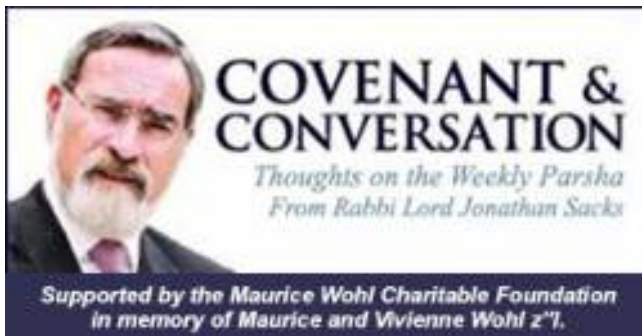


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Looking Up

The Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The impossible had happened. The mightiest army in the ancient world – the Egyptians with their cutting-edge, horse-drawn chariots – had been defeated and drowned. The children of Israel were now free. But their relief was short-lived. Almost immediately they faced attack by the Amalekites, and they had to fight a battle, this time with no apparent miracles from God. They did so and won. This was a decisive turning point in history, not only for the Israelites but for Moses and his leadership of the people.

The contrast between before and after the Red Sea could not be more complete. Before, facing the approaching Egyptians, Moses said to the people: “Stand still and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today ... The Lord will fight for you; you need only be silent.” (Ex. 14:13) In other words: do nothing. God will do it for you. And He did.

In the case of the Amalekites, however, Moses said to Joshua, “Choose men for us, and prepare for battle against Amalek.” (Ex. 17:9) Joshua did so and the people waged war. This was the great transition: The Israelites moved from a situation in which the leader (with the help of God) did everything for the people, to one in which the leader empowered the people to act for themselves.

During the battle, the Torah focuses our attention on one detail. Moses climbs to the top of a hill overlooking the battlefield, with a staff in his hand:

As long as Moses held his hands up, the Israelites prevailed, but when he let his hands down, the Amalekites prevailed. When Moses' hands became weary, they took a stone and placed it under him, so that he would be able to sit on it. Aaron and Chur then held his hands, one on each side, and his hands remained steady until sunset. (Ex. 17:11-12)

What is going on here? The passage could be read in two ways: The staff in Moses' raised hand – the very staff which he used to perform mighty miracles in Egypt and at the sea – might be a sign

that the Israelites' victory was a miraculous one. Alternatively, it might simply be a reminder to the Israelites that God was with them, giving them strength.

Very unusually – since the Mishnah in general is a book of law rather than biblical commentary – a Mishnah resolves the question:

Did the hands of Moses make or break [the course of the] war? Rather, the text implies that whenever the Israelites looked up and dedicated their hearts to their Father in heaven, they prevailed, but otherwise they fell.¹

The Mishnah is clear. Neither the staff nor Moses' upraised hands were performing a miracle. They were simply reminding the Israelites to look up to heaven and remember that God was with them. Their faith gave them the confidence and courage to win.

A fundamental principle of leadership is being taught here. A leader must empower the team. They cannot always do the work for the group; they must do it for themselves. But the leader must, at the same time, give them the absolute confidence that they can do it and succeed. The leader is responsible for their mood and morale. During battle, a captain must betray no sign of weakness, doubt or fear. That is not always easy, as we see in this week's episode. Moses' upraised hands "became weary." All leaders have their moments of exhaustion and at such times the leader needs support – even Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur, who then helped him to maintain his position. In the end, though, his

upraised hands were the sign the Israelites needed that God was giving them the strength to prevail, and they did.

In today's terminology, a leader needs emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, best known for his work in this field, argues that one of the most important tasks of a leader is to shape and lift the mood of the team:

Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision, or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions.²

Groups have an emotional temperature. As individuals they can be happy or sad, agitated or calm, fearful or confident. But when they come together as a group, a process of attuning – "emotional contagion" – takes place, and they begin to share the same feeling. Scientists have shown experimentally how, within fifteen minutes of starting a conversation, two people begin to converge in the physiological markers of mood, such as pulse rate. "When three strangers sit facing each other in silence for a minute or two, the one who is most emotionally expressive transmits their mood to the other two – without speaking a single word."³ The physiological basis of this process, known as *mirroring*, has been much studied in recent years, and observed even among primates. It is the basis of empathy, through which we enter into and share other people's feelings.

