

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT BESHALLACH

DVAR TORAH: HOLDING ON TO JOY

The introduction of the Shirat Hayam, Moshe and Israel's Song at the Sea, seems inappropriately worded. It begins "Then Moshe and the Children of Israel sang this song to God," and ends with the very common word לאמר. לאמר, the infinitive of the root אמר, is usually translated as "to say." The most common use of this word in the Chumash is in "וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר," God spoke to Moshe, instructing him "to say" the words to the Children of Israel. But that use seems out of place here. Moshe and the people of Israel together sing this song to God; so who needs to be spoken to?

The Kedushat Levi answers this question through answering another question. The People of Israel were happy over the salvation at the Red Sea. Happiness is essentially an inner emotional experience, in the heart. Why was there a need for Israel to sing at all? Why wasn't feeling the inner joy sufficient?

His answer is based on an emotional reality. Inner happiness can be fleeting and fizzle out. Moshe and the people of Israel wanted to hold on to their joy and celebrate with God for an extended period of time, on and on. Speech, the process of verbalization, especially through singing, enabled them to expand and cultivate their joy. And they sang so they could lengthen their joy, and prolong their joyous love of God after the miracle he did for them.

This is what לאמר means in our verse. Moshe and the People of Israel spoke in order that they should themselves be able to keep on joyfully singing. They continued to sing so their joy would continue and they could keep on experiencing love of God through joy.

There are two ways that the Kedushat Levi's teaching can be helpful for us. One is to follow the model of Moshe and the people of Israel and to sing out to God in thanks when we experience wonderful things, whether on a national level or in our personal lives. Verbalizing, speaking out our thanks to God will fan the flames of our intense feelings of joy when great things happen to us.

There is another way to implement this lesson in holding on to joy. At the Sea we wanted to hold on to our joy. But we also need to hold on to joy. Joy is essential for avodat Hashem, for service of God. One is fortunate and praiseworthy if he or she has a constant inner self-motivated wellspring of joy; but most of us do not. We can, however, take advantage of positive experiences – of family simchas, of personal accomplishments, and the small and great miracles that accompany our everyday lives. We can amplify the affect they have on us by expressing ourselves about them to Hashem. We can ride the wave of the Kriat Yam Suf-like events in our lives to extend and eternalize that combination of joy and love of God the Kedushat Halevi describes.

Where do we find the words? We can, of course, latch on to the daily Az Yashir during Pesukei Dezimra, or David Hamelech's Tehillim, or the words of the Shemoneh Esrei or any other of the prayers. Our personal intentions about the events in our lives can be tied to their carefully inspired choice of words. However, we can also follow the lead of the composers of those prayers, expressing ourselves in our own words, perhaps even poetically, and perhaps even writing them down so we can later reread and relive that joyous moment.

SOURCE GUIDE:

There are many instances where the Torah wants us to look at two sides of a great concept simultaneously. The most classical example: זכור ושמור בדבור אחד נאמרו – To properly appreciate the complexity of Shabbat we heard at once both its “zachor” –remember and mention – and its “shamor” – keep and protect. This is recorded in the Chumash as the two separate parshiot of Shabbat in the Ten Commandments, one in Yitro and the other in Vaetchanan. Instead of presenting us with one complicated passage, ‘You should both remember and protect the Shabbat, which is both reminiscent of the Exodus and the Creation,’ the Torah gave us each of the two aspects of Shabbat individually and we process the complexity within our minds.

3-D Glasses

This is similar to the way 3-dimensional vision works. We see depth because our right and left eyes are a small distance apart, and the two different pictures, one from each eye, are simultaneously processed by our brains. 3-D photos and movies simulate this by using 3-D glasses. Pictures are taken from two cameras, placed slightly apart, and these are projected onto the screen or printed in the book. When one wears the 3-D glasses, with their two color filters, each eye sees one of the two pictures and the pictures are processed and we see depth.

Splitting of the Sea: Evening and Morning Blessings of the Shema

The Splitting of the Sea presents us with a similar phenomenon – two aspects of a concept that are each presented individually, leaving us to process the complete picture. Just as Shabbat’s two aspects were presented to us through two independently presented parshiot of the Aseret Hadibrot, two aspects of Israel at the Sea are presented through two independently worded prayers. The last blessings of both the evening and morning Kriat Shema close with a mention of Kriat Yam Suf, the Splitting of the Sea. There is, however, a pronounced difference between them with regards to how the people of Israel are referred to.

