

of the Canaanite, as He swore to you and to your fathers, and gives it to you, you shall devote to the LORD the first offspring of every womb, and the first offspring of every beast that you own; the males belong to the LORD. But every first offspring of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, but if you do not redeem *it*, then you shall break its neck; **and every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem.** And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. **Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.**’ So it shall serve as a sign on your hand and as phylacteries on your forehead, for with a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt” (Exodus 13:4-16).

In closing, this powerful Torah portion has much to be gleaned by those seeking to please the Lord in their personal walks of faith. The spiritual principles implied by these many physical acts are to be understood on so many different levels, so that God’s people can truly fulfill their mission to the world at large.

May the Holy One endow each and every one of us to not only study in order to be approved—but by faith *and* with a stirred heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:25-27)—work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12), knowing that He loves us and desires that no one should perish!

B’shalach After he had let go “Freedom Faith Tests”

Exodus 13:17-17:16
Judges 4:4-5:31 (A); 5:1-31 (S)

Some of the details, about the miraculous deliverance of Ancient Israel from Egyptian servitude, are recorded in this week’s Torah portion, *B’shalach*. It includes particular attention to the ongoing struggles that the liberated nation will have to endure, as the Lord desired His chosen people to replace the burdens of slavery to other people, with a wholehearted dependence upon Him. However, as recorded in this *parashah*, what God wanted for Israel regarding its principal mission—to be a light, illuminating the existence and blessings available to all from the One True Creator God to humankind at large (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6)—would not come without considerable reorientation of priorities. After all, the propensity of the carnal

nature, primarily focused upon self interests and self-preservation, is now released from the oppression of physical bondage to make choices about not only what to do and think, but also who or what to worship and serve. With the goal of the Holy One to possess a holy nation of priests, which will faithfully follow His ways (Exodus 19:5-6), a testing of faith commences, as perceived freedom unleashes the free will of human beings to make choices.

In our Torah reading, the incredible contrast between faithfully following the presence of God in the pillar of fire and cloud—after a phenomenal deliverance with the inclination to simply survive—actually begins with a mention of Joseph’s deathbed desire (Genesis 50:24-25), to have his remains taken back to Canaan rather than be interred in Egypt. Such was the example established and fostered by Joseph, that for the forty-year sojourn of Ancient Israel in the wilderness, the bones of Joseph were finally laid to rest in the plot of land purchased by Jacob in Shechem, shortly after the Israelites ultimately came into the Promised Land (Joshua 24:32). While much can be said about the faith of Joseph, who was used by God to preserve the nascent nation, the fact that he only had vivid dreams early in his life to primarily draw upon for faith—versus the visible appearance of God’s presence in a pillar of fire and cloud for the liberated Israelites to witness—is a stark reminder that God alone will dispense, to different individuals, a certain measure of faith (Romans 12:3). As *B’shalach* records,

“Now when Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, ‘The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt.’ Hence God led the people around by the way of the wilderness to the Red Sea; and the sons of Israel went up in martial array from the land of Egypt. **Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, ‘God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.’** Then they set out from Succoth and camped in Etham on the edge of the wilderness. **The LORD was going before them in a pillar of cloud by day to lead them on the way, and in a pillar of fire by night to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. He did not take away the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people**” (Exodus 13:17-22).

From the onset of our reading, everyone of us should consider the critical admonitions found in the opening statements of the Epistle of James, as the half-brother of the Lord described the unique relationship between joy, trials, wisdom, and faith:

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. **But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But**

he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:2-8).

It should be noted that after the initial encampment at Succoth (Exodus 12:7), Moses then followed the cloud and relocated the people to the wilderness at Etham (Exodus 13:20), before being told to reestablish camp at Baal-zephon, where they were hemmed in by the sea. It was here, between Migdol and the sea, that the Lord was going to execute a dramatic judgment on the furious Egyptians—who now were up in arms, in hot pursuit, with horses and chariots bearing down on the relatively defenseless Israelites. With their escape restricted by the seemingly impenetrable sea, the frightened Israelites immediately and perhaps justifiably—because of the dire, life-threatening circumstances—began to complain to Moses. But the Lord had a plan to show His power and majesty, not only to the mortified Israelites, but to all who would eventually learn about His defeat of the mighty Egyptian Pharaoh:

“Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Tell the sons of Israel to turn back and camp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea; you shall camp in front of Baal-zephon, opposite it, by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel, ‘They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has shut them in.’ Thus I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD.’ And they did so. When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, ‘What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?’ So he made his chariot ready and took his people with him; and he took six hundred select chariots, and all the *other* chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he chased after the sons of Israel as the sons of Israel were going out boldly. Then the Egyptians chased after them *with* all the horses *and* chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon. As Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD. **Then they said to Moses, ‘Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.’ But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen**

today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent.’ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the sons of Israel to go forward. As for you, lift up your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the sons of Israel shall go through the midst of the sea on dry land. As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen’” (Exodus 14:1-18).

