

Torah Sparks for B'SHALAH

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This week's Haftarah will be chanted by Ira Poretsky.

Summary of B'Shalah

This week we read about the great crossing of the Sea of Reeds (sometimes translated as the Red Sea). The Israelites flee from Egypt and encamp by the sea. G-d leads them, taking the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Pharaoh changes his mind and pursues the Israelites with 600 chariots. The Israelites find themselves trapped, with the army of Pharaoh on one side and the sea on the other.

Moses prays to G-d. G-d says, "Why do you cry to me? Speak to the people of Israel, that they go forward." There is a time for prayer and a time for action. Moses holds his hand over the sea and a great wind comes, splitting the sea and opening up the dry land. Moses and the Israelites cross in the dry land. The sea then comes crashing onto the pursuing Egyptians, drowning them.

The Israelites sing the beautiful Shirat HaYam, the Song of the Sea. Miriam takes the women and they sing their own song. The song joyously describes in poetic form the crossing of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptians, and the great power of G-d. A phrase from the song has entered our daily liturgy - "Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

After they have crossed the sea, the people complain about the lack of food; G-d answers by providing manna for the wilderness trek. The people are to collect the manna each day, taking a double portion on Friday, but they are not to collect any on the Sabbath. The people complain about the lack of water, so G-d tells Moses to strike a rock and bring forth water. Finally, Amalek attacks the weakest of the Israelites. Israel is victorious over Amalek, but that nation becomes the epitome of evil and the eternal enemy of Israel.

"Manna-Fest Destiny"

"And Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar, put one omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord, to be kept throughout the ages.'" (*Exodus 16:33*)

Commentaries, Old and New

"Throughout the ages' – When Jeremiah would admonish the people: 'Why are you not involved in the study of Torah?' they would respond: 'Shall we abandon our work and study the Torah?! From where will we support ourselves?' He would take out the jar of manna and say to them: 'See this thing of G-d! ...With this your forefathers were supported. G-d has many methods and agents through which to provide sustenance for those who revere Him.'

'Before the Lord' – Before the Ark." (*Rashi*)

"For safekeeping and for an educational purpose." (*Nahum Sarna, JPS Commentary*)

"The earthenware jar and the manna is symbolic of the relationship of the human being created from earth to the Torah. Every human being serves as a receptacle to spirituality. Just as the manna expanded to fill the entire jar, likewise the larger a receptacle of spirituality one makes himself through faith and spiritual refinement the more G-d will expand his capacity to receive spirituality." (*Rabbi Aaron Levine, Ha-Derash V'ha-Iyun*)

"Happiness is like manna; it is to be gathered in grains, and enjoyed every day. It will not keep; it cannot be accumulated; nor have we got to go out of ourselves or into remote places to gather it, since it has rained down from a Heaven, at our very door." (*Tryon Edwards, 19th century American theologian; great-greatgrandson of Jonathan Edwards, one of America's greatest theologians who died in 1758*)

What Do You Think?

What was the jar of manna's most important educational function? Was it a symbol of our own function as receptacles of G-d's will and presence? Was it a reminder of what makes for human happiness and contentment (a la Rev. Edwards)? Perhaps the jar of manna next to the Ark of the Covenant was a reminder of our covenantal duty to care and provide for the hungry, a sign that our worship is incomplete (or, perhaps, a hollow gesture) without social consciousness and empathy for the needy. Ner Tamid is not really engaged in social action programs anymore, probably because of the age and ability of our congregants to be very active. Are there other ways we can make the world a better place – *Tikkun Olam*? Why is the Reform Movement much more involved in social action programs than the Orthodox or even the Conservative?

Regarding Jeremiah's claim that the people should study Torah and G-d will provide our material needs. The early Zionists rejected this attitude completely. And was Jeremiah blind to the need for people in general to make a living? If not, what was he trying to accomplish? What about us when we retire – should we be expected to get more involved in Judaism and the synagogue? Why do you think more retirees in Ner Tamid don't participate in anything but the High Holy Days and *yahrzeits*? is morally complicated... especially in the context of the modern state of Israel. How are we to balance the demands of Torah study and spiritual pursuits on the one hand with the demands of the market and making a livelihood on the other? How do we balance faith and personal responsibility?

Rabbi Aaron Levine, a pious ultra-Orthodox Rabbi who died recently, uses Kabbalistic imagery to discuss the need to refine ourselves in preparation for spiritual growth. How might we best go about this process of refinement and preparation? Is the younger generation interested in this practice? Should we at Ner Tamid be more encouraging of spiritual pursuits? What holds us back from more spiritual progress?

Historic Note

Parashat Beshallah, read on February 4, 2012, describes the Israelite departure from Egyptian slavery. On February 4, 1794, the French National Assembly proclaimed the abolition of slavery. And on February 4, 1969, Yasser Arafat assumed leadership as chairman of the PLO, which proclaimed the desire to push the Jews into the Sea!

Halakhah L'Maaseh

Chapter 16 of Exodus describes the daily divine gift of manna to the Israelites, as well as the double portion (*lehem mishneh* – 16:22) on Friday, so that no gathering had to be done on the Sabbath. Most people claim that this is the origin of reciting Ha-Motzi over two uncut loaves at dinner on Friday night as well as at Shabbat lunch. (An unbroken piece of matzah also counts as a "loaf.") Many authorities recommend using *lehem mishneh* at all meals eaten on Shabbat. But the mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria used 12 loaves at each of his three Shabbat meals, to commemorate the showbread presented in the Temple each Shabbat, and Rabbi Levin believes this is the real origin of *Lehem Mishneh*, because they were laid out in two rows. (*Shaarei Teshuva* 174:1.)

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