

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✧ Spirituality

Shabbat B'Shallach

Exodus 14:10-29

KEY KOSHI:

HOW DO/MUST WE RESPOND TO THE RAGING WATERS B4 US AND PHARAOH PURSUING BEHIND?
WHAT DO THE RESPONSES TO THE MOMENT AT THE SEA TEACH US ABOUT LIVING ✧ SPIRITUALITY?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS... The beginning of knowing about God is simply paying attention, being fully present where you are

10] As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the Lord. 11] 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? 12] Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?’” 13] But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. 14] The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!” 15] Then the Lord said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. 16] And you lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground. 17] And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen. 18] Let the Egyptians know that I am Lord, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.” 19] The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved and followed behind them; and the pillar of cloud shifted from in front of them and took up a place behind them, 20] and it came between the army of the Egyptians and the army of Israel. Thus there was the cloud with

10 וּפְרָעָה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־
עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם | נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם
וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־
יְהוָה : 11 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הַמַּבְלִי אֵיךְ־
קָבְרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוֹת בְּמִדְבָּר
מֵהָ־זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם :
12 הֲלֹא־זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ
בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת־
מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עַבְדָּה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם
מִמָּוְתָנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר : 13 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם
אֶל־תִּירָאוּ הַתִּיַצְבוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת
יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר־
רְאִיתֶם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסְפוּ
לְרַאֲתָם עוֹד עַד־עוֹלָם : 14 יְהוָה יִלָּחֶם
לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תַּחֲרֹשׁוּן : פ [שְׁלִישִׁי]
15 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה מֵהַתְּצַעֵק אֵלַי
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ : 16 וְאַתָּה
הָרִם אֶת־מַטְּךָ וְנִטְהַ אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם
וּבִקְעָהוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם
בֵּינֵפֶשֶׁה : 17 וְאַנִּי הִנְנִי מַחְזֵק אֶת־לֵב
מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאַכְבַּדְתָּהּ בַּפְּרָעָה
וּבְכָל־חִילוֹ בְּרָכְבוֹ וּבַפְּרָשָׁיו : 18 וַיִּדְעוּ
מִצְרַיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּהַכְּבֹדִי בַּפְּרָעָה
בְּרָכְבוֹ וּבַפְּרָשָׁיו : 19 וַיִּסַּע מֶלֶאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים
הַחֲלֹץ לִפְנֵי מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְךָ
מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּסַּע עִמּוֹד הָעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם
וַיַּעֲמֵד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם : 20 וַיָּבֹא בֵּין | מַחֲנֵה
מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הָעָנָן

the darkness, and it cast a spell upon the night, so that the one could not come near the other all through the night. 21] Then Moses held out his arm over the sea and the Lord drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night, and turned the sea into dry ground. The waters were split, 22] and the Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. 23] The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen. 24] At the morning watch, the Lord looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. 25] He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they moved forward with difficulty. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." 26] Then the Lord said to Moses, "Hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen." 27] Moses held out his arm over the sea, and at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state, and the Egyptians fled at its approach. But the Lord hurled the Egyptians into the sea. 28] The waters turned back and covered the chariots and the horsemen—Pharaoh's entire army that followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. 29] But the Israelites had marched through the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֹּאֶר אֶת־הַלַּיְלָה וְלֹא־קָרַב זֶה אֶל־זֶה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה: ²¹ וַיִּטּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיּוּלֶךְ יְהוָה אֶת־הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עֶזָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׁם אֶת־הַיָּם לַחֲרָבָה וַיִּבְקָעוּ הַמַּיִם: ²² וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה וְהַמַּיִם לְהֵם חוּמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׁמָאלָם: ²³ וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם כָּל־סוּס פָּרְעֹה רָכָבוֹ וּפָרָשָׁיו אֶל־תּוֹךְ הַיָּם: ²⁴ וַיִּהְיֶה בְּאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַבֶּקֶר וַיִּשְׁקֹף יְהוָה אֶל־מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ וְעָנָן וַיִּהְיֶם אֶת־מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם: ²⁵ וַיִּסֹּר אֶת־אֲפֻן מַרְכָּבֹתָיו וַיִּנְהָגוּ בִּכְבֹּדָתָם וַיֹּאמֶר מִצְרַיִם אֲנוֹסָה מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי יְהוָה נִלְחַם לָהֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם: פ [רביעי] ²⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה נִטָּה אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם עַל־מִצְרַיִם עַל־רָכָבוֹ וְעַל־פָּרָשָׁיו: ²⁷ וַיִּטּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשֹׁב הַיָּם לַפְּנוֹת בֶּקֶר לְאִיתָנוֹ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעֶר יְהוָה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם: ²⁸ וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת־הָרָכָב וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל־חֵיל פָּרְעֹה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא־נִשְׁאַר בָּהֶם עַד־אֶחָד: ²⁹ וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בַיַּבֵּשָׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם לְהֵם חוּמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׁמָאלָם:

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS...

