

+++++

**The Lower East Side
Parshat HaShavua sheet**

*A collection of Divrei Torah
from around the Internet*

+++++

=====
Pesach – last days
=====

Latest time for Kriyat Sh'ma – 9:33

SEA THE MIRACLE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

On the Seventh Day of Pesah we celebrate the crossing of our people through the Sea Of Reeds on the dry path that G-d miraculously provided that night over 3300 years ago. After almost one year of miracles that brought down the kingdom of Egypt and brought about the release of our people from bondage -- the people stood at the sea with their backs to the wall as the Egyptian chariots pursued the newly liberated masses. "Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness?...it is better for us to serve in Egypt than we should die in the desert," cried the crowds to Moshe. It is difficult to understand how a people who witnessed so many mind-boggling natural wonders could suffer such a great lapse of faith so soon after the night of Pesah.

The puzzle becomes more mysterious when we study the events of following the crossing through the sea. Our Sages teach, "A maid servant at the sea saw revelation more clearly than the Prophet Yehezkel, who saw the secrets of Heaven." We have difficulty understanding the greatness of the spiritual heights reached by the people at the sea -- the vision was so clear that they said, "This is my G-d" -- pointing at Him as they spoke. Yet shortly thereafter Moshe had to force the people to travel away from the shores of the sea.

The verse states: "Moshe caused the Children of Israel to journey from the Sea of Reeds." [Shemot 15:22]

Rashi clarifies, "He (Moshe) caused them to journey against their will, for the Egyptians adorned their horses with ornaments of gold, silver and precious jewels, which the Jews found in the sea.... Therefore, Moshe had to force them to travel against their will." The people who were lifted to the heights of spirituality were plunged down to Earth by their baser physical desires only moments later. The conclusion is that witnessing awesome miracles does not change a person and does not guarantee that one will not fall prey to one's base desires and inclinations. The enemy, the Evil Inclination, is very powerful.

The days of Pesah are days where one can free oneself from the shackles of the soul that distance one from one's Maker and spiritual growth. The war against one's base desires is a lifelong series of tests. The word for "test" in the Holy Tongue is NISAYON, which is from the root of the word NESS to elevate. The trials of life are served by G-d in order to give a person an opportunity to go higher and to grow closer to Him. The tests are "custom made" to suit the individual at the time of the test. No one is given a test that he or she does not have the ability and the potential to pass. If one does succeed then one rises one step higher and closer to G-d. The next test is more difficult but the person being tested is also stronger and better equipped to win the battle. In life, one confronts situations which are extremely trying and that can drain one emotionally. The message is "Don't give in. Keep on pushing with all you've got to overcome the challenge and reach the next rung of the ladder that climbs Heavenward towards spiritual freedom. You can be free!"

The holiday of Pesah is a time when we do not eat the "yeast that is in the dough". The Sages call the Evil Inclination "The yeast that is in the dough."

We spend the week doing G-d's bidding and refraining from many pleasures that are permitted all year long. This restraint is a springboard that can give one the power to win the battles one is sure to confront throughout the coming year. As we reach the closing of this beautiful week let us take advantage of the opportunity for growth, the kind that is achieved step by step -- the kind that can take one higher permanently not merely for a fleeting moment. Freedom from the Evil Inclination is on sale this week. Get out your spiritual credit card and stock up for the year and "CHARGE!"

The Nation and the Community

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The seventh day of Pesach is called "atzeret" (Devarim 16:8), as is the eighth day of Succot. The meaning of this word in the Torah is not clear. In all three verses where it appears it is linked to a prohibition of performing labor. What does it mean?

There seem to be two possible explanations for the word, and they might well be related to each other. On one hand, it seems to imply a gathering, or a grouping, similar to the word "atzara" which appears in other places, such as in the verse, "Declare a fast day, call for a gathering, gather the elders and all the dwellers of the land in the house of your G-d" [Yoel 1:14]. The word atzeret appears with this meaning in the lament about the nation, "Who will give me lodging in the desert, so that I can leave my nation and go away from them, for they are all adulterers, a gathering of traitors?" [Yirmiyahu 9:1]. This would imply that on the seventh day there is a mitzva to make a special gathering of the people in order to take note the end of the holiday.

However, in his commentary on Vayikra 23:36, Ibn Ezra rejects this interpretation of the word atzeret for the seventh day of Pesach, since the verse where it appears is preceded by an explicit declaration that after offering the Pesach sacrifice on the first day, "You shall turn away in the morning and return to your tent" [Devarim 16:7]. Thus, he insists that the word atzeret cannot mean a gathering, since it is clear that by the seventh day the people had returned home. Therefore he interprets atzeret in a different way: "that the people shall abandon all worldly interests." This interpretation is based on the appearance of Doeg the Edomite in the Tabernacle at Nov: "And on that day a man from the slaves of Shaul paused before G-d, and his name was Doeg the Edomite" [Shmuel I 21:8].