This incredible miracle of deliverance, ably dramatized with some cinematic license in the 1956 classic film, *The Ten Commandments*, is now described in gruesome detail. So for those who have perhaps been conditioned by such a portrayal of the events, upon reading the following account, one can only imagine how this might affect the minds and hearts of those who witnessed and participated in the Exodus in person:

“The angel of God, who had been going before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel; and there was the cloud along with the darkness, yet it gave light at night. Thus the one did not come near the other all night. **Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided.** The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Then the Egyptians took up the pursuit, and all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots and his horsemen went in after them into the midst of the sea. **At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty;** so the Egyptians said, ‘Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians.’ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.’ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal state at daybreak, while the Egyptians were fleeing right into it; then the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, even Pharaoh's entire army that had gone into the sea after them; not even one of them remained. But the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea, and the waters *were like* a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. **Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had**

used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses” (Exodus 14:19-31).

One would think that this extraordinary miracle would be received with the awe and fear of the Lord, and a great respect for Moses, as recorded. This resulted in Moses’ effusive song of praise and worship—which gave all glory to the Lord for His actions of salvation—and should be read for not only its wonderful description of the events, but how it will be, in the future, sung by the saints as a reminder of the power and glory of the Majesty on High (Revelation 15:3). So many other encouraging songs are derived from these words, but note that as a result of this disaster for the Egyptian army, the other powers of the region were to be terrified:

“Then Moses and the sons of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and said, **‘I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise Him; My father’s God, and I will extol Him. The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is His name.** Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; and the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deeps cover them; they went down into the depths like a stone. Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. And in the greatness of Your excellence You overthrow those who rise up against You; You send forth Your burning anger, *and* it consumes them as chaff. At the blast of Your nostrils the waters were piled up, the flowing waters stood up like a heap; the deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.” You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. **Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them.** In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; in Your strength You have guided *them* to Your holy habitation. The peoples have heard, they tremble; anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. **Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; the leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; all the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away. Terror and dread fall upon them; by the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; until Your people pass over, O LORD, until the people pass over whom You have purchased.** You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established. The LORD shall reign forever and ever.’ For the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his horsemen went into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea on them, but the sons of Israel walked on dry land through the midst of the sea. Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the

women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. Miriam answered them, **‘Sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; the horse and his rider He has hurled into the sea’**” (Exodus 15:1-21).

Nevertheless, despite the horse and the riders consumed by the waves of the sea, the march toward Canaan continued in the wilderness of Shur, with an immediate need for water for the people and their livestock. This caused a physical crisis that elicited some more grumbling from the Israelites—because the basic need for survival was being tested—and the natural inclination, regardless of the recent events—took precedence in the hearts of the delivered people:

“Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’ Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw *it* into the waters, and the waters became sweet. **There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them. And He said, ‘If you will give earnest heed to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in His sight, and give ear to His commandments, and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have put on the Egyptians; for I, the LORD, am your healer.’** Then they came to Elim where there *were* twelve springs of water and seventy date palms, and they camped there beside the waters” (Exodus 15:22-27).

After the water came forth to alleviate the need for hydrated sustenance, Moses noted the testing, by stating the demand upon the Israelites to heed the voice of the Lord, to do what was right in His sight, give ear to His commandments, and keep His statutes.

Needless to say, with the provision of water at Elim, the congregation of Israel continued to complain, because the memories of Egypt and the relatively available foodstuffs that they were accustomed to, were no longer at hand. Complaints became rampant, but once again the Lord was testing Israel with hunger pains, in order to execute another miracle that came in the form of manna from Heaven and an abundant supply of quail in the evening. But the test was not necessarily consuming the manna and quail, but instead, perhaps, in the confidence that was required to follow the direction of the Lord to gather manna for only six days, taking a Sabbath rest on the seventh day—a pattern that would require belief and adherence to His commands:

“Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. **The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.** The sons of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by

the LORD's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, **that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.** On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.' So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, 'At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumbings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?' **Moses said, 'This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumbings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumbings are not against us but against the LORD.'** Then Moses said to Aaron, 'Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, "Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumbings."' It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'I have heard the grumbings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'" **So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground.** When the sons of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, 'What is it?' For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, 'It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat. This is what the LORD has commanded, "Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.'" **The sons of Israel did so, and *some* gathered much and *some* little. When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat. Moses said to them, 'Let no man leave any of it until morning.' But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them"** (Exodus 16:1-20).