14:10-11 *As Pharaoh drew near, the Children of Israel caught sight of the Egyptians coming after them, and in great fear the Children of Israel cried out to Adonai. And they said to Moses: ...What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt?!*

RASHI... *"They cried out"* That is, they adopted the craft of their ancestors: they prayed!

ABRAVANEL... How is it possible that the Israelites simultaneously *"cried out in prayer to the Lord,"* and asked Moses sarcastically whether there weren't enough graves in Egypt?... Understand—they did not cry in prayer, but in complaint.

ZORNBERG... These questions interrogate the narrative of redemption:... The MAH tries to push the limits of the known... to insist on depths yet to be plumbed... When the Israelites challenge Moses, *"What is this that you have done?"* the effect is to move beyond the world of facile rationalizations, to become aware of incongruities... In this sense, the people's challenge, ugly, ungrateful as it may be, ... represents a necessary truthfulness, a way of opening up a new depth of dialogue with Moses and with God.

14:13-14 *Moses said to the people: Have no fear! Stand by and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today; for the Egyptians you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will battle for you; you, hold your peace!*

IBN EZRA... It is surprising that a camp of 600,000 armed men were afraid of their pursuers and would not fight for their lives and those of their children. The answer, of course, is that these Egyptians had been their masters. The Exodus generation had learned from their youth to bear the yoke of Egyptian servitude...

MEKHILTA... *"the Lord will fight for you"*—R' Meir says: If even when you stand there silent, how much the more so [will YHVH do battle on your behalf] when you render God praise! Rav says: *"the Lord will fight for you and you will hold your peace!"* Shall YHVH perform miracles for you while you are standing here silent?

The Israelites then said to Moses, our Teacher, what is there for us to do? And he said to them: You should be exalting and glorifying the Name of God, uttering songs of praise... And at that moment, as the Israelites went forth into the Sea, they opened their mouths and sang out in [the] Song:

"I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously..." [Exod 15:1]

ZORNBERG... The nephew of HaEMEK DAVAR, R' Baruch HaLevi Epstein, quotes his uncle's opinion and disagrees. He notices RASHI's comment on "the corridors of the Sea," reading Rashi as the whole length of the corridor, urging praise... before the tension is resolved, before one has emerged from the undetermined, ominous passage... Both RAMBAN and SEFORNO are among the leading commentators who affirm that... the people sang while the Egyptians followed them into the Sea... In the course of traversing, fraught with tension,... singing breaks in as an unexpected response.

14:15 *Then the Lord said to Moses: Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Children of Israel to go forward...*

RASHI... This verse teaches that Moses was standing and praying. But the Holy One cried out to him, saying: "Now is not the time to prolong prayer, for Israel is in distress. Do something!"

MEKHILTA... *"Speak to the Children of Israel"* could be understood as the alternate to *"Why are you crying out to Me?"* In other words, it is to the Children of Israel to whom you must speak! The verse then implies that the Children of Israel would only be ready to enter the Sea after Moses had spoken with them, words of encouragement or rebuke.

OR HaCHAYIM... It is difficult to understand in what direction the Israelites were expected to march, with the pursuer at their rear and the Sea before them. IF the command was meant to follow after the Sea divided, the verse order should have read: *"As for you, lift up your staff and hold it out over the sea and divide it."* Only after should the command be given, *"Tell the Children of Israel to go forward!"*

"...Tell the Children of Israel to go forward."

RASHI... They have only to march forward, for the sea does not stand in their way.

TALMUD... R' Meir stated: When the Israelites stood on the brink of the sea, the tribes contended with one another. One said: "I will go down into that sea first!" The other replied, "No, I will go down first!" While they stood and argued, the tribe of Benjamin took the plunge and went down first. For this reason, Benjamin was granted the privilege of playing host to the Divine Presence, the Sanctuary built in its territory.

R' Judah countered: It did not happen this way. One tribe said: "I will not go first!" The others countered: "Neither shall we!" While they were arguing with one another Nachshon ben Aminadav of the tribe of Judah plunged into the waves. For this reason, Judah was granted dominion over Israel, as it is stated: *"Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion."* (Psalms 114:2) [Sotah 36b.]

MEKHILTA... R' Joshua stated: God said to Moses: *"The Israelites have only to march forward!"* We must understand this to mean that the Children of Israel usually follow Moses, as sheep do a shepherd. But at the Sea, God told Moses to rely upon Israel's faith... In virtue of their act, the Sea would divide, with Moses walking behind them.

D'RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

Rabbi NORMAN COHEN...

One moment Moses is telling his followers that they are about to witness God's redemptive power, and the next he appears to be crying out to God when the Divine has not acted...The Rabbis in the Midrash say that one person, Nachshon ben Aminadav, was brave enough to jump into the Sea...When Moses sees that Nachshon is drowning, he cries out to God to save him. It is then God finally responds to Moses, "Moses, Nachshon—the whole people—are drowning in the Sea, and you stand here praying? Do something!" Moses responds, "But what can I do?"

