of his commitments to the organization. He was torn. How could he regain his reputation as a Torah observing Jew and ingratiate himself to his former community? He returned to the Brisker Rav and asked him once again for his advice.

The Rav told him the following story. There was a young man who aspired to become a wagon driver. He approached a seasoned wagoneer and began his training. After a few weeks, he was ready to be certified.

Before receiving an official certification the veteran decided to pose a few practical applications.

"Let's say," he asked his young charge, "that you decide to take a shortcut and deviate from the main highway. You cut through a forest on a very muddy trail. Your wheels become stuck in the mud and your two passengers become agitated. The horses are struggling to pull out of the mud. They can't seem to get out. What do you do?"

The young driver looked up in thought. "Well," he began, "first I would take some wooden planks and try to get them under the wheels. "Ah!" sighed the old timer, "you made a terrible mistake!" "Why?" retorted the neophyte driver, "I followed procedure in the precise manner! What did I do wrong?"

The old man sighed. "Your mistake was very simple. You don't take shortcuts into muddy forests!"

The activist understood the Brisker Rav's message.

Rav Moshe Feinstein of blessed memory explains that before the Jews were even given the laws of Shabbos they were taught an even more important lesson in life. Before you can embark on life's journeys and even approach the holy Shabbos, you must know

your boundaries. So before discussing the details of what you can or can not do on Shabbos, the Torah tells us where we can and cannot go on Shabbos. Sometimes, keeping within a proper environment is more primary than rules of order. Because it is worthless to attempt to venture into greatness when you are walking out of your domain. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

#### HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

### **Bais Hamussar**

**A**fter the awesome miracles witnessed at the splitting of the sea, the Torah tells us -- and we recite it daily during Shachris -- "Bnei Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Mitzrayim and the nation feared Hashem and they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant." Rav Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash, Beshalach 14:31) asks the obvious question. How is it that their fear of Hashem preceded their belief in Hashem? Shouldn't the order have been reversed? Only after one believes in the Creator is there the possibility of fearing Him.

He quoted the answer given by his Rebbi, Rav Yeruchom Levovitz, the Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in prewar Europe. Rav Yeruchom was wont to say, "One cannot discuss emunah with a drunkard." It is only after the drunkard sobers up that he has the clarity of mind needed to discuss belief in the Creator.

Rav Wolbe cites a Medrash (Shemos Rabba 30:11) that corroborates this idea. Iyov, who suffered tremendous misfortunes, declared in his misery, "If only I knew how to find Him... I would set out my case before Him" (Iyov 23:3). Chazal explained his declaration with a parable. An officer once proclaimed, "Show me the king and I'll teach him a lesson." They then brought the officer to the palace and he observed the king blind a lieutenant, jail a princess, exile a general, cripple a captain and banish a prime minister. Consequently the officer announced, "I apologize for I was drunk and did not realize the power of the king." Likewise, Iyov was shown how Hashem caused Yitzchak to become blind, Miriam to remain in solitude due to her tzara'as, Avraham's offspring to be exiled, Yaakov to be crippled (in his fight with the angel) and Moshe to be banished from Eretz Yisrael. Consequently Iyov announced, "I apologize for I was drunk and did not realize the power of The King."

Without a proper appreciation of Hashem's exacting standards of retribution, a person is, to an extent, "in the dark." The emunah discussed in the Torah is not the basic knowledge that there is a Creator. After the miraculous redemption from Egypt, the fact that there is a G-d was not a subject for debate. The Torah is referring to an understanding and acknowledgment that every single aspect of the world is run completely and solely by Hashem. Although they had previously questioned the prudence of their exodus



from Egypt, they were aroused from their "stupor" by the exacting punishment meted upon the Egyptians. This occurrence initiated a new level of appreciation of Hashem's providence in every aspect of the running of the world. The fear brought them to faith.

In a similar vein, continues Rav Wolbe, someone who is entirely caught up in a materialistic lifestyle, is for all intents and purposes a drunkard. There is no way to speak to him about emunah when he can't see past his bottle of wine i.e. his self-indulgent lifestyle. Only after he awakens from his stupor can he have the clarity of mind to discuss spirituality in general and belief in Hashem in particular.

Unfortunately, we have all too many alarm clocks trying to awaken us from our slumber.

The terror in Eretz Yisrael, the tragedies and suffering that have befallen numerous people are all wake up calls from The King. These occurrences should instill awe in our hearts so that we wake up and realize that, "If this is the power of the King, then we indeed have been drunk up until now." Since we haven't appreciated His omnipotence and providence in every last aspect of the running of the world, He is trying to teach us a lesson in emunah. We need to wake up from the deep slumber brought upon us by our very materialistic world and rub our eyes to enable ourselves to discern Hashem in every facet of our lives!

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**RABBI ARI WEISS**

## The Proverbial Point

**T**his shabbat, besides being Shabbat Shirah, is also Tu B'shevat, the Jewish new year for trees [ed note - Tu B'shevat is on Monday this year]. 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.

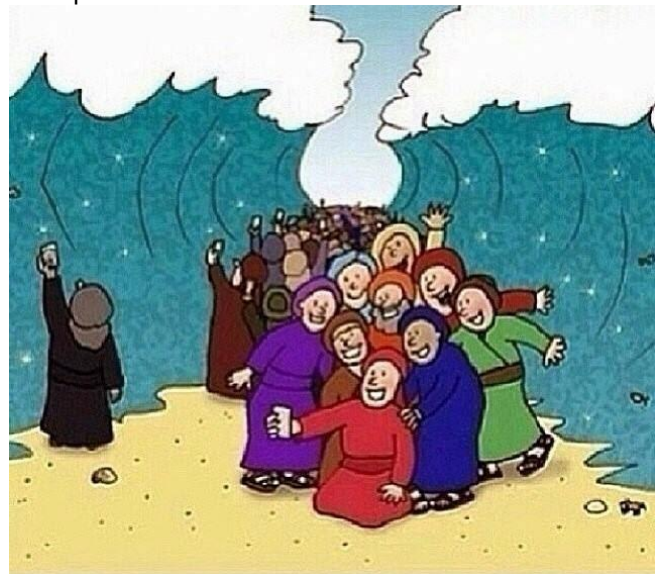
Interestingly, the Talmud makes the statement that one who is studying Torah and stops to admire a tree, is worthy of death (although not literally punishable by death). Additionally, we read that no trees were allowed to be planted or cultivated anywhere on the Temple mount in Jerusalem. From these 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. © 2013 Rabbi A. Weiss





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## 13 Miles for 13 Years

by Binny Ciment

(Hi. First of all, my mother is not writing this for me.)

For two summers I went to Camp Simcha and had the best summers of my life. You might ask why I am a part of Chai Lifeline and the real reason is because when I was diagnosed with a brain tumor Chai Lifeline was awesome. They visited me in the hospital, took me to Disney, and kept me happy whenever things got hard. They also helped out my family.

Camp Simcha was the best and now I'm running in honor of my upcoming Bar Mitzvah to make sure other kids in my situation can have the same

amazing summer. I'm also running in memory of my friend who was with me in Camp Simcha and who I miss a lot.



amazing summer. I'm also running in memory of my friend who was with me in Camp Simcha and who I miss a lot.

Training for this will be hard, but trust me, I've been through harder stuff. I know I can do this. Please help me reach my goal by donating here:

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Best - Binny



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