

**Texts for Torah Study – Parashat
Beshalach 5786 – 2026
Temple Sinai
Rabbi Fred Guttman**

The Long Way - Exodus 13:17-18

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, “If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.” So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.

The Long Way – Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

The deepest message in our *parashah* is in its opening declaration that Moses did not take the short route to Israel (i.e. the King’s highway via the Land of the Philistines) because the Israelite slaves were not up to the challenges of fighting a war to win their freedom (Exodus 13:17). At that point, there were two choices before God. One, to remove human free will and turn the Israelites and ultimately all human beings into robots, perfectly fulfilling God’s directions and not deterred by real-life considerations. Maimonides wrote that out of respect for human beings, God chooses the second

option, to accept people as they are. Rather than changing human nature miraculously, the Torah accepts the realities of human nature and human limitations.⁷ God enters with them into a covenantal relationship in which the Israelites are asked to raise the level of their moral performance above the society and culture around them, while moving toward an ultimately higher divine standard.⁸

Megillah 10B

And similarly, Rabbi Yoḥanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “And the one came not near the other all the night” (Exodus 14:20)? The ministering angels wanted to sing their song, for the angels would sing songs to each other, as it states: “And they called out to each other and said” (Isaiah 6:3), but the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: The work of My hands, the Egyptians, are drowning at sea, and you wish to say songs? This indicates that God does not rejoice over the downfall of the wicked.

Exodus 14:13-18

Moses answered the people, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, מֶה-תִּצְעֵק אֵלַי; דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּסְעוּ.

¹⁵Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. ¹⁶Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. ¹⁷I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen.”

Talmud Sotah 37A

It is taught in a *baraita* that Rabbi Meir would say: When the Jewish people stood at the Red Sea, the tribes were arguing with one other. This one was saying: I am going into the sea first, and that one was saying: I am going into the sea first. Then, in jumped the tribe of Benjamin and descended into the sea first.

Therefore, Benjamin the righteous was privileged to serve as host to the Divine Presence of the Almighty, as the Temple was built in the territory of Benjamin, as it is stated in Moses’ blessing for the tribe of Benjamin: “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; He covers him all the day, and He rests between his shoulders” (Deuteronomy 33:12).

Rabbi Yehuda said to Rabbi Meir: That is not how the incident took place. Rather, this tribe said: I am not going into the sea first, and that tribe said: I am not going into the sea first. Then, in jumped the prince of Judah, Nahshon ben Amminadab, and descended into the sea first, accompanied by his entire tribe.

Nachshon - Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael (14:22):

“When the tribes were standing at the sea, each of them said: I will not go down first into the sea, no, I will not be first.... Because they stood and deliberated, Nachshon the son of Aminadav leapt into the sea.

”Nachshon, a relative unknown, leapt first into the sea, and soon after, the waters parted for all. Nachshon, brave and bold, went first.

Miriam the prophet Exodus 15

¹⁹When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen^[e] went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. ²⁰Then **Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister**, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. ²¹Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the Lord,
for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver
he has hurled into the sea.”

Miriam’s Song – Debbie Friedman

And the women dancing with their timbrels
Followed Miriam as she sang her song
Sing a song to the One whom we've exalted
Miriam and the women danced and danced the whole
night long
And Miriam was a weaver of unique variety
The tapestry she wove was one which sang our history
With every strand and every thread she crafted her
delight
A woman touched with spirit, she dances toward the
light
When Miriam stood upon the shores and gazed across
the sea
The wonder of this miracle she soon came to believe
Whoever thought the sea would part with an
outstretched hand
And we would pass to freedom and march to the
promised land
And Miriam the prophet took her timbrel in her hand
And all the women followed her just as she had planned
And Miriam raised her voice in song

She sang with praise and might
We've just lived through a miracle
We're going to dance tonight

"Redemption Song" Bob Marley

Old pirates, yes, they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look? Ooh!

Some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfill the book

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
Redemption songs
Redemption songs

Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery
None but ourselves can free our minds
Whoa! Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them-ah can-ah stop-ah the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look?
Yes, some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfill the book

Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever have
Redemption songs
All I ever have
Redemption songs
These songs of freedom
Songs of freedom

Belzer Rabbi and Parashat Beshalach 1944

One of the great rabbis of Pre-war Europe was Rabbi Aharon Rokeach (1880 – 1957), the fourth Rebbe of the Belz Chasidic dynasty.

His reign as Rebbe saw the devastation of the Belz community, along with most of European Jewry during the Holocaust.

The Belzer Rebbe not once said any of the prescribed prayers like Yizkor or Kaddish for his wife and children, because he felt that those who had been slain by the Nazis for being Jews were of transcendent holiness; their spiritual stature was beyond our comprehension. Any words about them that we might utter were irrelevant and perhaps even a desecration of their memory.

The first Shabbat after he arrived in Israel during the winter of 1944 was Shabbos Parshat Beshalach, and he spent it in Haifa. He was alone in the world, without a single relative alive.

During the Shabbat, The Rebbe quickly realized that the Holocaust survivors present, who had endured indescribable suffering and had lost virtually everything they had, were in no mood to sing. The Rebbe decided to address himself and his few broken Chassidim who had survived.

The Rebbe raised the above question of why the Torah specifically alludes to the resurrection of the dead, in conjunction with the song that was sung celebrating the splitting of the Red Sea.

He gave this chilling answer. When the Jewish people sang the Song of the Sea, much of the nation was not present. How many people did not survive the enslavement of Egypt? How many Jewish children were drowned in the Nile? How many Jews never lived to see the day of the Exodus? How many refused to embark on a journey into the unknown?

According to tradition, only a fifth of the Jewish people made it out. 80% of the Jews died in Egypt. It is safe to say that everyone who did make it out of Egypt had lost relatives and could not fully rejoice in the miracles they were witnessing. Now, the sea split. The wonder of wonders. Moses says to them, "It is time to sing." But they responded, "Sing? How can we sing? Eighty percent of our people are missing!"

Hence, the Torah says, "Moses and the children of Israel will sing," in the future tense. Moses explained to his people, that the story was far from over. The Jews in Egypt have died, but their souls are alive. We can sing now, said Moses, not because there is no pain, but because despite the pain, we do not believe we have seen the end of the story. We can celebrate the future.

Jewish history alone is unique. It is a story of the past based on the future. For the Jewish people, the future defines and gives meaning to the past.

His disciples did sing.