Moses, who is every leader, every person, doubts that he has the power to ensure his people's deliverance. But what he doesn't understand is even more critical: The Israelites will not be saved if they merely stand idly by and wait for God to act. There is no such thing as passive redemption!

Therefore, God continues commanding him, "Raise your rod and extend your hand over the Sea. [14:16] Moses has to raise his rod—the symbol not only of God's Presence, but also of Moses' own ability...And lest the people believe that he can only perform miracles using the staff of God, God gives him the double command, "and extend your hand over the Sea." Only then will the Sea split. Moses' hand channels, or even becomes, God's own Hand...When we act in the world, we act in God's stead, and, in those moments, we fulfill our divine potential.

[*Moses and the Journey to Leadership*, Jewish Lights, pgs 45-48]

Rabbi SHLOMO RISKIN ...

The essential message of the drama of the Egyptian experience was to demonstrate the supreme power of the God of Israel—the universal God, over and above the Pharaoh or the Nile, that the Israelites believe in God and His promises...But as of this moment Israel had yet to understand that belief as a Jew expects not only faith in God but faith in self...For God is not satisfied with Moses' lesson to Israel:

"Stand by...God will wage battle for you..."

And the Lord responds: *"Why do you cry out to Me? Tell Israel to get moving!"*

I would submit that the Bible is imparting a critical lesson to Israel, providing a dramatic transformation of faith...If indeed the Israelites are to be God's partners, they dare not stand silently by and wait. Much to the contrary, Israel must begin the process, and act. Biblical faith means to do what has to be done in the physical, spiritual and ethical realms. Only after we have done whatever we can do have we the right to rely on God...We learn the lesson at the brink of the Sea: we must believe in God, but we must also believe in ourselves. God works through human action in the process of redemption. [*Torah Lights*, Vol II, pgs 97-99]

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE... God's "I am" has the psycho-theological force not of dissolving individual selves but of reminding us that we were never individual selves in the first place...Our selfhood endures by virtue of its participation in some greater Self,

Rabbi PATRICIA KARLIN-NEUMANN...On one hand, Nachshon was fearless in his willingness to sanctify God's Name. The Rabbis agree that Nachshon was the first to get wet. What they disagree about is how. As we see in Bamidbar Rabbah, Nachshon not only entered the waters first, but, according to the Midrash on Psalms, pelted his brothers with stones to ensure that they would not beat him into the sea. In contrast, in the Mekhilta, with a terrified crowd looking behind at the Egyptians, amid the jostling, Nachshon jumps up in fear, falling into the waves, shouting: "Save me, O God, for the waters have come even unto my soul!" (Ps 69:2) Whether as the hapless victim or the eager leader, Nachshon's entry into the water changes Jewish history. Whether his faith is expressed by bravado or by cries of terror, Nachshon becomes a leader. He braves the waters and is acknowledged by his community for so doing....As a woman rabbi, I find in Nachshon a leader for our time---a time when it is possible to enter the waters of change with both surprise and faith, when a link to the past must be accompanied by an eye toward the future...For Nachshon is not only a prince from the tribe of Judah, he is also the grandfather of Bo-az, who, with Ruth, continues the line of David....Nachshon reminds us that leadership can come from many quarters, and that a commitment to continuity and redemption is found by looking forward as well as looking back.

Rabbi STEVEN NATHAN...The traditional understanding here is that we need to take action before God will help us...It is up to us to change our lives, and to change the world, with God's help. However, my colleague, Rabbi Michael Cohen once suggested that perhaps Nachshon didn't jump into the Sea intentionally. Perhaps he was pushed, or simply fell in by accident. In this case his fame was due to a fluke, or pure "dumb luck." Nachshon then becomes a reluctant hero put on a pedestal for something he never intended to do.

I have always looked at Nachshon as the model of a true religious activist. He wasn't going to sit around and wait for God...He knew he needed to take responsibility...and to take action. But if he was pushed in, this

interpretation goes out the window, and Nachshon becomes a poor zhlub who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Not unlike Woody Allen's Zelig or Groome's Forrest Gump, God just looked and said, 'Whadya know! It's Nachshon?'"

We can see ourselves in these different Nachshons. We all have the potential to be the one who leaps, but, hesitant to make the move, we might well be the one who gets pushed. We want to be that fearless idealist ready to jump into unknown waters at any moment. But we often find ourselves in situations where our choices are not so clear cut, ...and we aren't at all sure about taking the plunge.

So, we go through life caught between two Nachshons...Truth is, most of the time, we are somewhere in between. We are testing the waters with our toes, then going in to our knees, and up and up, until the water is at our neck. We just have to hope that our Sea will split...

It is at those moments that we need to rely...on the power of the Divine within each of us to give us the strength and the faith to continue our journey certain that we will not drown.