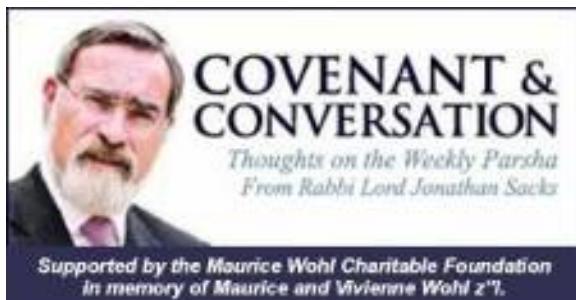


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On Leadership: Looking Up

The Israelites had crossed the Red Sea. The impossible had happened. The mightiest army in the ancient world - the Egyptians with their horse-drawn chariots - had been defeated and drowned. The people were now free. But the relief proved 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 from a situation in which the leader (with the help of God) does it for the people, to one in which the leader empowers the people to do it for themselves.

As this was happening, the Torah focuses our attention on one detail. As the battle began Moses

climbed 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 hand - with which he had performed 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. This gave them the confidence and courage to win.

A fundamental principle of leadership is being taught here. A leader must empower the team. He cannot do the work for them. They must do it for themselves. But he must, at the same time, give them the absolute confidence that they can do it and succeed. He is responsible for their mood and morale. During the battle he must betray no sign of weakness, doubt or fear. That is not always easy. Moses' hands "became weary." All leaders have their moments of exhaustion. At such times the leader needs support - even Moses needed the help of Aaron and Hur. 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 attunement - "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 his or her 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 basis of 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 if inwardly they are full of doubts and hesitations. If they betray their private fears in word or gesture, they risk demoralizing 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 dies, caught by his hair in a tree, and stabbed to death by Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

When he hears the news, David is heartbroken. His son may have rebelled against him, but he is still his son and he is devastated by his death, covering his face and 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 start regretting 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)

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 his or her private emotions if he is not to demoralize those he or she leads. 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 implements 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 Sautuola had been within a few feet of a monumental treasure, but he had missed it for one reason. He had forgotten to look up.

One of the ongoing themes of *Tanakh* is the need to look 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

Beshalach (Exodus 13:17-17:16) advanced compendium

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 his or her 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.

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



The Eleventh Plague

With¹ the ten plagues behind them, the Jews leave Egypt and head to Mount Sinai. In fact, Sinai had been on the itinerary from the outset of the Exodus story; a critical stop on the way to the Promised Land, Mount Sinai was one of the objectives of the Exodus.

I will come down (or, I am descending) to rescue them from the grip of Egypt and bring them up out of that land to a good, spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, the territory of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Yevusites.... 'Because I will be with you,' replied [God]. 'And this will be the sign that I have sent you: When you take the People out of Egypt you will all then serve God on this mountain.' (Shmot 3:8,12)

When God first spoke to Moshe and empowered him to act as His messenger, the events that would unfold at Sinai were foretold. But after Pharaoh relents, and before they reach Sinai, another major event occurs, an event whose nature is unclear. How are we to understand the splitting of the sea? Each step they take from the moment they are freed leads them both one step further from Egypt and one step closer to the Revelation at Sinai. How, then, should we view the events at the sea? Is this an introduction to the Sinai experience or the final chapter of leaving Egypt?

While the topic of this week's parsha is a direct continuation of the preceding chapter, there is nonetheless a shift. This ambiguity requires the modern reader to shed some rather ingrained preconceptions: At no time, in no way does the Torah state that there will be ten plagues. This is a man-made categorization. We are so accustomed to seeing ten plagues, that the splitting of the sea is automatically assigned a category of its own, *sui generis*, unique and separate. The events of Parshat Beshalach are assumed to be distinct from those of the preceding parsha, apart from the ten plagues that are organically connected to leaving Egypt. But why? Why is the splitting of the sea seen as a separate event and not as the eleventh plague?