This is the foundation for one of the most important roles of a leader. It is he or she who, more than others, determines the mood of the group. Goleman reports on several scientific studies showing how leaders play a key role in determining the group's shared emotions:

Leaders typically talked more than anyone else, and what they said was listened to more carefully ... But the impact on emotions goes beyond what a leader says. In these studies, even when leaders were not talking, they were watched more carefully than anyone else in the group. When people raised a question for the group as a whole, they would keep their eyes on the leader to see his or her response. Indeed, group members generally see the leader's emotional reaction as the most valid response, and so model their own on it – particularly in an ambiguous situation, where various members react differently. In a sense, the leader sets the emotional standard.⁴

When it comes to leadership, even non-verbal cues are important. Leaders, at least in public, must project confidence even when they are inwardly full of doubts and hesitations. If they betray their private fears in word or gesture, they risk demoralising the group.

There is no more powerful example of this than the episode in which King David's son Absalom mounts a *coup d'état* against his father, proclaiming himself king in his place. David's troops put down the rebellion, in the course of which Absalom's hair gets tangled in a tree and he

is stabbed to death by Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

When he hears this news, David is heartbroken. His son may have rebelled against him, but he is still his son and his death is devastating. David covers his face crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" News of David's grief quickly spreads throughout the army, and they too – by emotional contagion – are overcome by mourning. Joab regards this as disastrous. The army have taken great risks to fight for David against his son. They cannot now lament their victory without creating confusion and fatefully undermining their morale:

Then Joab went into the house to the King and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now." (2 Samuel 19:6-8)

King David does as Joab insists. He accepts that there is a time and place for grief, but not now, not here, and above all, not in public. Now is the

time to thank the army for their courage in defence of the King.

A leader must sometimes silence their private emotions to protect the morale of those they lead. In the case of the battle against Amalek, the first battle the Israelites had to fight for themselves, Moses had a vital role to perform. He had to give the people confidence by getting them to look up.

In 1875 an amateur archaeologist, Marcelino de Sautuola, began excavating the ground in a cave in Altamira near the north coast of Spain. At first, he found little to interest him, but his curiosity was rekindled by a visit to the Paris exhibition of 1878 where a collection of Ice Age instruments and art objects was on display. Determined to see whether he could find equally ancient relics, he returned to the cave in 1879.

One day he took his nine-year-old daughter Maria with him. While he was searching through the rubble, she wandered deeper into the cave and to her amazement saw something on the wall above her. “Look, Papa, oxen,” she said. They were, in fact, bison. She had made one of the great discoveries of prehistoric art of all time. The magnificent Altamira cave paintings, between 25,000 and 35,000 years old, were so unprecedented a finding that it took twenty-two years for their authenticity to be accepted. For four years Sautoula had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

This is one of the enduring themes of Tanach: the importance of looking up. “Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things,” says Isaiah (Is. 40:26). “I lift up my eyes to the hills.

From there will my help come” said King David in Psalm 121. In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will not be like the flat plain of the Nile Delta where water is plentiful and in regular supply. It will be a land of hills and valleys, entirely dependent on unpredictable rain (Deut. 11:10-11). It will be a landscape that forces its inhabitants to look up. That is what Moses did for the people in their first battle. He taught them to look up.

No political, social or moral achievement is without formidable obstacles. There are vested interests to be confronted, attitudes to be changed, resistances to be overcome. The problems are immediate, the ultimate goal often frustratingly far away. Every collective undertaking is like leading a nation across the wilderness towards a destination that is always more distant than it seems when you look at the map.

Look down at the difficulties and you can give way to despair. The only way to sustain energies, individual or collective, is to turn our gaze up toward the far horizon of hope. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was “to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle”. The fly is trapped in the bottle. It searches for a way out. Repeatedly it bangs its head against the glass until at last, exhausted, it dies. Yet the bottle has been open all the time. The one thing the fly forgets to do is to look up. So, sometimes, do we.

