



Wembley Synagogue

בְּשַׁלַּח

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Beshalach

וַיִּסַּב אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמְדְּבָר יַם סוּף - Hashem led the people on a roundabout route through the desert to the Sea of Reeds (13:17)

Why did Hashem lead the Jewish people on a roundabout route and not straight into the Land of Israel? *Rashi* suggests that if they would have encountered war straight away, such as the war of the Amalakites and the Canaanites (Bamidbar 14:45) then they would have returned to Egypt. Consider, that even after Hashem led them in a roundabout way, they still said "let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt." (Bamidbar 14:4), how much more so would they have made such plans if He had led them on a direct route.

Abarbanel says that the Jewish people had left Egypt with Pharaoh's permission as the verse states "when Pharaoh sent the people away." (13:17) Pharaoh was under the impression that the Jewish people went into the desert in order to sacrifice to Hashem. Consequently, if they had headed straight for the Land of Israel, Pharaoh would feel that he had been misled. For this reason, they took a more indirect route. *Ohr Hachayim* says our rabbis said that when the Jewish people left Egypt, Pharaoh and all his men escorted the Jewish people for a short distance, like a good host who escorts guests that leave his home. Since Pharaoh was wicked, Hashem did not want him to be rewarded for performing this mitzvah. Therefore, Hashem changed the route by which the Jewish people travelled, thus rendering Pharaoh's "escort" ineffective; since it turned out that he led them in a different direction to which they were travelling. However, as a result of the above, the Jewish people were forced to follow a longer route. *Kli Yakar* says that the Jewish people were not yet fit to receive the Torah, for their faith in Moshe was not complete. This is evident from the fact that only later, after the sea had split and the Egyptians had perished, the Torah finally states that "they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant." (14:31) for this reason, Hashem led the Jewish people on a roundabout route, so that they would come to a higher level of belief through seeing His miracles.

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ - And Moshe took the bones of Yoseph with him (13:19).

When the Jews left Egypt, they had two tasks - to collect the Egyptians valuables, and to bring Yoseph's bones for burial in the Land of Israel. Moshe felt that bringing Yoseph for burial was the greater of the two mitzvot, and therefore involved himself with Yoseph's remains rather than with collecting pickings from Egypt. The Midrash praises Moshe's action by applying the verse (Proverbs 10:8) "And the wise of heart shall take mitzvot" to Moshe. Moshe's action of choosing a great mitzvah involving no personal benefit over a lesser mitzvah with personal benefit involved shows that Moshe preferred spiritual gain over material gain. One advantage of choosing spiritual gain over material gain is that only spiritual gain is permanent. Material benefits do not stay with a person beyond the grave "for upon his death, he will not take anything, his splendor will not descend after him" (Psalm 49: 18). Only the mitzvot which one performs stay with him and remain his forever. The above verse hints to the concept that it is only a person's mitzvot which stay with him forever. At first glance the phrase "with him" may appear to be superfluous. The Torah could have stated simply "And Moshe took the bones of Yoseph." The verse "And Moshe took the bones of Yoseph with him" indicates that the merit of Moshe taking the bones of Yoseph would stay "with him" forever. (Source: Avnei Nezer / Kli Yakar / Ma'ayana shel Torah)

וַיִּגַּד לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם - And it was told to the King of Egypt that the people fled; Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart." (14:5)

The people did not *run* away. Were they not asked to leave?

