

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Beshalach

February 8, 2020 *** 13 Shevat, 5780

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

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Beshalach in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3262/jewish/Beshalach-in-a-Nutshell.htm

Soon after allowing the children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through, and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d. In the desert the people suffer thirst and hunger, and repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah, and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff. He causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the divinely decreed day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day, but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar, as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses' prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

Haftarah in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/626290/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah describes the fall of the Canaanite general Sisera and his armies, who were swept away by the Kishon River, and Deborah's ensuing song of thanks. This parallels this week's Torah portion which discusses the drowning of the Egyptian forces in the Red Sea and the subsequent songs led by Moses and Miriam.

Deborah the Prophetess was the leader and judge of the Israelites at a difficult time; the Israelites were being persecuted by King Jabin of Canaan and his general Sisera.

Deborah summoned Barak son of Abinoam and transmitted to him G-d's instruction: "Go and gather your men toward Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and Zebulun. And I shall draw to you, to the brook Kishon, Sisera, the chieftain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will give him into your hand." At Barak's request, Deborah accompanied him, and together they led the offensive.

Sisera was informed of the Israelites' mobilization and he gathered his forces and proceeded towards the Kishon River. Barak's army below and the heavens above waged battle against the Canaanites and utterly destroyed them. The river washed them all away; not one of the enemy survived.

The defeated general fled on foot and arrived at the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite. She invited him in and offered to hide him. When he fell asleep, Jael took a tent-peg and

knocked it through Sisera's temple.

The next chapter of the haftorah is the Song of Deborah, which describes the miraculous victory and thanks the One Above for His assistance.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Crossing the Sea (Beshalach 5780) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

<http://rabbisacks.org/beshalach-5780/>

Our parsha begins with an apparently simple proposition:

When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the land of the Philistines, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt prepared for battle. (Ex. 13:17-18)

God did not lead the people to the Promised Land by the coastal route, which would have been more direct^[1]. The reason given is that it was such an important highway, it constituted the main path from which Egypt might be attacked by forces from the north-west such as the Hittite army. The Egyptians established a series of forts along the way, which the Israelites would have found impregnable.

However, if we delve deeper, this decision raises a number of questions. *First:* we see that the alternative route they took was potentially even more traumatic. God led them around by the desert road towards the Red Sea. The result, as we soon discover, is that the Israelites, when they saw the Egyptian chariots pursuing them in the distance, had nowhere to go. They were terrified. They were not spared the fear of war. Hence the first question: why the Red Sea? On the face of it, it was the worst of all possible routes.

Secondly, if God did not want the Israelites to face war, and if He believed it would lead the people to want to return to Egypt, why did the Israelites leave chamushim, "armed" or "ready for battle"?

Third: if God did not want the Israelites to face war, why did He provoke Pharaoh into pursuing them? The text says so explicitly. "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for Myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." (Ex. 14:4). Three times in this one chapter we are told that God hardened Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 14:4, 8, 17).

The Torah explains this motivation of "I will gain glory for Myself." The defeat of the Egyptian army at the Sea would become an eternal reminder of God's power. "The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." Egypt may come to realise that there is a force more powerful than chariots, armies and military might. But the opening of our parsha suggested that God was primarily concerned with the Israelites' feelings – not with His glory or the Egyptians' belief. If God wanted the Israelites not to see war, as the opening verse states, why did He orchestrate that they witnessed this attack at the Sea?

Fourth: God did not want the Israelites to have reason to say, "Let us return to Egypt." However, at the Red Sea, they did tell Moses something very close to this:

"Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" (Ex. 14:11-12)

Fifth: God clearly wanted the Israelites to develop the self-confidence that would give them the strength to fight the battles they would have to fight in order to conquer the Holy Land. Why then did He bring about a state of affairs at the Sea where they had to do exactly the opposite, leaving everything to God:

Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still." (Ex. 14:13-14)

The miracle that followed has so engraved itself on Jewish minds that we recite the Song

at the Sea in our daily Morning Service. The division of the Sea was, in its way, the greatest of all the miracles. But it did not contribute to Jewish self-confidence and self-reliance. The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still. The Egyptians were defeated not by the Israelites but by God, and not by conventional warfare but by a miracle. How then did the encounter teach the Israelites courage?

Sixth: The parsha ends with another battle, against the Amalekites. But this time, there is no complaint on the part of the people, no fear, no trauma, no despair. Joshua leads the people in battle. Moses, supported by Aaron and Hur, stands on a hilltop, his arms upraised, and as the people look up to Heaven, they are inspired, strengthened, and they prevail.