It is the task of a leader to empower, but it is also their task to inspire. That is what Moses did when, at the top of a hill, in full sight of the people, he raised his hands and his staff to

heaven. When they saw this, the people knew they could prevail. “Not by might nor by power, but by My spirit,” said the Prophet (Zechariah 4:6). Jewish history is a sustained set of variations on this theme.

A small people that, in the face of difficulty, continues to look up will win great victories and achieve great things.

QUESTIONS (AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE)

1. Can you think of other times in the Tanach when the people needed to change their perspective and “look up”?
2. Do you think leaders should always maintain an optimistic attitude?
3. How can we apply this idea of looking up to the situation we are in today?

NOTES

1. Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 3:8.
2. Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership*, (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press), 2002, 3.
3. *Ibid.*, 7.
4. *Ibid.*, 8.



Songs of Freedom

The transition from slavery to freedom is sudden. As the parashah begins, the emancipated slaves take up arms (13:18), and brace themselves for

the inevitable showdown with their erstwhile masters. Their arms are primitive; from a logical perspective, they stand little chance against the mighty Egyptian war machine. Pharaoh and his army bear down on them in armored chariots, the ancient equivalent of tanks.

God, however, had already made an executive decision: The Israelites were not ready to face battle. He guided them toward the desert, away from the more direct route along the coastline, not out of fear of the Egyptians, but in order to avoid confrontations further along the route with other tribes and other armies (13:17).

There was still a special fate in store for the ruthless Egyptians, who had callously thrown Jewish babies into the water to their deaths. The Egyptians may have thought that they had paid the price for this murderous policy during the plague that had turned the waters of the Nile to blood. In retrospect, that was mere foreshadowing of the final chapter of the exodus story: The splitting of the sea, and the watery death of the Egyptians.

Rarely in life do we witness Divine Justice unfolding in real time, as the Israelites did with the splitting of the sea. Standing on terra firma, they had front row seats to the most awesome display of God's involvement in human history man had ever seen: The Egyptian army, chariots and all, were consumed by the water, and the reality of God's might and Egypt's complete eradication began to sink in to their consciousness. In response, the Israelites broke into songs of praise and thanks. The remainder of their march toward destiny would be



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unencumbered by fear of Pharaoh or his henchmen.

Soon enough, though, a new- old nemesis arrived on the scene, and the battle that might have been avoided was upon them. Amalek arrived. Years earlier, Yaakov and Esav had made a deal: Yaakov would take on responsibility for the covenant God had made with Avraham, which included slavery and suffering. Now that the hard part was finally over, the time to collect the reward had come: It was time to inherit the Land of Israel. Yaakov's children and grandchildren had paid the bill, had upheld their part of the deal through hundreds of years of suffering, but now Esav's family showed up, ready to "re-negotiate" the terms. Their arrival on the scene was anything but coincidental; it was a perfectly-timed attempt to re-take the birthright's benefits without having to assume any of the less-pleasant responsibilities.

The timing of Amalek's attack may have had additional, more spiritual roots as well. The verses that immediately precede the battle indicate that the Israelites were suffering from a type of cognitive dissonance. They had witnessed the plagues, the splitting of the sea, the crippling of Egypt and their own miraculous prosperity, yet they cried bitterly at the prospect of running out of supplies. It seems that it never occurred to them that the same God who had turned the Nile into blood and split the sea could provide fresh water or food. Even after the first crisis is resolved by a miraculous sweetening of the bitter water, they seem strangely unable to draw the obvious conclusions:

Setting out from Elim, the whole Israelite community came to the wilderness of Tsin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. In the wilderness, the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moshe and Aharon. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had **died** by the hand of God in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, when we ate our fill of bread! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole congregation to **death**." (Shmot 16:1-3)

As a food shortage looms, they speak of death. Interestingly, this is not the first time we see this reaction; years earlier, Esav spoke the same way:

Yaakov was cooking a stew, and Esav came in from the wilderness, tired. Esav said to Yaakov, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am tired"-which is why he was named Edom. Yaakov said, "First sell me your birthright." And Esav said, "I am at the point of **death**, so of what use is my birthright to me?" (Bereishit 25:29-32)

Now, as the Israelites begin to run out of supplies, they quarrel with Moshe and test God. They had been so privileged, so protected; they had witnessed incredible miracles, but they had come to expect the miraculous. Neither the manna nor the sweetening of the bitter waters moved them to sing God's praises or even to express their gratitude as they had done at the sea. They had lost their voice; the song of praise they had sung



Beshalach (Exodus 13:17-17:16)

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at the sea was a distant, forgotten sound - only a few short days later. Their sense of gratitude and wonder had become dull, and they were spiritually "weary."

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt-how, undeterred by fear of God, he happened upon you on the march, when you were **tired** and **weary**, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear. (Devarim 25:17-18)

When Esav struck the deal with Yaakov, his emotional state was described precisely the same way:

Yaakov was cooking a stew, and Esav came in from the field, **tired**. Esav said to Yaakov, "Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am **tired**"... (Bereishit 25:29-30)

This spiritual exhaustion leads them to begin to question God's involvement, His very existence - and then, Amalek appears:

The place was named Massah and Merivah, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested God, saying, "Is God present among us or not?" And Amalek arrived... (Shmot 17:7-8)

The timing was perfect. The Jews had lost the voice of Yaakov, and apparently, the faith of Avraham as well; they had begun to sound like Esav. They failed to appreciate the miracles that sustained them, and began to see the world in much the same way as Amalek did - attributing personal and national history to happenstance.

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt-how, undeterred by fear of God, he **happened** upon you on the march, (Devarim 25:17-18)

The spiritual malaise into which they had descended opened the door for Amalek to stake a claim as the "rightful heir." Having lost their voice, the Jews were forced to fight on Esav/Amalek's terms, using weapons and brute force to secure their future, rather than the instruments of faith that had been handed down from Yaakov, Yitzchak and Avraham.

Moshe was well aware of the spiritual health of his flock. Hoping to help them recalibrate and rediscover their spiritual stamina, he stands on the mountaintop and lifts his hands in prayer.

Moshe said to Yehoshua, "Pick some men for us, and go out and do battle with Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill, with the staff of God in my hand." Yehoshua did as Moshe told him and fought with Amalek, while Moshe, Aharon, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Then, whenever Moshe held up his hand, Israel prevailed; but whenever he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moshe's hands grew heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it, while Aharon and Hur, one on each side, supported his hands; thus his hands remained steady until the sun set. And Yehoshua overwhelmed the people of Amalek with the sword. (Shmot 17:9-13)

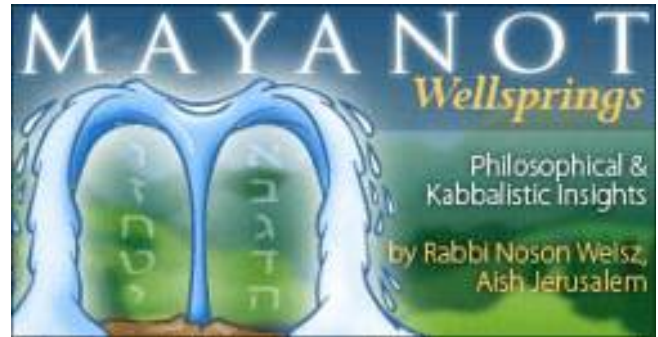
By behaving like Amalek, they had brought Amalek into their lives. They had failed to pray, to invest their energies in cultivating their relationship with God, or even to express gratitude, and had put the community in a precarious situation. What was Moshe's plan to shake them out of the religious rut into which they had fallen?

And it came to pass, when Moshe held up his hand, that Israel prevailed. (Exodus 17:11). Did the hands of Moshe make war or break war?