<p>1. Last Blessing of the Evening Shema He passes His sons through the cut blocks of the Reed Sea. He sunk their pursuers and those who hate them in the depths. His sons saw His might, and praised and thanked His Name. They willfully accepted His kingdom upon them. Moshe and the people of Israel responded to You in great joy, and all said, “Who is like You among gods; who is like You, in pristine holiness, awesome in praises, doing wonders.” Your children saw Your kingdom, the sea split before Moshe. This is my God, they declared, and said, Hashem will rule forever and ever.</p>	<p>ברכה אחרונה: קריאת שמע של ערבית הַמַּעֲבִיר בְּנָיו בֵּין גִּזְרֵי יָם סוּף. אֶת רוּדְפֵיהֶם וְאֶת שׁוֹנְאֵיהֶם בְּתַהוֹמוֹת טַבַּע. וְרָאוּ בְּנָיו גְּבוּרָתוֹ. שִׁבְחוּ וְהוֹדוּ לְשִׁמּוֹ: וּמַלְכוּתוֹ בְּרִצּוֹן קִבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם. מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָךְ עָנוּ שִׁירָה בְּשִׂמְחָה רַבָּה. וְאָמְרוּ כָּלֵם: מִי כַמְכָה בְּאֱלֹהִים ה'. מִי כַמְכָה נֹאדָר בְּקִדְשׁ. נוֹרָא תְהִלּוֹת עֲשֵׂה פֶלֶא: מַלְכוּתְךָ רָאוּ בְּנֵיךָ. בּוֹקֵעַ יָם לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה. זֶה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. וְאָמְרוּ: ה' יִמְלֹךְ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד:</p>
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Note that, as we speak to God about the great miracles at the Sea, we refer to Israel as “Your **children.**” In the morning Shema the Anshei Kneset Hagedolah (the authors of the blessing) used a different expression:

<p>2. Last Blessing of the Morning Shema You split the sea for them, sank the evildoers, and passed the friends (beloved ones) through [the Sea], covered their oppressors with the water. Not one of them was left. Therefore, the beloved ones praised and ascribed loftiness to God. The friends gave hymns, sons, and praises, blessings, and thanks to the King who is living and eternal ...</p>	<p>ברכה אחרונה: קריאת שמע של שחרית וַיִּם סוּף לָהֶם בְּקִעַת. וַיִּזְדִּים טַבַּעַת. וַיִּנְדְּדִים הַעֲבָרִת. וַיִּכְסּוּ מִיָּם צָרִיהֶם. אֶחָד מֵהֶם לֹא נוֹתַר: עַל זֹאת שִׁבְחוּ אֱהוּבִים וְרוֹמְמוֹ לְאֵל. וְנִתְּנוּ יְיָדֵים זְמִירוֹת שִׁירוֹת וְתִשְׁבָּחוֹת. בְּרִכּוֹת וְהוֹדָאוֹת. לְמִלְךָ אֵל חַי וְקַיִם ...</p>
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The people of Israel are here referred to as friends and beloved ones. These two pictures of Israel – children and friends – are split into two individual blessings and we are left to process them within. The depth of our relationship with God is then able to emerge in a way it would not have if the text of the prayer was merely, “You saved Your children and beloved friends by allowing them to pass through the Sea.” Children and friends are both close to us, but there are some radical differences between those two relationships.

Children

Children come from their parents. This is a physical reality. Children do not choose their parents and parents do not choose their children. Children remain the children of their parents no matter what. God relates to Israel as His children. This relationship is a reality that is independent of Israel’s location, spiritual level. We gave us lofty Jewish souls, each one a חלק אלוך ממעל, a portion of the Divine from Above. How far does this go? Does a Jew remain God’s child – do the Jews remain God’s children – even if they don’t act like it? This is a dispute between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir.

<p>3. Kiddushin 36a “You are sons of Hashem your God” (Devarim 14:1) – when you act like His sons you are called sons, but if you do not act like sons you are not called sons. These are the words of Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Meir says: No matter what (whether you act like sons or not), you are called sons. For it says, “They are foolish sons” (Yirmiyahu 4:22), and it says, “[They are] sons who are not trustworthy” (Devarim 32:20), and it says, “Bad offspring, destructive sons” (Yishayahu 1:4), and it says, “Instead of Him saying ‘You are not My nation,’ it will be said of you, ‘Sons of the living God’” (Hoshea 2:1).</p>	<p>קידושין לו. “בנים אתם לה’ אלקיכם” (דברים יד:א) – בזמן שאתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אתם קרוים בנים, אין אתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אין אתם קרוים בנים, דברי ר’ יהודה. רבי מאיר אומר: בין כך ובין כך אתם קרוים בנים שנאמר, “בְּנִים סְכָלִים הָיְתָה” (ירמיה ד:כב), ואומר, “בנים לא אמוץ בם” (דברים לב:כ), ואומר “זרע מרעים בנים משחיתים” (ישעיהו א:ד), ואומר “וְהָיְתָה בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר לָהֶם לֹא עַמִּי אַתֶּם יֵאָמֵר לָהֶם בְּנֵי אֵל הָי” (הושע ב:א):</p>
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The Rashba (Teshuvot Harashba 1:242) rules according to Rabbi Meir, based on the compelling evidence, the string of verses, Rabbi Meir presents. [The halachic responsum concerns the status of one embraced idolatry.] The people of Israel were at the 49th level of impurity in Egypt and God redeemed them, as a father bailing out His son. We were then naked (Yechezkel 16:7) and undeserving (see Shemot Rabbah 1:35), and the surprised angels looked down on us and the Egyptians and said: Both groups are idolaters; why is one saved and the other destroyed? The answer is that Israel was God’s first-born son.