Where then was the fear spoken of in the opening verse of the parsha? Faced by the Amalekites, in some ways more fearsome than the Egyptians, the Israelites did not say they wanted to return to Egypt. The sheer silence on the part of the people stands in the strongest possible contrast to their previous complaints about water and food. The Israelites turn out to be good warriors.

So why the sudden change between the opening of our parsha and its close? In the opening, God is protective and miracle-working. At the close, God is more concealed. He does not fight the battle against the Amalekites; He gives the Israelites the strength to do so themselves. In the opening, the Israelites, faced by the Egyptians, panic and say that they should never have left Egypt. By the close, faced by the Amalekites, they fight and win.

What had changed?

The answer, it seems to me, is that we have perhaps the first recorded instance of what later became a key military strategy. In one of the more famous examples, Julius Caesar ordered his army to cross the Rubicon in the course of his attempt to seize power. Such an act was strictly forbidden in Roman law. He and the army had to win, or they would be executed. Hence the phrase, "to cross the Rubicon."

In 1519, Cortes (the Spanish commander engaged in the conquest of Mexico) burned the ships that had carried his men. His soldiers now had no possibility of escape. They had to win or die. Hence the phrase, "burning your boats."

What these tactics have in common is the idea that sometimes you have to arrange that there is no way back, no line of retreat, no possibility of fear-induced escape. It is a radical strategy, undertaken when the stakes are high and when exceptional reserves of courage are necessary. That is the logic of the events in this week's parsha that are otherwise hard to understand.

Before they crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites were fearful. But once they had crossed the Sea, there was no way back.^[2] To be sure, they still complained about water and food. But their ability to fight and defeat the Amalekites showed how profoundly they had changed. They had crossed the Rubicon. Their boats and bridges were burned. They looked only forwards, for there was no return.

Rashbam makes a remarkable comment, connecting Jacob's wrestling match with the angel to the episode in which Moses, returning to Egypt, is attacked by God (Ex. 4:24) and also linking this to Jonah on the stormy ship.^[3] All three, he says, were overcome by fear at the danger or difficulty that confronted them, and each wanted to escape. Jacob's angel, Moses' encounter and the tempest that threatened to sink Jonah's ship, were all ways in which Heaven cut off the line of retreat.

Any great undertaking comes with fear. Often we fear failure. Sometimes we even fear success. Are we worthy of it? Can we sustain it? We long for the security of the familiar, the life we have known. We are afraid of the unknown, the uncharted territory. And the journey itself exposes our vulnerability. We have left home; we have not yet reached our destination. Rashbam was telling us that if we have these feelings we should not feel ashamed. Even the greatest people have felt fear. Courage is not fearlessness. It is, in the words of a well-known book title, feeling the fear but doing it anyway.

Sometimes the only way to do this is to know that there is no way back. Franz Kafka in one of his aphorisms wrote, “Beyond a certain point there is no return. This point has to be reached.”[4] That is what crossing the Red Sea was for the Israelites, and why it was essential that they experienced it at an early stage in their journey. It marked the point of no return; the line of no retreat; the critical point at which they could only move forward. I believe that some of the greatest positive changes in our lives come when, having undertaken a challenge, we cross our own Red Sea and know that there is no way back. There is only a way forward.

Then God gives us the strength to fight our battles and win.[1] See the newly published volume, *Exodus: The Koren Tanakh of the Land of Israel* which includes maps, beautiful illustrations, detailed explanations, and my new translation of the Hebrew text.[2] This explanation does not work for the Midrashic view that the Israelites emerged from the sea on the same bank as they had entered. But this is, as far as I can tell, a minority view.[3] Rashbam, Commentary to Gen. 32:21-29. [4] Kafka, Notebooks, 16.

Redemption: Dvar Torah for Beshalah By Rabbi Len Levin

This week’s joyful song at the crossing of the Sea is ensconced in the daily liturgy, morning and evening: “Who is like You, O Lord, among the celestials; who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, working wonders!” (Exod. 15:11) Thus the liturgy utters three ringing declarations about God: God creates, God reveals Torah in love, God redeems.

A naïve understanding would have it that God is active and we are passive in these three actions. But a more sophisticated approach asks: Does God act unilaterally? Can anything happen in human history without human participation and cooperation?

Two weeks ago, God promised: *Ve-hotzeiti etkhem*—“I will bring you out” (Exod. 6:6). In his liturgical poem *Kehosha’ta Elim* accompanying the Sukkot lulav processional, the 7th-century poet Eleazar Kalir read this verse *ve-hutzeiti itkhem*—“I will be brought out with you.” Abraham Joshua Heschel similarly understood the enigmatic phrase *Ani va-ho hoshi’a na* as meaning: “I and You, may You deliver us both” (Heschel, *Heavenly Torah*, 110–11).