It may be instructive to take a step back and view the larger framework: The events at Sinai are conceptually divided between two elements: the Revelation itself, and the content of that Revelation - the experience of seeing the heavens open and hearing the voice of God, on the one hand, and the concepts which were imparted through that experience, on the other. Similarly, at the splitting of the sea we may discern two distinct elements. The Egyptians experienced punishment on a scale previously unknown to them, while the Israelites experienced revelation:

My strength and song is God And this is my deliverance; This is my God, I will enshrine Him, My father's God and I will exalt Him. (Shmot 15:2)

Rashi explains:

'This is my God' - He was revealed to them in His glory, and they saw and pointed to Him with their own finger. A maid servant at the [splitting of the] sea saw what the prophets did not see.

The splitting of the sea was not just a devastating blow for the Egyptians, nor was it exclusively a moment of salvation for the Jews. The Jews, as a Nation, saw a vision of God, a manifestation of His might. This was a moment of confirmation, a "pre-Revelation revelation", as it were. The hand of God was clearly seen, as God appeared ready for battle as a "Man of war", and they pointed to Heaven in awe:

God is the Master of war, God is His name. (Shmot 15:3)

This week's parsha is therefore a conduit, a corridor of history, in which punishment is transformed into revelation. Cause and effect, God's active involvement in human history, the unique relationship between God and His Chosen People all become clear in this crystallizing moment, as the Jewish People inch closer to Sinai.

The parsha begins...

When Pharaoh let the people leave, God did not lead them via the Philistine land, although it was the shorter route. God's consideration was that if the people encountered armed resistance, they would lose heart and return to Egypt. God therefore made the people take a roundabout path, by way of the desert to the Red Sea. And the Israelites were armed when they left Egypt. Moshe took Yosef's remains with him, for Yosef had bound the Israelites by an oath: 'God will grant you special providence, and you must then bring my remains out of here with you.' (Shmot 13:17-19)

When the Jews start their journey, apparently they are not quite ready to go, for God takes them on a circuitous route, lest they see war and turn back to Egypt. Ironically, they leave armed; the Israelites thought they were ready for battle, but God knew better.²

Verse 19, though seemingly somewhat out of context, may in fact reflect upon the "armaments" with which the Jews were equipped: While the Children of Israel take up their primitive arms for protection, Moshe takes Yosef's remains, which, as we shall see, were more likely the catalyst for the splitting of the sea.

The next three verses seem to foreshadow the giving of the Torah:

[The Israelites] moved on from Sukkot, and they camped in Etam, at the edge of the desert. God went before them by day with a pillar of cloud, to guide them along the way, and by night with a pillar of fire, providing them with light so they could travel day and night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire at night never left [their position] in front of the people. (Shmot 13:20-22)

The connection between these verses and those surrounding the giving of the Torah is both symbolic and linguistic. First, the clouds hovering above remind us of the clouds that engulfed the mountain at the Revelation. Second, the word *yamush* (depart) used here is a word which is rarely used in Tanach, but more often than not is associated with Torah,³ as in describing Yehoshua's dedication to his master Moshe:

When Moshe went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the tent's entrance, and [God] would speak to Moshe. When the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tent's entrance, the people would rise, and each one would bow down at the entrance of his tent. God would speak to Moshe face to face, just as a person speaks to a close friend. [Moshe] would then return to the camp. But his aid, the young man, Joshua son of Nun, did not leave the tent. (Shmot 33:9-11)

This passage, in which we find both the symbol of the cloud and the expression of constant dedication, *yamush*, also includes elements that we see in the splitting of the sea, as well as elements we later find associated with the experience of Torah learning: Later in the parsha, after the revelation at the sea, after the song of joy and thanks Moshe and all the people sing to God, the Jewish People receive their first taste of Torah.

Moshe led the Israelites away from the Red Sea, and they went out into the Shur Desert. They traveled for three days in the desert without finding any water. Finally, they came to Marah, but they could not drink any water there. The water was bitter (marah), and that was why the place was called Marah. The people complained to Moshe. 'What shall we drink?' they demanded. [Moshe] cried out to God, and He instructed him [regarding] a certain tree. [Moshe] threw it into the water, and the water became drinkable. It was here that he was given law and statute, and here he was tested (uplifted). (Shmot 15:22-25)

Immediately following the splitting of the waters and the "Song of the Sea", a national event occurred, which reverberates in our collective experience to this very day. The People of Israel receive Torah, and share a collective learning experience. At this juncture, the Jews have traveled three days' distance from the site of their first revelation - the splitting of the sea - and they are thirsty. What they seek is more than physical sustenance. They beg for a continued revelation, an ongoing dialogue with God, and they are given certain Torah laws - *hok u'mishpat*. From that day forth, Jews do not allow an interval of three days to transpire between public readings of the Torah. This spiritual sustenance uplifted them, allowed them to face the trials and challenges that lay ahead.