Rather, this tells you that as long as the Jewish people turned their eyes upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed; but when they did not, they were defeated. (Mishna, quoted in Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashana 29a)

Moshe's gesture from the mountaintop overlooking the battlefield transforms the hands of Esav back into the voice of Yaakov. He redirects the Israelites' focus heavenward, with a physical reminder of who they have become and who they must yet become - and the people are energized. Once that metamorphosis takes place, the march to Sinai, and then on to the Land of Israel, is once again possible. It is not a journey that cannot be undertaken by the spiritually weary, nor can the trip reach its successful conclusion if we doubt God's active involvement in history. When we collect and re-focus our spiritual energies, when we raise our voice in praise, thanksgiving, and prayer, we affirm that we are the children of Yaakov, the rightful heirs to the covenant God made with Avraham. Only then

are we ready for the rendezvous with God at Sinai.



Run For Your Soul

It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people... (Exodus 13:17)

All the commentators are perplexed by this verse. Why does it say "when Pharaoh sent out the people"? Surely the Torah ought to say "when God took the children of Israel out of Egypt." Pharaoh was forced to succumb to the Divine will by the ten plagues. It wasn't his idea to send out the Jews. Why does the verse imply that it was only because he sent us out that we left?

This difficulty is even more glaringly obvious in a later verse.

It was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled... (Exodus 14:5)

Rashi quoting rabbinic sources explains the background to the verse thus: Pharaoh sent some of his guards along with the Jews to make sure that they did not violate the three-day limit placed on their royal permission to leave.



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When the Jews showed no sign of stopping or turning around after three days, Pharaoh came to the conclusion that they were attempting to flee, and he duly decided to give pursuit. At this point they were AWOL and he was entitled to resort to punitive measures to force them to return.

Once again the point is made that the Exodus has something to do with Pharaoh. How can this be reconciled with the idea that:

God strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued the Children of Israel -- and the Children of Israel were going out with an upraised arm. (Exodus 14:8)

Nachmanides says that they left with the full trappings of nationhood -- banners flying etc. -- showing that they left on their own steam not under Pharaoh's terms. Which of these images represents the true Exodus?

THE TRUE EXODUS

The answer turns out to be quite complex. The key to understanding it is the realization that there are really two Exoduses -- a physical one and a spiritual one.

The physical Exodus had nothing to do with Pharaoh, and in physical terms the Jews indeed left with an "upraised arm," but the spiritual Exodus was a different story altogether.

When people who have become intertwined with each other over a period of 210 years separate, much more is involved than physical departure or the clear demarcation of material assets. Such separations are comparable to the breakup of families brought about by the end of a marriage, a

complicated messy business indeed, always accompanied by considerable emotional trauma.

While this is a rule that applies to all human separations, it is especially true in the case of the Exodus. In psychological terms, the Exodus was akin to jumping off a cliff. The Jews left Egypt where life may not have been wonderful, but was quite predictable, and therefore safe and secure in a way, to go into the desert where there was no food, water or shelter. At the climax of their journey, this people coming straight out of a background of 210 years of subjugation, faced the prospect of a difficult war against trained armies who outnumbered them by far.

LOSS OF PREDICTABILITY

To be a participant of the Exodus meant to abandon your entire sense of security, to lose the predictability of life, and place yourself and your future entirely into the hands of God.

To give just one illustration of the psychological difficulty involved:

Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, "In the evening you shall know that God took you out of the land of Egypt. And in the morning you will see the glory of God..." (Exodus 16:6-7)

Nachmanides explains this according to the Talmud (Yuma, 75b). The Jewish people complained about the lack of bread and meat. God sent both miraculously, the manna and the birds, but the meat came at night and was not delivered to them with joy as man can survive without meat so they should not have asked for it.

The manna was provided joyfully as man cannot live without bread.

In either case both began to fall only on the 15th day of the month of Iyyar, a full thirty days after the Exodus. Until all the supplies they took out of Egypt were totally exhausted, God provided nothing.

In other words, you could not even complain to God about the lack of food until all your supplies were totally exhausted. Reserves for tomorrow were not an option. Then, when God was finally prepared to listen to fears of starvation, he wanted the people to ask Him for only the bare necessities of survival.