The longing for redemption is a major theme in Jewish historical experience. In Moses’s day, the people of Israel were enslaved and yearned for the liberation of the Exodus. In the time of the Judges—Deborah, Gideon, and Samson—the people were subjugated to neighboring powers and longed for independence. In the time of Ezekiel and Second Isaiah, they were in exile in Babylonia and longed for the first return. From the defeat of Bar Kokhba through the Crusades and pogroms, Jews longed for the second return to Zion, which came about after the tragedy of the Holocaust with the establishment of the State of Israel.

Not only Jews have longed for redemption in history. In 1776, the colonists of America declared a new nation guaranteeing its citizens the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In the nineteenth century, northern Abolitionists and southern black slaves united in invoking the narrative of the Exodus to inspire a new liberation and end to slavery. In the 1940s those oppressed by Fascism throughout Europe united to liberate themselves from the newest, cruelest modern tyranny.

The rabbis expressed the idea of human participation in redemption through a story. As the Israelites were arguing whether it was feasible to move forward in the face of the watery barrier before them, Nachshon took action and jumped into the sea. This precipitated a crisis, whereupon Moses at God’s command took his rod and struck the sea, bringing about its division, and the Israelites walked through. (Mekhilta on Exodus 14.22)

Jewish experience attests deeply that the world is unredeemed. The Talmud tells of a rabbi who on entering a ruin to pray heard a divine voice lamenting, “Woe to the children, due to whose sins I destroyed My house, burned My Temple, and exiled them among the nations,” and was told that the lament reverberates three times every day (corresponding to the times of prayer—see Berakhot 3a). How striking, that God and humans are united

in lamenting the unredeemedness of the world, and in praying for redemption to come! In the early twentieth century, traditional Jews and Zionists debated whether the redemption was supposed to come by divine action or human action. The Zionists had the better of the argument; without human action, there would be no State of Israel. But to religious Zionists like Rabbi Abraham Kook, this was a false dichotomy. In the long view, maybe it is through our actions that God works in the world. Twice the Talmud says that humans are partners with God in the act of creation—when they perform justice, and when they inaugurate the Sabbath as a memorial of creation. (Talmud Shabbat 10a, Shabbat 119b). It would be equally true to say that for redemption to occur, humans must be partners with God in the work of redemption. (Rabbi Len Levin is professor of Jewish philosophy at AJR and editor of *Studies in Judaism and Pluralism*.)

[On Slivers & Soul-Food by Rabbi Josh Warshawsky \(Conservative Yeshiva Alumnus\)](http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1102506082947&ca=03eecf5a-fc15-4a80-89c3-e0ba319598f2)

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In this week's parashah, Beshallah, the Israelites leave Egypt and set out towards freedom. In the very first verse of the parashah, we learn that God recognized the shaky psyches of Bnei Israel and routed them via Yam Suf (the Sea of Reeds) to minimize the challenges and obstacles that would make them want to return to Egypt: "Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although it was nearer; for God said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds." (Shemot 13:18) But as we see in the next chapter, this is exactly what happens at the Sea: "As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD. And they said to Moses, 'Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt?'" (Shemot 14:10-11)

So what was it about Yam Suf and why did we have to go this way? "Yam Suf" in Gematria (Hebrew numerology) equals 196. 196 is also the Gematria for the word $\gamma\iota\tau$ - a thorn or splinter. Being in Egypt was like having the biggest splinter you could possibly imagine, just stuck there, always causing you pain, and never being able to get it out. And that is what this journey is all about; taking out the sliver.

A sliver looks like the Hebrew letter vav (ו). And when you take out that vav from the middle of the word $\gamma\iota\tau$ you are left with $\gamma\tau$ (keitz). Keitz means an end - an end to the suffering in Egypt and end to this chapter of our people's story. But keitz also means to awaken, as in "Vayikatz Par'o" - "And Pharaoh awoke." Leaving Egypt was meant to be an awakening for the people of Israel. But they needed someone to lead them through this awakening, into this new beginning.