This reading of the verse associates water with Torah. Yet the text remains somewhat impenetrable: The water they found was bitter, and became sweet after God's instructions were followed. The Zohar draws a parallel to the bitter waters used to test woman suspected of infidelity. According to the Zohar, the very foundations of Jewish life had been shaken by the servitude in Egypt. A cloud of suspicion hung

over the community, as husbands and wives suspected their spouses of sexual misconduct as a means of personal survival during the period of their slavery. The atmosphere of mistrust and guilt was paralyzing, embittering. At Marah, the bitter waters of the *sotah* ritual were administered to all of the people, and they emerged with a clean bill of spiritual health. What began as a ritual of blame and suspicion gave way to reconciliation, *rapprochement*, family and communal healing and unity. The water was sweetened, and the first precepts of Torah were received. Here, too, a spiritual corridor is created, moving the People from punishment to confirmation, from jealousy and distrust to a highly personal understanding of Torah law as the Word of God, from personal and communal estrangement to a unique perception of God's involvement in personal and national history.

This transformation had to take place on their way to Sinai, for in order to receive the Torah, unity is required. When they stand at Sinai, the Jewish People stand as one. The core of this unity is the Jewish family. Suspicion and jealousy are contrary to the atmosphere needed for the Torah to be brought down from heaven.⁴ The text points this out with a dramatic shift from the plural to the singular (which is imperceptible in translation):

They departed from Rephidim and arrived in the Sinai Desert, camping in the wilderness. And Israel (literally, he - singular form) camped opposite the mountain. (Shmot 19:2) And Israel camped there: As one man with one heart. But in their other places of encampment, there was argument and discord. (Rashi, Shmot 19:2)

Arriving at the foot of Mount Sinai, they have come a long way spiritually. They have experienced a revelation, they have received laws and statutes, and re-established the foundations of their personal and national relationships. All along this route, the terminology used to describe the processes they undergo is reminiscent of the Revelation at Sinai.

We should not overlook another telling use of the language of unity describing the pre-Sinai encampment: The Israelites were on their way out of Egypt, perhaps hoping and praying that they would never lay eyes on their abusive masters again. Then, it happens: Pharaoh is closing in on them, with what looks like all of Egypt in pursuit:

And Pharaoh drew near, and the Israelites looked up and saw Egypt riding after them, and they became very frightened and the Children of Israel screamed to God. (Shmot 14:10)

Once again, the translation of this verse does an injustice to the interplay of plural and singular: Pharaoh is closing in on them and Egypt, referred to in the singular, is in hot pursuit. The text might more properly have read "the legions of Egypt" or "the chariots of Egypt". Why refer to Egypt in the singular? Here, too, Rashi explains:

'Riding after them': With one heart as one man. (Rashi Shmot 14:10)

Rashi's allusion is unmistakable: The glorious unity experienced by the Jews as a prerequisite to receiving the Torah - "As one man with one heart" - is here, too, among the Egyptian pursuers - but in reverse, "With one heart as one man."⁵ The Egyptians are unified by their hearts' desires and unite to achieve that goal, while the Israelites are united as a People and are therefore willing to put aside their desires to maintain their unity. The encampment at the foot of Mount Sinai was unique, for here we became one.

An earlier encampment, between Egypt and the sea, also draws our attention:

God spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Speak to the Israelites and tell them to turn back and camp before Pi haHirot (Freedom Valley?), between Migdol (Tower?) and the sea, facing Ba'al Zefon (Lord-of-the-North?). Camp opposite it, near the sea. Pharaoh will then say to (i.e., regarding) the Israelites 'They are lost in the area and trapped in the desert.' (Shmot 14:1-3)

Here they are told to encamp at a place called "Pi haHirot," which is most literally translated as "the mouth of freedom". Rashi explains:

[Pi haHirot] is Pitom, and at this point it is called Pi haHirot because here the Israelites became free men. They are two tall upright rocks, and the canyon between them is called "the mouth of the rocks."