Suffice it to say, the Lord heard the grumbling complaints, and made provision. As the people gathered the manna on the appropriate mornings, it is noted that such daily bread was to be eaten each day, or it would become foul and inedible. In a sign that He was personally interested in the minute details of everyone receiving the proper amount—everyone, regardless of the amount they gathered—had just enough to be satisfied. But once again, we see that the main

focus was on God's people having faith to observe His Sabbath, rather than simply receiving provision:

"They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt. Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, then he said to them, 'This is what the LORD meant: **Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the LORD.** Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.' So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it" (Exodus 16:21-24).

The pattern, of taking a Sabbath rest, is an integral part of developing faith in the Holy One of Israel, and it was the primary reason that the Almighty used this basic example to compel the Ancient Israelites to trust in Him for His provision. As is noted in the following excerpt, despite some period of adjustment to the way the manna was to be gathered and consumed, it is notable that for the forty-year sojourn, the Lord provided manna to His people. For, perhaps just as Abraham had to be tested centuries earlier when the Lord provided a ram as a substitute for the sacrificial offering of Isaac (Genesis 22:4), the Israelites needed to learn that their God was the Provider in all things, including basic nutrition:

"Moses said, 'Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, *the sabbath*, there will be none.' It came about on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My instructions? See, the LORD has given you the sabbath; therefore He gives you bread for two days on the sixth day. Remain every man in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day. The **house of Israel named it manna, and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey.** Then Moses said, 'This is what the LORD has commanded, "Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'" Moses said to Aaron, 'Take a jar and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout your generations.' As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony, to be kept. **The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years**, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan. (Now an omer is a tenth of an ephah.)" (Exodus 16:25-36).

As *B'shalach* prepares to close, with Israel relocating to the wilderness of Sin and the encampment at Rephidim, the challenge of a lack of water, once again surfaced. Naturally, this generated resentment and quarreling with Moses, because, despite the previous provisions, and the witness of the pillar of fire and cloud, a

lack of faith continued. This time, the Lord instructed Moses to strike at the rock at Horeb, which resulted in a gushing forth of water, slaking the parched lips of the Israelites. But once again, the people were found to be establishing a pattern of grumbling, complaining, and even quarrelling to the point of threatening the life of Moses. The lack of faith in the presence and provision of the Holy One, was becoming quite troubling:

“Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the LORD, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water that we may drink.’ And Moses said to them, ‘Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?’ But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, ‘Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?’ So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, ‘What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me.’ Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.’ And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. **He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the LORD, saying, ‘Is the LORD among us, or not?’**” (Exodus 17:1-7).

Finally, with the incomprehensible question looming as to whether the Lord was among Israel, He allowed for yet another example of His love for His people as the dreaded Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:2-3) threatened to destroy them militarily. Given the precise instructions on how Moses was to station himself on the top of the hill, with his hands and staff extended to prevail over the warring Amalekites, his personal need to have assistance from Aaron and Hur was noted, as faithful Joshua led the counterattack:

“Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. So Moses said to Joshua, ‘Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. **Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.**’ Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. **Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’** Moses built an altar and named it **The LORD is My Banner**; and

he said, “The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:8-16).

It is here in these concluding remarks, that a key, identifying title for the Holy One is mentioned. *ADONAI nissi* reminded not only the Israelites then—but Messiah followers today—that He is indeed a powerful banner of victory over His own people. Furthermore is the reminder that the descendants of Esau, through Amalek’s line (Genesis 36:12), would be perpetually at war with the saints down through the generations, despite the command to eliminate them given in this memorial account.

As our Torah reading closes, there is a stark reminder that the Almighty has and will continue to use tests to challenge the faith and perseverance of those who have ostensibly been freed from the bondage of sin, but may still be struggling with the inclinations of the flesh. May each of us learn from what we have read, and by faith be able to overcome the trials and tests of life, in order to accomplish all of the good works that the Father has foreordained for each and everyone of His chosen children.

Yitro Jethro “Blind Faith”

Exodus 18:1-20:23[26]
Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:5-6[6-7] (A);
6:1-13 (S)

The trials and tribulations of Ancient Israel’s deliverance from Egypt continue in this week’s Torah reading, with particular emphasis on the Ten Commandments that are received while the people were encamped at Mount Sinai. After observing the many miracles performed by God to free them from the bondage of Egyptian slavery—including the ten plagues, the cloud and pillar of fire, the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army, making bitter water potable, provision of manna and quail, providing water from a rock, and defeating the Amalekites—the Israelites were definitely in awe of the power of their God. By experiencing and witnessing these visible, and in many respects, tangible acts of punishment, provision, and protection—Israel was prepared to do whatever the Lord declared, before even knowing what He was going to require. Accordingly, one might conclude that the people were finally at a point where they exhibited a “blind faith,” willing to follow the instruction of the Lord regardless of the outcome.