A few weeks ago towards the end of Yosef's life, he said to his brothers, "And you should take my bones out from here [Egypt]." (Bereishit 50:25) And this week, in Parashat Beshallah, we see Moshe do just that. The very next verse after we learn about the roundabout route, we read, "And Moshe took with him the bones of Yosef." (Shemot 13:19)

Moshe takes the time to collect Yosef's bones and bring them with him as they leave, just as Yosef had requested. The rabbis find additional significance in Moshe's actions by comparing the leadership roles of these two characters. Rebbe Menachem Mendl of Kosov explains that Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael Torah. Moshe nourished their souls, taught them how to do mitzvot and how to care for each other. And Yosef took care of Bnei Yisrael's physical needs. He provided food and shelter to them in their time of need: "Now Yosef was the vizier of the land; it was he who dispensed rations to all the people of the land." (Bereishit 42:6) He filled up their bodies. And the rabbis explain that Moshe knew that Bnei Yisrael needed both of these nourishments - body and soul - so Moshe took Yosef's bones with them, hoping to step into Yosef's shoes in a way, and nourish their bodies AND souls. This is the dual-nature of the task of a leader. A leader must find

a way to embody Yosef AND Moshe. Every day they must work to engage their followers and fill them up with physical nourishment and spiritual nourishment - both food and soul-food. May the aspiring leaders among us find guidance in both of their examples, and may we find both kinds of nourishment in our own communities this Shabbat.

Another Leadership Model by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein (Conservative Yeshiva Faculty)

<http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1102506082947&ca=03eecf5a-fc15-4a80-89c3-e0ba319598f2>

Biblical stories rarely inform us of the qualifications which engendered God to choose someone as a prophet or as a leader. In fact, much of the time this seems intentional, as if to tell us that any one of us might become qualified under the proper circumstances. Rabbinic sages frequently have a different agenda. Often, they fill in biographical details in order to use the heroes of the Bible as a model. Devorah, the prophetess, is a case in point. In the biblical story, she is introduced to the reader already holding official position as a prophet, judge and leader of the people, with no description of her background other than the name of her husband: "Now Devorah, a prophet-woman, the wife of Lapidot, she it was who judged Israel at that time." (verse 4:4, Alter translation)

In Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, a late midrashic collection dedicated to ethical teaching, Devorah's biography is elaborated so that she should play a paradigmatic role: "And what was the nature of Devorah that she merited to be a judge over Israel? ... I bear testimony before heaven and earth that whether a person be a non-Jew or a Jew, a man or a woman, a slave or a maid-servant, the Holy Spirit resides with a person only in accordance with their deeds. They said that Devorah's husband was unlearned. Devorah said to her husband: Go and make wicks and go with them to the Holy Temple in Shiloh. By doing so, [namely providing light for those serving there], you will be counted among the righteous and will merit the world to come. He made his wicks particularly thick so that they would provide much light - that is why he was known as "Lapidot" [meaning "torch"] ... The Holy One Blessed be He examines hearts and kidneys [the organ of the body which stores knowledge!]. He said to Devorah: You intended (kavanah) and you made the wicks thick to provide much light, therefore I will make you great in Judah, Israel and among the twelve tribes." (Ish Shalom ed. pp. 48-9)

It is interesting here to note what this midrash views as proper preparation for leadership. In this story, Devorah serves as someone who provides inspiration for another person to make a positive contribution to society and to better himself. In this role, she seems selfless (and, in fact, many may criticize this midrash because it pictures a woman playing a supportive role for her husband, putting herself in the background). Here, however, it is her willingness to be supportive of others which made her ripe to be the leader of the people. In some sense, I suppose, the message of this story is that true leadership is not about you.

Beshalach by Rabbi Berel Wein

<https://www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-2263.html>

Miracles occur in all sizes and shapes. Some are major, completely aberrational and beyond natural or rational explanation. Other miracles that occur to us daily in our own lives take the form of being natural events and part of the rhythm of society and life. Major miracles command our attention, and as we see in this week's reading of the Torah, even cause us to sing eternal songs that extend through generations of Jewish life till our very day.

Certainly, the splitting of the waters of the sea before the Jewish people, escaping from the Army of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and then for those very waters receding and covering the drowning Egyptian enemy, is a miracle of major importance, and thus remains indelible in the collective memory of the Jewish people. So, Moshe and his sister Miriam lead the Jewish people in song to commemorate this event and to impress upon them the awesome quality of this major miracle.

We are reminded daily in our prayers of this miracle, and the song of Moshe forms an important part of our daily morning prayer service. This type of miracle was repeated

when the Jewish people crossed the river Jordan on their entry into the land of Israel after the death of Moshe and at the beginning of the reign of Joshua. This could be termed less of a miracle, than what took place with the Egyptian army, yet it represented the confirmation of the divine will to protect the Jewish people and to enable them to enter, inhabit and settle the land of Israel that would be its eternal homeland over all of the millennia of civilization.

However, the commemoration and memory of the major miracle should also remind us of the so-called minor miracles that occur to us in our daily lives. We are accustomed to everything going right as far as our bodies, social interactions and commercial enterprises are concerned. But it should be obvious that for things to go just right – simply what we call normal life – countless minor miracles must take place. We recite this in our daily prayers as well, and, in fact, we do so three times a day when we acknowledge and thank God for these so-called minor miracles that are with us constantly, evening, morning and afternoon.