Rashi identifies the specific locale as Pitom, one of the areas built by the sweat of Jewish slaves and now known as 'the mouth of freedom', the place where the slaves became free. Passing through this place allowed the erstwhile slaves to achieve emotional or existential freedom, traveling as a free nation through a towering symbol of their servitude. Now, they would not build, would not obey a slave-master; now they could admire, reminisce, sigh - and move on.

The name given to this new-old landmark, *Pi haHirot*, is similar to the word used to describe the engraved writing on the Tablets given on Sinai, *harut*. When discussing the verses that describe the Tablets of Stone, the Talmud teaches that we should not read *harut* (engraved), rather *herut* (freedom), "for only one who is involved in Torah is truly free."⁶ The linguistic similarity in the case of the Tablets is clearly a Midrashic rendering of two words that sound similar despite their different root spellings (the root of the word for engraving is spelled with the letter 'tet', whereas the root for freedom is spelled with a 'taf'). In our present case, the similarity is more firmly grounded - *hirot* and *herut* are spelled with the same letters, and are thus more closely related. We have alternative definition of this word, no other more convincing reading of this place-name: Here, as they pass through, they become free.⁷

There are several elements of the description of this place that are disturbing. Rashi describes the *pi* ("mouth") as a formation of two tall upright rocks forming a canyon or natural outlet, a mouth. While this seems innocuous enough, Rashi's comments on the verse do not end there. The next few words of the verse, "before *Baal Tzafon*" leave the reader with a more troubling image:

Before *Baal Tzafon*: For he was the last remaining god of Egypt, so as to mislead the Egyptians so that they should say their deity is durable. Regarding this (continued existence of *Baal Tzafon*), Job explained, "He leads nations astray and He destroys them." (Rashi Shmot 14:2)

Pi haHirot is before *Baal Tzafon* - the last of Egypt's various gods left standing. The Mechilta⁸ examines the geological formation of this area in terms of the Egyptian pantheon: These rocks had a very specific connotation, appearing as male and female. The shrine to Egypt's holdout deity is a fertility symbol. And it is there that the Israelites find freedom.

It is no accident that the enslavement of the Jews took place in Egypt. Egypt was more than just a superpower in that era; it was the epicenter of

immorality. Sinking to the "49th level of impurity" is not surprising in a place like Egypt. Time and again, the Torah enjoins us not to follow the practices of Egypt.⁹ Egypt was a place of sexual depravity, as far back as our ancestors' experience reaches: In our first visit to Egypt, Sarah is wrested from Avraham. In the next visit, the wife of Potiphar throws herself at Yosef; Talmudic tradition teaches that Potiphar himself had designs on Yosef¹⁰ (which may explain why Potiphar's wife was lonely and forlorn).

This was the crucible into which the Children of Israel were thrown. If the Jews are to make a difference in the world, they must make an impact in a society like Egypt. Alternatively, so long as Egypt prospers, the impact of Jews will be limited.

The Torah framework for the rejection of immorality is quite telling:

Do not follow the ways of Egypt
where you once lived, nor of
Canaan, where I am bringing you.
Do not follow [any] of their
customs. (Vayikra 18:3)

The ways and mores of Egypt and Canaan are to be rejected. This should come as no surprise, for these nations share a common denominator, in quite a literal sense. Egypt and Canaan are descendants of brothers, sons of Cham, another individual whose morals were corrupt.

The Sages offer details as to the specific types of behaviors included in the prohibition to reject Egyptian and Canaanite ways. The Sifra lists the corrupt behaviors common in Egypt: men would marry men, women would marry women, a man would marry a woman and her daughter, a woman would marry two men.¹¹ Significantly, all the examples are in the realm of sexuality. In fact, the verse which commands us not to follow the ways of Egypt is the introductory statement to the Torah chapter dealing with forbidden relationships. The Midrash traces the roots of sexually deviant behavior back to the generation of the flood; eventually, the flood formed a huge mikvah¹² to purge and cleanse the world of these sins.¹³

Egypt is corrupt. One manifestation of this corruption is the slave economy, the empire built on feet of clay. The despotism of Pharaoh, the evil and inhumane treatment of the slaves and the genocidal decrees imposed upon a subservient population are economic expressions of deep-rooted corruption. Leaving Egypt means uprooting this immoral socio-economic

construct. But there is another element to leaving Egypt: the Jews were extricated from a society built around sexual depravity.