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Imagine yourself living for forty years with no savings, no house, no source of new clothes, no business, no job, without ever having provisions for the next day. The manna fell each day for only that day and could not be stored. Such a life totally ignores the emotional human need for a sense of security. In the conditions of the desert your total security is your ability to rely on God, a being over whom you have zero control by definition.

Nachmanides explains that this was the very point of the manna, and of the entire desert experience.

Behold! I shall rain down for you food from heaven; let the people go out and pick each day's portion on its day, so that I can test them, whether they will follow my teaching or not.
(Exodus 16:4)

The word "test" employed here does not imply an examination. The test consists of the subjection of the Jewish people to an ongoing existential conflict between their innate feelings of anxiety -- arising out of the human need to feel that one's future is safe and in control of one's own hands -- and their willingness to entrust their lives in God's hands.

The Jewish people needed to internalize the lesson that this desert experience was the accurate reflection of the reality they chose when they left Egypt. They needed to realize that any sense of security they might derive from their possessions or from their skills would be forever illusory. The spiritual essence of the Exodus experience was the willingness to face the fact that the only sense of security that a Jew can have in this world comes from the cheerful acceptance of the fact that his fate and his future are in the best possible hands -- God's.

BASIC ARTICLE OF FAITH

This realization, a basic article of faith for a Jew, represents the spiritual Exodus that was as real as its physical counterpart, but much more difficult to accomplish.

In this spiritual Exodus, the Jewish people, who were beset by the same insecurities as all other humans, have to manage to separate themselves from their psychological need to feel in control of their future without becoming too traumatized to enjoy life and without becoming crippled by feelings of anxiety. The physical bondage of Egypt was accompanied by the spiritual bondage to physicality, imposed by the need to feel in control. You cannot break one without the other.

Indeed, the rabbis tell us that most Jews didn't make it.

The Children of Israel were armed when they went up from Egypt. (Exodus 13:18)

The Hebrew word employed for "armed" is *chamushim*, which literally means "one-fifth." The Rabbis learn from this that four out of five Jews refused to leave and died in the days of darkness. (See Rashi in the name of the Midrash.) It is not that these Jews were so eager to continue their state of bondage in Egypt. It is not that they entertained doubts about God's existence. They simply could not face the life of total insecurity that Moses was asking them to undertake in the name of God.

PHARAOH'S MISCALCULATION

Pharaoh knew his Jews. While he fully realized that God had the power to forcibly take the Jewish people out of Egypt physically, he could not imagine that they could leave Egypt psychologically.

He could not imagine that they wouldn't return. Where would they go? They couldn't stay in the desert after all. What would they do? Engage in wars of conquest? Peace loving Jews, with no military experience, setting out to conquer warlike peoples? The very thought was ludicrous. Pharaoh was "sending" the Jews out, because he knew they had no alternative to him in human terms.

They may have left with all the trappings of nationhood but they would recover from their euphoria and be forced back to Egypt and to his

rule by the grim realities of life. Despite God's power, they remained his people.

Indeed we find that the Jewish people were divided in their reaction to the approaching Egyptians.

Pharaoh approached. The children of Israel raised their eyes and behold, Egypt was journeying after them and they were very frightened. The children of Israel cried out to God. They said to Moses, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt? Is this not the statement we made to you in Egypt saying, 'Let us be and we will serve Egypt'? For it is better that we should serve Egypt than that we should die in the wilderness!" (Exodus 14:10-12)

Nachmanides explains that when the Egyptians approached, the Jewish people separated into groups. One group turned to God in prayer; one group attacked Moses as a false prophet; while still another group said the whole Exodus process was flawed. Despite all the wonders they had witnessed, a large portion of the Jewish people was still deeply skeptical of Moses and his message. In their hearts they were still attached to Pharaoh.

And then the sea split -- the epiphany of the spiritual Exodus.

SPLITTING OF THE SEA

When they were still in Egypt Pharaoh had asked Moses and Aaron: "*Who is YHVH that I should*

heed his voice and send out Israel? I do not know YHVH nor will I send out Israel."