This ability to recognize and give thanks for the minor miracles that constitute our daily existence stems from the fact that we experienced, in our collective memory, the great miracle that made us a people, and saved us from the destruction that Pharaoh wished to visit upon us. It is this memory of the great miracle that enables us to recognize the so-called minor miracles that we are living through, especially here in the land of Israel, with the return of Jewish sovereignty.

It is important to maintain the ability to recognize and be grateful for the wonders and miracles that the Lord grants us each and every day of our individual and national lives.

[Destiny in the Details by Rachel Rosenthal](http://www.jtsa.edu/destiny-in-the-details)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/destiny-in-the-details>

In life's biggest moments, it is sometimes easy to lose track of the smallest details. I have been to more than one wedding where everything is beautifully set up, from the flowers to the catering to the band, but then when the couple being married reach the huppah, they realize that they had forgotten the kiddush cup for the Sheva Berakhot, or the pen for signing the ketubah.

However, when looking back on those big events, sometimes it is the tiny moments that resonate most. I remember the sickly-sweet taste of the Manischewitz wine that I drank after making kiddush at my bat mitzvah more than I remember reading from the Torah. I can tell you every feeling I had when I saw my husband for the first time on our wedding day, but the details of the ceremony are already blurry after only a few years.

Why are those small moments so poignant? It seems to be a strange question to ask at this climactic point of the Torah. This week's parashah, Beshallah, contains one of the Torah's biggest moments. The Israelites finally break free of the Egyptians, crossing the Red Sea on dry land while the Egyptians drown in the closing sea behind them. Jubilant in their triumph, they sing to God, led by Moses and Miriam. For a brief moment, they are united in their faith and in the glory of the moment.

However, earlier in the story, the people are less certain that they want to cross the Sea. Understandably, they are fearful, with the Egyptians behind them and a vast expanse of water in front of them. Moses, uncertain about what to do, cries out to God, and God reprimands him, saying, "Why do you cry out to me? Tell B'nai Yisrael to go forward!" In that moment, Moses jumps into action, as the Torah tells us:

Then Moshe held out his arm over the sea and Hashem drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. (Exod. 14: 21-22)

Certainly, this seems like that crossing the sea safely, while the Egyptians are trapped behind them, should be the most that the Israelites could ask for from God. The people are escaping the Egyptians, God is fulfilling the promise of redemption, Moses is powerful enough that the people trust him, if only for a moment. This is the grand

moment, the one that we recall every day, multiple times, in our liturgy when we recite Mi Kamokha. Surely this should be enough. However, there is a beautiful midrash in Shemot Rabbah that imagines God paying attention to the smaller details as well:

“Rabbi Nehurai taught: a daughter of Israel passed in the sea with her son in her arms, and he cried. So she would reach out her hands and grab an apple or a pomegranate from the sea and give it to him, as it says, ‘And He led them through the depths, as through a wilderness.’ (Psalms 106:9) Just as they lacked for nothing in the wilderness, in the depths of the sea they lacked for nothing.” (Parashat Beshallah 21:10)

Like those moments from my bat mitzvah and wedding, this scene is incredibly poignant. At this momentous occasion, the Israelites would seem unreasonable for expecting more from God than simply getting them across the sea safely. It’s natural for children to be scared, just as it’s natural for their parents to soothe them, but even though we sometimes describe God as a parent, it is striking that God attends to the passing distress of the young in the midst of these dramatic events. After all, they will soon be back on dry land, safe from the Egyptians, truly free for the first time. However, the Rabbis imagine that God put fruits in the sea to comfort the children. It is the tiny detail that makes all the difference for the youngest of B’nai Yisrael.

Why does this small act of comfort matter? Because, as it turns out, those children are the ones who will grow up and then enter the Land to conquer it as part of the next generation. That transitional moment, which occurs in the book of Joshua, has the potential to be as terrifying as this one, but there, the people do not turn away from the challenge. Instead, they are eager to enter the Land, no matter how difficult it might be. Perhaps their faith is stronger because they do not remember slavery, but perhaps it is stronger because they remember that God took care of even the smallest details when they were tiny and vulnerable.

This midrash in Shemot Rabbah doesn’t solve a problem in the text, or explain an ambiguity, as we tend to expect from this genre. Instead, it simply highlights God’s compassion, which is so great that it extends even to something so small. It is okay to focus on a detail in even the grandest of moments, it tells us. In fact, that detail might be the most formative part of the whole experience.