In *the Sidra of Beshalach* the term "*am*" — "people" — refers to the "*eirev rav*," a mixed multitude of Egyptians who left Egypt together with the Jewish people, and the expression "*B'nei Yisrael*" refers to the members of the Jewish people. When Pharaoh asked the Jewish people to leave Egypt, he sent along with them a contingency of his own Egyptians. He anticipated that this "fifth column" would assure the return of the Israelites to Egypt. Suddenly, word reached Pharaoh that "*barach ha'am*" — his own people whom he sent along with the Jewish people had fled. Pharaoh now had a change of heart for permitting the Children of Israel to leave, because not only did he lose his slaves, but he also lost his own subjects who enriched his coffers with taxes. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה מַה תִּצְעַק אֵלַי דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ - And Hashem said to Moshe "why do you cry out to me? Speak to the children of Israel and they shall travel! (14:15) When the Jews were caught by the Egyptian army upon the edge of the sea, they prayed to Hashem for deliverance. Hashem told Moshe that it was not proper to pray then. Rather, he should tell the Jews to proceed into the sea. Hashem would then provide them with a miraculous salvation. The question arises: Why was prayer an inappropriate course of action in this situation? Don't we always pray to Hashem in times of crisis? Why was travelling into the sea a better course of action? One answer is that Hashem was telling Moshe that the Jews' salvation was dependent only upon this test of faith. The necessary step for the Jews to gain salvation was following Hashem's instructions, not prayer. This was because Hashem had already decided that the Jews would be saved as soon as they would develop and demonstrate their faith in Him. They were to accomplish this by putting their faith in Hashem's words into practice - by entering the sea before the waters actually split upon Hashem's instructions. Since salvation was dependent upon the Jews' own actions, there was no point in further prayer. (Source: R' Chayim of Volozhin - P'ninim MiShulchan Govoha)

וַיָּבֹא עַמְלֵק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרֶפְדִּים - Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim. (17:8) The Rabbis tell us that the verse which tells us of Amalek's attack on Israel is juxtaposed to the previous verse in which the Jews tested Hashem, asking, "Is Hashem in our midst?" Hashem responded, "I am always in your midst. I never leave your side. Yet, you ask such a question!

This is compared to a man who placed his son upon his shoulder and set forth on a journey. Whenever the boy would see an object that caught his fancy, he would ask his father for it, and the father would oblige. This happened a number of times. They later encountered a man, at which point the son asked the man, "Have you seen my father?" Hearing this, the father said to his son, "Do you not know where I am?" He immediately cast his son off his shoulders, and a dog came and bit him."

וַיַּעֲלֶה מֹשֶׁה אַהֲרֹן וְחֹר - Moshe, Aharon and Chur ascended to the top of the hill." (17:9-10)

Why was it necessary to have a team consisting of Moshe, Aharon, Yehoshua, and Chur to fight Amalek? Under normal circumstances, when the Jewish people behave properly, Amalek is unable to attack them. However, he attacked the Jews in the city of Rephidim, whose name indicates two reasons for their vulnerability to attack:

1. "*Ripu atzman midivrei Torah*" — their involvement in Torah weakened" (*Sanhedrin* 106a).
2. "*Pirud*" — lack of unity (*Kli Yakar*).

The first letters of the names "Aharon," "Chur," "Yehoshua," and "Moshe" form the acronym for "*achim*" — "brothers." Moshe's call to the Jewish people was to act as brothers, live in brotherly harmony, and be united in the study of Torah and observance of *mitzvot*. This would assure that Amalek would be unable to break through into the Jewish camp.

וַיִּהְיֶה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וַיִּגְבֵּר יִשְׂרָאֵל (Israel would prevail) (17:11). The Mishna in Rosh Hashanah 3:8 asks the question וְכִי יָדָיו שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה עוֹשׂוֹת מִלְחָמָה אוֹ שׁוֹבְרוֹת מִלְחָמָה - "but could the hands of Moshe make or lose a war?" –The Mishna answers that this is to teach you that as long as Israel was looking upwards (i.e. in the direction of Moshe's hands) and subjecting their heart to their Father in heaven – they prevailed, and if not, they fell. The Mechilta quotes another version "But could the hands of Moshe give strength to Israel or could his hands smash Amalek? Rather, as long as he raised his hands upwards, Israel looked at him, and believed in the One who ordered Moshe to do so, and the Holy One, blessed be He, would perform miracles and wonders for them." It was the faith that the Jewish people showed in Hashem as their saviour that gave them the ability to triumph, for מִלְחָמָה ה' אֵישׁ Hashem is the Master of war (15:3). The Chatam Sofer explains that by the very act of looking heavenward during battle the Jewish people would express their faith in Hashem, for in war the first rule of combat is never take your attention away from your adversary. By ignoring this cardinal rule, the Jewish people demonstrated that they knew Who was really fighting the war.

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 4.36pm



Shabbat ends: 5.43pm