Freedom came in stages: walking out of Egypt, walking through the sea, drinking the sweetened waters, standing at Sinai. Each of these steps freed them from another aspect of their servitude in Egypt, and each brought them one step closer to complete liberation.¹⁴ Passing through *Pi haHirot*, facing the Egyptian god with its image of male and female, was another step toward freedom - freedom from the corrupt sexual mores of Egypt.

This observation brings us full circle, back to the beginning of the parsha. When they left Egypt, the Jews were "armed"; they thought they were ready for battle. In fact, they did not know what battle they would be fighting. They may not have been fully aware of the extent to which Egyptian morality had made inroads; they were unaware of the different facets of slavery from which they would have to be freed. God took them on a circuitous route, one that would walk them through various stages toward true liberation - knowing that they were not prepared for the battles they would face.

God continued to protect them until the penultimate scene of the parsha. Here, they once again find themselves without water, and experience a spiritual crisis of a different sort. They begin to question whether God is in their midst or not. On this backdrop, Amalek arrives on the scene.

And all the congregation of the People of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, in their journeys according to the commandment of God, and camped in Rephidim; and there was no water for the people to drink. And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moshe, and said, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?' ... And he called the name of the place Massah u'Merivah, because of the quarrel of the People of Israel, and because they tested God, saying, 'Is God among us, or not?' Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. (Shmot 17:1-8)

In Moshe's retrospective of this episode, in Devarim, we are offered further insight into the mindset of the

people. The feeling that God might not be with them, which precipitates the attack, is projected onto Amalek:

Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came out of Egypt; 18. How he happened upon you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and did not fear God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around, in the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance to possess, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget. (Devarim 25:7,19)

Rashi offers three explanations of the word used to describe what exactly Amalek did: *korcha* is a singular word, appearing nowhere else in *Tanakh*, a verb which Rashi posits may be derived from three different roots. One is from the word *kar*, meaning cold: the Amalekites "cooled" the Jews off. After leaving Egypt and witnessing miracles, receiving their first dose of revelation, embarking on the path of Torah observance, the Jews were "red hot" with enthusiasm and zeal. The Amalekites cooled off their enthusiasm.

The second interpretation of *korcha* is related to happenstance, from the word *mikreh*: Amalek "happened" upon them. The Jews began to see the world as happenstance; they experienced a moment of doubt regarding God's continued involvement in history. They felt God was not an active part of their day-to-day lives at this point; the world was one of *mikreh* - chance or coincidence.

The third interpretation is from the word *keri*, which means a seminal emission. This is based on a Midrash which teaches that Amalek's attack included deviant sexual practice, which culminated in mutilation of the male organ. Although grotesque, this view articulates a more profound idea: The timing of Amalek's attack was not random. The Jews stood at the cusp of Sinai. A new age of morality was about to descend on the world. Amalek, the descendent of Esav, rejected limits, rejected rules, rejected the very idea of self-restraint upon which morality is built. Circumcision, the ultimate symbol

of self-control, was abhorrent to Amalek, and it was this symbol they attacked.

When the Israelites left Egypt, they armed themselves with primitive weapons, under the illusion that they were ready to fight. Moshe took something else, something that would provide victory in this type of war; something that represented morality and self-control. He took the remains of Yosef.

The Yalkut Shimoni teaches that the sea was split due to the merit of Yosef: When he ran out of the house of Potiphar, escaping the advances of his master's wife, the term used is *vayanas*: he fled. This is precisely the phrase used to describe the splitting of the sea.¹⁵

She grabbed him by his cloak. 'Lie with me!' she pleaded. Leaving his cloak in her hand, he fled and ran outside. (Bereishit 39:12) The sea saw it, and fled; the Jordan was driven back. (Psalms 114:3)