Human memory is fallible, and we often lose the memories that we had most wanted to keep. However, the tiny glimmers that remain have the potential to shape not only our views of the past, but also the way we look towards the future. *(Rachel Rosenthal is an Adjunct Assistant Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at JTS)*

[Behshalach by Rabbi Shaul Rosenblatt](https://mailchi.mp/a633369914a8/weekly-davarbeshalach?e=e0f2ca6c0d)

<https://mailchi.mp/a633369914a8/weekly-davarbeshalach?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

The Jews leave Egypt. Pharaoh chases. The sea splits. The Jews come out the other side; the Egyptians don’t. God provides manna for the hungry and complaining Jews. Amalek attacks and is repulsed. It’s all heading towards the big climax next week.

The Torah tells us that Moses, when he left Egypt, brought along with him the bones of Joseph (who had died a couple of hundred years earlier). Joseph had asked that he be reinterred in the Land of Israel and Moses was the one who carried out his request. In Judaism there is certainly an idea of the Land of Israel being the Holy Land. And if, as in Joseph’s case, you cannot live there, it’s a good second best to be buried there. Many individuals throughout the ages, and more so today with the advent of air travel, have requested that they are interred in Israel. It’s certainly my preference.

This is a personal choice, but one thing very clear in Jewish law is that a person must be buried, not cremated. As an aside, I have been researching environmental issues recently and it certainly seems that burial is more environmentally friendly. Whilst there are arguments the other way, I believe that nourishing the earth with the body’s minerals must be better for our world than burning massive amounts of fossil fuel whilst also releasing the body’s natural carbon into the atmosphere. In Judaism, the ideal is to be

buried with no coffin, which is also, obviously, more environmentally friendly. But I don't believe the Torah's reasons for burial revolve around environmentalism, even though that is a great bonus. Firstly, there is a kabbalistic notion – that I claim to have no meaningful understanding of – that the soul remains connected, on some level, to the body after death and it is 'painful' for the soul to watch its body destroyed so brutally, rather than a slow decomposition. I'm not sure about that but mention it simply for the sake of completeness.

I believe, however, one of the main reasons that Judaism requires burial is as follows below: (and I think it's similar to the reason that Torah prohibits tattoos. The issue of tattoos has always been a difficult commandment for me as I'd love to get one – or two..... If I could rescind one law in the Torah, I'd choose a tattoo before being able to eat bacon. And I'm always sorry that I didn't get a tattoo before I became religious because once you have one, you don't have to get rid of it!!)

To give a metaphor, imagine that I borrow your car for a few weeks. When I bring it back, I have sprayed graffiti all over it. When you ask what I have done, I say that I think it looks great this way. Hmmmmm, I'm not sure how well that answer will go down. Or if the car breaks down and the mechanics say it's unfixable, so I take it to the scrap-dealer and have it crushed into a small box. Again, you might feel that it was your prerogative, not mine, to decide what to do with your broken-down car. And I believe that would be right. So too with us. Judaism sees our bodies as on loan to us, not permanent gifts. To start making permanent marks on God's property is highly inappropriate. Piercings close up and are not particularly noticeable but tattoos are permanent and obvious 'vandalism'. And cremating a body, albeit one that the soul has now left, is simply not our prerogative. Often, in Judaism, I will do things blindly – just as I would blindly take medicine recommended by a doctor. But it always helps to hear the reasons, most especially when they resonate – which in this case they do. So, no tattoos for me, I'm afraid, and when God decides that my time is up, I'll opt for burial – and as a bonus, be more considerate of our environment as well!

The Stewardship Paradigm – A Thought for Tu B'shvat by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
<http://rabbisacks.org/tu-bshvat/>

Few texts have had a deeper influence on Western civilisation than the first chapter of Genesis, with its momentous vision of the universe coming into being as the work of God. Set against the grandeur of the narrative, what stands out is the smallness yet uniqueness of humans, vulnerable but also undeniably set apart from all other beings. The words of the Psalmist echo the wonder and humility that the primordial couple must have felt as they beheld the splendour of creation:

**“When I consider your heavens, The work of your fingers, The moon and the stars,
Which you have set in place. What is humanity that you are mindful of it, The children of mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little lower than the angels
And crowned them with glory and honour.” (Psalm 8:3-5)**

The honour and glory that crowns the human race is possession of the earth, which is granted as the culmination of God's creative work: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.” This notion is fortified in Psalm 115: “The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth God has given to humanity.” While the creation narrative clearly establishes God as Master of the Universe, it is the human being who is appointed master of the earth.

Grappling with the challenging notion of humans as divinely-ordained owners and subduers of the earth, we come face to face with the fundamental questions of our place in the universe and our responsibility for it. A literal interpretation suggests a world in which people cut down forests, slaughter animals, and dump waste into the seas at their leisure, much like we see in our world today.