Friends

But we are also God’s *yedidim*, His beloved friends (see Menachot 53a!). Friends are independent of each other, yet create a relationship. Friends choose to be friends; it is willed relationship. Friends are attracted to each other’s positive characteristics. The splitting of the Sea was the culmination of God’s relating to us as **children** through the Exodus – where God pulled out His children from the depths of Egypt. But the splitting of the Sea was also the beginning of God’s relating to us as **friends**, and that loving and friendly relationship would bring us to Mount Sinai, and bring His presence within us in the Mishkan and later on in the Beit Hamikdash. That explains the mention of the Mikdash in the middle of Shirat Hayam, the Song of the Sea:

<p>4. Shemot 15:17 You brought them and planted them in the mountain of your inheritance. You created a dwelling place, Hashem; with Your hands you established a sanctuary.</p>	<p>שמות טו:יז (יז) תבאמו ותטעמו בהר נחלתך מִכּוֹן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ פְּעֵלְתָּ דָוָד מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנֵי יְדִיד:</p>
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Through the two prayers, the nighttime and daytime Shema, we process each of the two distinct ways God relates to us – as children and friends. But common to both is that God’s loves us.

WE NEED TO DANCE BY RABBI GIDON SHOSHAN

In one of his short essays, the Rebbe of Piasezna describes the human need for excitement. Just as man needs sleep, food, physical activity, and companionship; excitement and stimulation are ingredients of healthy living and spiritual emotional needs. A person's need for stimulation is so great, that one would sooner hear heart-wrenching, sad, or tragic stories than just be bored. In a sense, man would rather feel sad than not feel at all. This explains the popularity of sad novels and horror movies.

Knowing that a person must be stimulated, the Piasezna suggests, that he who is wise will fill his need for excitement by engaging in spirited Torah study, prayer, and the celebration of Judaism. If one does not do so, one is liable to seek his or her excitement through far cheaper and even perhaps prohibited stimulating activities.

I once heard in the name of Rabbi Mordechai Machlis a fascinating insight into this week's parshah. After the splitting of the Sea, Moshe, along with all the men of Israel, sings the famous hymn of great praise to God. Immediately following its conclusion, the Torah records how Miriam and the women sang and danced in celebration of the miracle.

In just a few weeks, we will read of another celebration, one far more eerie and tragic. When Moshe descended from the mountain, he found that the men of the Jewish people were dancing at the feet of the Golden Calf. The women danced at the Sea, but not at the Golden Calf; not so the men.

Rabbi Machlis explained that the men danced at the Golden Calf because they didn't dance at the Sea. If one has the need to dance and does not satisfy it through holiness, he will still dance – but when, where, and how? Special holy days are approaching. This coming Shabbos is Shabbos Shirah, the Shabbos of Song, when we to read, recall, and celebrate the splitting of the Sea and its attendant festivities. And following soon after is the Fifteenth of Shvat, a day of celebrating the pinnacle of the rainy season, of thanking Hashem for the trees' fruit, and inspiring us to recall that just as trees rejuvenate, so does the Jewish people. Just as rainwaters irrigate the physical world, so do the waters of Torah invigorate the soul.

We have yet more opportunities to awaken ourselves to the festive celebration of Jewish life. If we do so, we live with great vitality. If not, we are left to seek celebration through Big Games, multimedia stimuli, or many other modes of excitement – exciting things no doubt, but devoid of the transcendental significance and reward of Torah.

Have a great Shabbos.

This issue is sponsored to mark the first *yahrzeit* of
Avraham ben Shmuel ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

To dedicate a Taste of Text, please email Rabbi Freedman at
rabbi.dr.moshefreedman@gmail.com

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