They answered: *"The God of the Hebrews happened upon us..."* (Exodus 4:1-3). The word "Hebrew" means literally someone who passed over to the other side; in this case it refers to the people that emerged on the other side after having passed through the splitting of the sea. (Midrash Shmot Raba 3:8)

In other words, we learn that YHVH -- God in His transcendent identity -- will not be fully recognizable in the world until after they pass through the sea.

There is a quite remarkable but subtle aspect to this particular miracle that perfectly encapsulates the idea of this essay.

The most bizarre aspect of Pharaoh's behavior in the entire Exodus story is his willingness to follow Israel into the sea. He surely understood that the splitting of the sea was a miracle provided by God for the express purpose of allowing the Jewish people to escape his clutches. What could have possessed him to follow?

Nachmanides explains that Pharaoh was misled by the nature of the miracle itself.

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and God moved the sea with a strong east wind all the night, and He turned the sea to damp land and the water split. (Exodus 14:21)

There was no doubt that this was miraculous in itself, but even if the cause was miraculous the effect was natural. Thus Pharaoh believed that it was safe to follow the Jews into the sea.

As long as the Jews were in the artificial canyon created by the miracle, the canyon could not vanish. If it vanished for him, it would vanish for the Jews as well. As long as the Jews didn't drown, neither would he. The Egyptian experience of entering the sea was going into an area of dry land.

Not so on the Jewish side. When the Jews entered the sea they went down into the water. The sea did not split till they experienced the sensation of drowning in the water that came to over their noses. Nachshon ben Aminodov went first, but they all entered the dry land in the sea only by passing through this sensation of drowning. (Midrash Tehilim 114:8) They did not experience the miracle as the creation of a natural canyon. They experienced the entire crossing as living in the grip of a miracle. They had the sensation of being transported through what was really water, held in the gentle clasp of God's hand.

When the sea closed over the Egyptians, the Jews were still in it. Pharaoh's natural canyon closed and the Egyptian army was drowned, but Israel's passage through the waters in the palm of God's hand continued undisturbed.

THE PALM OF GOD'S HAND

The taste of life inside a miracle was a brand new taste in the human mouth. This new flavor is the essence of the spiritual Exodus.

In order to accept living in the palm of God's hand with equanimity, it is not enough to believe in miracles. You have to leave the world of nature behind altogether and enter a brand new miraculous world where different rules apply.

In this new miraculous world everything comes directly to you straight from God without using the channel of natural processes. The connection is between your soul and God directly, entirely bypassing the medium of nature. In this miraculous world the notion of saving for tomorrow doesn't exist. You have different ideas about what things constitute the necessities of life; as there is no need to maintain control over your survival, your notion of what you need to survive changes.

Of course no one lives in that miraculous world every moment of the day. A dedicated Jewish life can never be entirely free of conflict. We Jews are ordinary human beings with the same innate insecurities that beset the entire species.

As hard as we strive to place ourselves within the miraculous world of the spiritual Exodus described in this essay, a part of our beings necessarily remains in the everyday world of nature. This remnant will always send us the message that we must control our lives to be secure, that we must be masters of our own future. It refuses to allow us to place ourselves entirely in the hands of God.

A MANNA SAMPLE

Moses said, "This is the thing that God has commanded: a full measure of it shall be a safekeeping for your generations, so that they will see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness when I took you out of Egypt. (Exodus 16:32)

The Mechilta tells us that this manna was used by Jeremiah, some 1,000 years after the Exodus, to

chastise the Jewish people of his time. He told them that they do not devote enough time to Torah study. They answered him that they would happily study more but they need to make a living. This consumed so much of their time that they have very little left over to devote to Torah study. Jeremiah showed them the jar of manna Moses was referring to. He explained to them that God can always provide, and that the lesson of the spiritual Exodus is that He will provide for those who are willing to place themselves in His hand and follow Him into the wilderness.

In order to taste the flavor of the spiritual Exodus every Jew must attempt to decrease the part of his being that remains attached to the natural world and try to focus on the part of his being that experienced the splitting of the sea and became a Hebrew.