Just as Yosef fled the grasp of Mrs. Potiphar, the sea fled at the sight of Yosef's remains, receding and exposing a dry path for the Jews. This is not some sort of magical response to the remains of Yosef. The impact Yosef's spiritual identity still had on the community is what turned the tide - literally and figuratively. Yosef left an invaluable spiritual legacy behind: He displayed tremendous spiritual fortitude in the various unenviable situations in which he found himself after being sold into slavery. In fact, it was the sale of Yosef that brought the entire family to Egypt. Yosef's life, then, was both a model of moral integrity and a challenge, a constant reminder of the dangers of divisiveness and disunity. Redemption from Egypt must necessarily address both of these elements: Salvation stems from recognition and internalization of Yosef's moral heroism. At the same time, the sale of Yosef by his brothers must somehow be reversed. Unity must be achieved, healing the division in the community most acutely expressed by the sale of a brother.

Going into Egypt, the Jews were a family divided. The harsh image of the brothers breaking bread as Yosef screamed from the pit is one of the most tragic scenes in the Torah. The Passover seder, when we sit and break bread as a family and tell the story of the slavery and the Exodus, must be part of a *Tikkun*, rectification of the division within the community. At *Pi haHirot*, Egypt was united, with one heart: they were united in passion, for this was a place that

represented the passion of idolatry wrapped up with sexual licentiousness. The Jews will need to pass through this place in order to become free: They will need to be tested, just as Yosef was tested and as Yosef's brothers were tested.

In fact, they are successful in both aspects of the test. They pass through *Pi haHirot* and arrive at the sea, and nature is upended: The sea yields in the presence of Yosef, who withstood his own human nature in his extraordinary escape from temptation. Significantly, it is Moshe who carries Yosef out, invoking this great moral role-model. Moshe is from the tribe of Levi, who along with Shimon were Yosef's greatest adversaries. This is an important step toward healing the rift, reuniting the family of Israel, and becoming whole.

Leaving Egypt was not easy. It required physical, emotional and religious transformation. The path through *Pi haHirot* may at first glance have seemed a counter-intuitive choice: it might have empowered the Egyptians, for it was the focal point of their depravity. But this is precisely why this route was the most appropriate corridor, leading to our collective transformation: Here, the Jews saw the work of their own hands at Pitom, and as they crossed near the symbol of Egyptian depravity, in fact it was the Jews who were empowered. They became impervious to this idolatry. This was the path from Egypt to Sinai. It was paved with liberation, revelation, and transformation.

From *Pi haHirot* the Jews crossed through the waters of *Yam Suf*, immersing in what would normally have been a *mikva*. But because of the route they had travelled to arrive there, the Jews had already achieved holiness and did not need the waters to purify them. Significantly, the events at the sea take place on the seventh day after they left Egypt, the day husband and wife are reunited after she immerses in the *mikva*. The Zohar¹⁶ takes this idea even further, describing the seven week period between Pesach and Shavuot, between Exodus and Revelation, as a time of purification and preparation, linking the counting of the *omer* to the counting of a woman's seven clean days before immersion and reuniting with her husband.

At Sinai, each family, each husband and wife, and consequently the community as a whole, stood, once again, "as one person with one heart". They had corrected the interpersonal rift at Marah, and the tribal rift at the splitting of the sea. And at the foot of Mount Sinai, at that very moment of unity, Moshe relays a strange law: Husbands and wives are to

separate in preparation for the Revelation. For Sinai will symbolize a new marriage, both between man and God, and between each couple. They will begin again, begin anew, in a union based on holiness. Through this act of separation, through this act of self-restraint, they all become holy - they all become like Yosef. They are all ready to receive the Torah, one unified nation, conceived in holiness - and completely free.