On the other hand, as Rav Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, writes, any intelligent person should know that Genesis 1:28, “does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who

afflicts his people and servants merely to fulfil his personal whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart.” Could God have really created such a complex and magnificent world solely for the caprice of humans?

Genesis chapter 1 is only one side of the complex biblical equation. It is balanced by the narrative of Genesis chapter 2, which features a second Creation narrative that focuses on humans and their place in the Garden of Eden. The first person is set in the Garden “to work it and take care of it.”

The two Hebrew verbs used here are significant. The first – le’ovdah – literally means “to serve it.” The human being is thus both master and servant of nature. The second – leshomrah – means “to guard it.” This is the verb used in later biblical legislation to describe the responsibilities of a guardian of property that belongs to someone else. This guardian must exercise vigilance while protecting, and is personally liable for losses that occur through negligence. This is perhaps the best short definition of humanity’s responsibility for nature as the Bible conceives it.

We do not own nature – “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24:1) We are its stewards on behalf of God, who created and owns everything. As guardians of the earth, we are duty-bound to respect its integrity.

The mid-nineteenth century commentator Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch put this rather well in an original interpretation of Genesis 1:26, “Let us make the human in our image after our own likeness.” The passage has always been puzzling, since the hallmark of the Torah is the singularity of God. Who would God consult in the process of creating humans?

The “us,” says Hirsch, refers to the rest of creation. Before creating the human, a being destined to develop the capacity to alter and possibly endanger the natural world, God sought the approval of nature itself. This interpretation implies that we would use nature only in such a way that is faithful to the purposes of its Creator and acknowledges nature’s consenting to humanity’s existence.

The mandate in Genesis 1 to exercise dominion is, therefore, not technical, but moral: humanity would control, within our means, the use of nature towards the service of God. Further, this mandate is limited by the requirement to serve and guard as seen in Genesis 2. The famous story of Genesis 2-3 – the eating of the forbidden fruit and Adam and Eve’s subsequent exile from Eden – supports this point.

Not everything is permitted. There are limits to how we interact with the earth. The Torah has commandments regarding how to sow crops, how to collect eggs, and how to preserve trees in a time of war, just to name a few. When we do not treat creation according to God’s Will, disaster can follow.

We see this today as more and more cities sit under a cloud of smog and as mercury advisories are issued over large sectors of our fishing waters. Deforestation of the rainforests, largely a result of humanity’s growing demand for timber and beef, has brought on irrevocable destruction of plant and animal species.

We can no longer ignore the massive negative impact that our global industrial society is having on the ecosystems of the earth. Our unbounded use of fossil fuels to fuel our energy-intensive lifestyles is causing global climate change. An international consensus of scientists predicts more intense and destructive storms, floods, and droughts resulting from these human-induced changes in the atmosphere. If we do not take action now, we risk the very survival of civilisation as we know it.

The Midrash says that God showed Adam around the Garden of Eden and said, “Look at my works! See how beautiful they are – how excellent! For your sake I created them all. See to it that you do not spoil and destroy My world; for if you do, there will be no one else to repair it.”

Creation has its own dignity as God’s masterpiece, and though we have the mandate to use it, we have none to destroy or despoil it. Rabbi Hirsch says that Shabbat was given to humanity “in order that he should not grow overbearing in his dominion” of God’s

creation. On the Day of Rest, “he must, as it were, return the borrowed world to its Divine Owner in order to realise that it is but lent to him.”

Ingrained in the process of creation and central to the life of every Jew is a weekly reminder that our dominion of earth must be l’shem shamayim – in the name of Heaven. The choice is ours. If we continue to live as though God had only commanded us to subdue the earth, we must be prepared for our children to inherit a seriously degraded planet, with the future of human civilisation at risk.

If we see our role as masters of the earth as a unique opportunity to truly serve and care for the planet, its creatures, and its resources, then we can reclaim our status as stewards of the world, and raise our new generations in an environment much closer to that of Eden.

Some Tu B'Shevat Recipes by Gil Marks

[https://jewshaction.com/food/recipes/happy-new-year-tu-bshevat/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=shsh%20Beshalach%205780%20\(1\)&utm_content=&spMailingID=31347582&spUserID=MTk3MTk2OTk5NjMyS0&spJobID=1643417319&spReportId=MTY0MzQxNzNmXmOQS2](https://jewshaction.com/food/recipes/happy-new-year-tu-bshevat/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=shsh%20Beshalach%205780%20(1)&utm_content=&spMailingID=31347582&spUserID=MTk3MTk2OTk5NjMyS0&spJobID=1643417319&spReportId=MTY0MzQxNzNmXmOQS2)