As long as we attempt to remain within the false security of the cocoon of the natural world, no matter how observant we may be, we cannot leave Egypt and follow God into the desert. Those who attempt to fully reconcile their Judaism with maintaining total control over their lives, and squeeze it into the time remaining after all the worries about the house and the job and the bank account are fully attended to, will never experience the taste of life in God's palm. They will never eat manna.



Financial Wisdom

While the Jewish people were busy gathering the treasures of Egypt, in fulfillment of Hashem's promise to Avraham that his descendant would come forth from captivity "with great wealth," Moshe was doing some gathering of his own. He was preparing the remains of Yosef for transportation to Eretz Yisrael. The Talmud (*Sotah* 13a) praises Moshe for being a "wise heart gathering *mitzvos*" (*Mishlei* 10:8) while the rest of the people were gathering money.

After *Havdalah*, when we sing *Hamavdil*, we come across the phrase "*zareinu vechaspeinu yarbeh kachol*, may He increase our children and our money like the sand." The Vilna Gaon changed the text to read "*zareinu uzechuyoseinu*, our children and our merits." As it stands, commented the Gaon, "This is not a Jewish prayer. We ask for a decent livelihood. We do not ask for wealth."

A man once came to the Vilna Gaon with a plea. "*Rebbe*, I want to make sure that all my children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be learned and observant Jews. How can I accomplish this? Is there any special *mitzvah* I can do? Is there a *segulah*, a charm, for this

purpose? Should I say a particular chapter of *Tehillim* every day? Or should I perhaps learn something in the *Gemara*? What should I do? What will do the trick?"

The Vilna Gaon looked at him intently. "There is something you can do," he said. "There is special prayer you can say in the *Shema Koleinu* blessing of *Shemoneh Esrei*."

The man was a little disappointed. "You mean I should pray they should be learned and observant during the *Shema Koleinu* blessing?"

"Not at all," said the Gaon. "This is what you should say: *Yehi ratzon*, may it be Your will, Hashem my Lord and the Lord of my fathers, that my children should not be rich. Do not pray that they should be poor, just that they should not be rich. That will be their best protection."

This, according to the Vilna Gaon, was the *segulah*, the charm, for having good Jewish children. He did not mean that rich Jews are somehow less Jewish than others are. It is certainly feasible for a rich Jew to be as learned and devout as any other Jew. It just takes more effort. Riches come along with tremendous temptation. All doors are open to the rich person, and it takes courage and determination not to step through some of the ones that are exceedingly enticing. In the long run, looking ahead to further generations, which rich person can feel confident that all his grandchildren will be equally strong and righteous? Experience has certainly shown us otherwise. Therefore, the best *segulah* for keeping all one's descendants securely within the Jewish fold is to shield them from the temptations of wealth..



On *Shabbos Mevarchim*, we ask Hashem for *chaim shel osher vechavod*, a life of wealth and honor. Why didn't the Vilna Gaon object to this wording as well as "not a Jewish prayer"? Why do we ask for wealth when it is such a dangerous commodity?.

Many years ago, I met a Jew who had just come back from Jerusalem. While there, he had visited a family - consisting of two parents and eleven children in a tiny one-room apartment. He remarked to me that he could not imagine how a family could live like that. He also expressed his amazement at the exceptional respect with which the children treated their parents and each other. Finally, he commented to me that the apartment was neat and clean, a place of dignity. It was one of the most amazing things he had ever seen..

This family undoubtedly did not have a large bank account. They did not have holdings and investments. But their lifestyle was certainly one of "wealth and honor." It could not have been more so had they lived in a sprawling mansion..

A person can have millions of dollars without having a life of wealth and honor. Perhaps his wife complains constantly, his kids drive him crazy and everyone is fighting. Is that a life of wealth and honor? What difference does it make that he has a million dollars if everyone is constantly bickering and nothing is ever good enough? On the other hand, it is possible to have eleven children, live in a one-room apartment and enjoy "a life of wealth and honor."

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