1. A version of this essay with Hebrew sources and footnotes can be found at <http://arikahn.blogspot.com/>, or <http://rabbiarikahhn.com/> .
2. Rashi offers two interpretations for *chamushim*: first, that they were armed, and second, that only one of five Israelites (one fifth of the total Jewish population) left Egypt.
3. See Yehoshua 1:8.
4. It is interesting that when the Jews sin with the Golden Calf, they are made to drink the ground up pieces, which is also reminiscent of the bitter water ordeal. See Shmot 32:20.
5. See the Shem M'shmuel who notices the term and explains that the Egyptians were given this unity for a holy purpose, namely to induce the Israelites to repent and come closer to God.
6. See Talmud Bavli Eruvin 54a and Pirkei Avot 6:2.
7. Certain mystical sources see the passage through the sea as a national rebirth experience, as they travel, physically and symbolically into a new stage of existence through a wondrous passageway between the waters.
8. Midrashic sources describe the geographic formation of these rocks. See Mechilta Beshalach 5:1 for a description which evokes the image of the *keruvim*.
9. Vayikra 18:3. See below.
10. See Talmud Bavli Sotah 13b.
11. Sifra Acharei Mot section 8.
12. See Midrash Rabba Vayikra 23:9: R. Ishmael taught: AFTER THE DOINGS OF THE LAND OF EGYPT... AND AFTER THE DOINGS OF THE LAND OF CANAAN... SHALL YE NOT DO, etc. (Vayikra 18:8), otherwise, I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD (ib. 4). R. Hiyya taught: Why is I AM THE LORD written twice? It implies: I am He who inflicted punishment upon the Generation of the Flood, upon Sodom, and upon Egypt, and I am the same who will inflict punishment upon any one who will act in accordance with their practices. The Generation of the Flood were blotted out from the world because they were steeped in whoredom. R. Samlai observed: In every instance where you find the prevalence of whoredom, an androlepsia comes upon the world and slays both good and bad. R. Hunu says in the name of R. Jose: The Generation of the Flood were only blotted out of the world on account of their having written hymenean songs for sodomy. R. 'Azariah in the name of R. Judah son of R. Simeon and R. Joshua b. Levi in the name of Bar Kappara say: We find that the Holy One, blessed be He, is long-suffering towards every offence except whoredom, and there are numerous texts to bear this out; as it says, And came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth... that the sons of God saw the daughters of men... and they took them wives... And the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great... And the Lord said: I will blot out man (Gen. 6:1 ff). What of the Sodomites? R. Joshua son of Levi in the name of Bar Kappara said: During the whole of the night in question Lot was busy pleading on their behalf, but when they came and said to him: Where are the men... bring them out unto us, that we may know them (ib. 19:5) - 'know them,' that is to say, carnally - then forthwith The men said unto Lot: Hast thou here (*poh*) any besides? (ib. 12). By '*poh*' they as much as said: Until this moment you had a pretext (*pithpon peh*) for pleading in their favour, but now Son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters ... bring them out

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of the place; for we will destroy this place (ib. 13 f). 'I am the Lord' implies: I am He who inflicted punishment upon Samson, Amnon, and Zimri, and who will in the inflict punishment upon any one who will act in accordance with their practices. I am He who requited Joseph, Jael, and Palti the son of Laish, and I will in the future pay reward to any one who acts in accordance with their deeds.

13. The third place which was included to form an unholy trinity with the generation of the flood and Egypt, was Sodom was cleansed with lava and fire, not water. Generally there are connections, thematic and linguistic, between Sodom and Egypt.

14. Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Izbica in his *Mei Shiloach* Parshat Beshalach, suggests that the male/female image of *Pi haHirot* was an expression of the pagan perspective of freedom as a lack of law or structure. To the pagan mind, *Pi haHirot* was a place of freedom because there laws applied, sexually was not limited or regulated.

15. See Shem Mishmuel Bshalach 5675: Faith (*emunah*) is what causes the sea to be split, creating a parallel with the hands of Moshe, which are called *emunah*, in the defeat of Amalek.

16. Zohar Vayikra 97b: Just as a woman then has to count seven days, so now God bade the Israelites count days for purity. They were to count for themselves, so as to be purified with supernal holy waters, and then to be attached to the King and to receive the Torah. The woman had to count seven days, the people seven weeks. Why seven weeks? That they might be worthy to be cleansed by the waters of that stream which is called living waters, and from which issue seven Sabbaths. When Israel drew near to Mount Sinai, that dew that descends from the supernal Point came down in its fullness and purified them so that their filth left them and they became attached to the Holy King and the Community of Israel and received the Torah, as we have explained.



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

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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."



Holy Measures

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week's Torah reading tells of the Exodus from Egypt. In his monumental work, *Netivot Shalom*, the Slonimer Rebbe writes that the Jewish people merited to leave Egypt only because they cultivated within themselves a concept of *kedusha* (holiness).