In agricultural-based ancient Israel, Tu b’Shevat—the traditional new year for trees—was a meaningful occasion celebrated with singing and dancing. Sephardim, who primarily lived in warm locales near the Mediterranean, long manifested a deep devotion to this festival, which they call Las Frutas (The Fruit). On the day of Tu b’Shevat, Sephardic families customarily visit relatives, where they are served a feast. The children, who are given off from school for the day, are encouraged to not only partake of the spread, but to take bolsas de frutas (bags of fruit) home with them. Among Ashkenazim, on the other hand, Tu b’Shevat was only marginally celebrated, primarily because it falls in the dead of winter in northern climates and the variety of fruit trees available was far more limited. The community of kabbalists, who made their home in sixteenth-century Safed, maintained a profound regard for this minor holiday and developed a new liturgy and rituals for it. An expanded version of these prayers was collected in an eighteenth-century work appropriately called Peri Etz Hadar (“Fruit of the Goodly Tree”), which describes the Tu b’Shevat seder (ceremonial meal). This ceremony contains rituals such as drinking four cups of wine—each wine a different type—and sampling at least 12 fruits and nuts; others increase the number to 15, corresponding to the numerical value of tu. Iraqi Jews further expanded on the concept, increasing the number to a minimum of 100 fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables.

There is a widespread custom to eat foods containing the sheva minim, the seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised in Deuteronomy 8:8—wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates.

Havij Edjeh (Persian Carrot Omelets) Yields about twelve 3-inch omelets/ 3 to 4 servings

This recipe can also be prepared as a single large omelet and cut into bite-sized pieces. These slightly sweet omelets are served as a side dish or dessert. The fruit makes havij edjeh traditional for Tu b’Shevat.

3 tablespoons butter or margarine
2 medium onions, chopped
12 ounces (about 2 cups) grated carrots
½ cup chopped pitted dates
1/3 cup dried currants or raisins
2 tablespoons lemon juice
4 large eggs, lightly beaten
About ½ teaspoon salt

Butter or margarine for frying

Heat the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions and carrots and sauté until softened, 5 to 10 minutes. Add the dates, currants, and lemon juice. Stir into the eggs. Add the salt. Heat the butter or margarine in a large skillet over medium heat. In

batches, drop the egg mixture by about 1½ tablespoons to form thin patties. Fry until the edges turn golden brown, about 2 minutes. Turn and fry until golden brown. Drain on paper towels. Serve warm or at room temperature and if desired, accompanied with yogurt or jam.

Dimlama (Bukharan Vegetable and Fruit Stew) Yields 5 to 6 servings

In the flat, semiarid land of central Asia, crops must generally be coaxed out of the soil by means of a series of ancient irrigation canals. The result is an assortment of fruit, generally of immense proportions, and a medley of vegetables. Bukharans commonly cook vegetables and fruits together.

¼ cup vegetable oil
2 large onions, chopped
2 medium carrots, thickly sliced
2 medium potatoes, peeled, and diced
1 medium turnip, peeled and diced
2 large tomatoes, coarsely chopped
1 large quince, peeled, cored, and coarsely chopped
1 large tart apple, peeled, cored, and coarsely chopped
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
¼ cup chopped cilantro
Salt to taste
About 2 cups water

2 tablespoons each additional chopped parsley and cilantro for garnish

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium heat. Add the onions and sauté until soft and translucent, 5 to 10 minutes. Add the carrots, potatoes, and turnip and sauté for 2 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, quince, apple, parsley, cilantro, and salt. Add enough water to cover the mixture. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer until tender, about 45 minutes. Serve with rice or noodles. Sprinkle with the additional parsley.

Zeitoun bi Hamod er Rummaan (Syrian Sweet-and-Sour Olives) Yields 1½ cups; about 24 olives

Olives are a ubiquitous component of Middle Eastern mezes (appetizer tables) and many meals.

1½ cups (about 8 ounces) small to medium brine-cured green or yellow olives, rinsed, drained, and lightly crushed or scored

1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/3 cup hamod er rummaan (pomegranate concentrate)
1/3 cup water

1 small onion, sliced
1 tablespoon brown sugar
10 whole black peppercorns

Combine all the ingredients in a 1-pint jar. Cover and let stand in the refrigerator for at least 3 days and up to 3 months. Serve at room temperature.

(Gil Marks is the author of the James Beard finalist The World of Jewish Cooking, The World of Jewish Entertaining, and The World of Jewish Desserts.)

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### Yahrtzeits

Larry Ozarow remembers his father Boris Ozarow (Dov-Ber) on Sat. Feb 8 (Shevat 13).

Bob Woog remembers his mother Nina F. Woog (Nahama bat Jacob va Shoshanah) on

Mon. Feb. 10 (Shevat 15)