This is based on the verse: "And Moses took the bones of Yosef" (Exodus 13:19). However the word for "bones" - "atzamot" - is very close to another Hebrew word, "atzmuto," which means "his essence." Moses, the leader of the Jewish people, did not only take the bones of Yosef; he also took with him the *essence* of Yosef.

What is the essence of Yosef? Yosef is identified with *yesod* (foundation), which is one of the *Ten Sefirot* (channels) through which God causes His

influence to permeate this world. Each of the *sefirot* correlates with a part of the body, for example the head, the heart, etc. The *sefira* of *yesod* is identified with the reproductive organs.

This is the essence of Yosef HaTzaddik, Yosef the righteous one, who withheld himself from engaging in immorality with the wife of Potiphar and anyone else.

So Moses took with him not just the bones of Yosef, but also the essence of what Yosef represents - which is *kedusha*, separateness from immorality. Only in the merit of *kedusha* are the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt.

The commandment to be holy is repeated more often throughout the Torah than any other mitzvah. For example, we find in next week's parsha (Yitro): "And you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6). And in the portion after that (Mishpatim): "You shall be holy people unto me" (Exodus 22:30). And we find in parshat Kedoshim: "You shall be holy" (Leviticus 19:2). Later it says: "Sanctify yourselves and be holy for I am the Lord your God. And you shall keep my laws and do them. I am the Lord who sanctifies you" (Leviticus 20:7-8).

The Zohar (3:190b) points out that the word *kedusha* is mentioned three times in this latter excerpt. The Slonimer Rebbe says that this teaches us that we have to sanctify all three parts of the human being – mind, heart and limbs. Through this will come a rectification of the *ten sefirot*, which are grouped into three categories. The first group - *chochmah* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding) and *da'at* (knowledge) - corresponds to the mind. The next three - *chesed* (kindness), *gevura* (strength) and *tiferet* (beauty) - correlate with the heart. The final four - *netzach* (eternity), *hod* (glory), *yesod* (foundation) and *malchut* (sovereignty) - correlate with the limbs.

This sheds light on the verse in Isaiah 6:3: "*Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*" - "Holy, holy, holy." We have to sanctify all three parts of the human being: mind, heart and limbs.

The verse continues "The Lord of Hosts, the whole world is filled with His glory." What is the significance of the word "*melo*" (filled)? It means that we have to fulfill the acronym of the word *melo*. The *mem* is for the *moach* (mind), the *lamed* is for *lev* (heart) and the *aleph* is for *eivarim* (limbs). That is why holiness is mentioned three times in parshat Kedoshim and Isaiah.

FULL SANCTITY

Another significance of the triple repetition is that they represent the three dimensions in which human beings operate: place, time and self. We have to sanctify every place - our homes, our workplaces, etc. We have to sanctify every moment so that it will be productive and constructive. And finally, we ourselves need to be holy.

Obviously, being holy is a very central part of being Jewish. So, the Slonimer Rebbe asks, why isn't it counted as one of the 613 commandments of the Torah? He answers that holiness is not a specific or technical issue that can be addressed by Jewish Law. Rather, it is what being Jewish is all about. If a person is not holy, he is not just lacking in one particular area, his Judaism is deficient as a whole. Holiness is the true measure of a Jew and any lack in this area is a blemish on one's entire being.

The Slonimer Rebbe maintains that just as there is no commandment to "be Jewish," so too "being holy" is so much of the essence, that it cannot be an individual commandment.

As the Torah says: "You are a holy nation unto God your God and God has chosen you" (Deut. 14:2). It is only when we choose to live the lives of a holy people that we merit being the chosen people. Instead of being numbered among the 613 specific commandments, holiness is a "global mitzvah."

According to the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov on this week's parsha, one of the ways we can achieve holiness is by keeping our minds occupied with holy things. Our hearts and limbs generally follow our minds, so we are basically defined by what we think about. When our minds are preoccupied with holy thoughts, then we become holy people. However, if our minds are occupied with unholy thoughts, then our minds and bodies will inevitably follow.

May we all think holy, and be holy, and live up to the innate holiness that lies inside us. Just as our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt in the merit of their holiness, so we too should be redeemed from our current exile in the merit of our own efforts to be holy.