However, perhaps Ibn Ezra's problem with respect to the other interpretation can be answered and his approach can be combined with the more common one. It may be that the Torah is not referring to a single central gathering, something which indeed takes place only on the first day of the holiday. Perhaps the Torah is giving a command to organize local gatherings, every community for itself. The purpose of such gatherings would be to stand before G-d in an expression of the sanctity of the day, at the end of the holiday.

This would mean that the holiest days of the main holidays in the year – the first and the last days – symbolize two different aspects of how man is attached to a greater entity. On the first day, the entire nation is involved, with all the people coming to the Temple to show themselves before G-d. On the last day of the holiday, a man shows himself as part of his nearby community, gathered together before G-d in order to put aside their worldly pursuits. Between these two days, a person remains in an internal state, "Return to your tent." Thus, in summary, the holiday of Pesach incorporates within it all three cycles of human life: the family, the community, and the nation.

The Symphony Of Life

by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig

"For a six-day period you shall eat matzos and on the seventh day shall be an assembly to the L-rd, your G-d; you shall not perform any creative work." (Deuteronomy/Devarim 16:8) This seventh day is the day that G-d split the Sea of Reeds (often mislabeled the Red Sea) for the Jews, and drowned the Egyptians who chased after them. After the Jews were saved, the Torah records the song they sang as thanks to and praise of G-d. This song is prominent in Jewish life; it is repeated in its entirety in our daily morning prayers.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 23:4) states that prior to the splitting of the sea no one had sung to G-d as the Jews did in response to this miraculous salvation. Many commentators are troubled by this Midrash since we do have records of earlier songs, including Psalm 92, the psalm honoring the Shabbos day, which is attributed to Adam. What was so unique about the Song at the Sea that our Sages' consider it the first? And why is there a continued emphasis on that song today?

Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr explains that this song excels because it is the first time that the depth and magnificence of the message draws on the full essence of the beauty of music. A song is comprised of many notes - some high, some low, some euphoric, some discordant. Each note on its own is nothing special. The beauty of song is bringing together all the individual notes and chords to create something magnificent. A song without the low notes would lack richness and beauty. Similarly, our own lives are replete with many experiences - high points and low points - that comprise the symphony of life. With our finite, human perspective we do not appreciate the reason for the low points and would prefer the song of life to be without them. All of the songs written in praise of G-d prior to this one were expressions of gratitude for the evident blessings and high points in life.

With the Egyptians drowned in the sea and real freedom finally at hand, the Jews now appreciated there was a reason for the decades of suffering they had endured. The low points helped testify to the glory of G-d in the song of life; the song would be incomplete without them. For the first time, a song praising G-d included praising Him for the events one may perceive to be bad. Thus, we continue to emphasize that song today. It constantly reminds us that whether we understand it or not, there is a purpose behind life's challenges and in due time we will understand and appreciate the beauty of every aspect of our lives.

It is well known that we Jews do not gloat over the punishments visited on the Egyptians. The Talmud relates that at the time of the Splitting of the Reed Sea, the ministering angels started to sing praise to the Lord. The Al-Mighty rebuked them: "My handiwork are drowning in the sea and you recite song?!" (Megilla 10b). Rav Kook takes this thinking a step further. He is bothered by the following problem.

There is a Talmudic principle that a truly righteous person must see to it that he is not the cause of a wicked person's being punished. The verse, "Also, to punish the righteous is not good," was interpreted by the rabbis, "Also, to punish for the righteous is not good." (Proverbs 17:26; Brachot 7a; Shabbat 149b). Furthermore, in cases where the zaddik had in fact been the cause of a wicked person being punished, the zaddik is deprived of the divine presence. "Whose companion is punished on his account, is not admitted to the divine presence." (Ibid). Neither do the rabbis differentiate in this regard between wicked Jews and wicked non-Jews; in neither case should the righteous be the cause of punishment. (See Tosafot, Brachot 7a, s.v. *hahu zadduki*, and Shabbat, ibid, concerning Nebuchadnezzar.)

How then, asks Rav Kook, could the Jews, who clearly were the cause of the Egyptians' being smitten, have enjoyed basking in the divine radiance?! Rav Kook quotes the Mechilta to the effect that the lintel and two doorposts of the Israelites, upon which were smeared the blood of the paschal lamb, were accorded the status of a holy place. "Our forefathers had three altars: The lintel and the two doorposts." (Mechilta, Bo, parasha 11. Cf. Psachim 96a). That same night the firstborn of Egypt were being smitten, the Jews were enjoying a state of utter sanctity. How is that possible?

More basic, Rav Kook attempts to understand why the smiting of the firstborn of Egypt was, so to speak, the "grand finale" of the ten plagues. What is so significant about this specific plague?

The key to understanding all of the above, is the fact that at this time, G-d speaks of the Jewish People as "My firstborn son, Israel" (Exodus 4:22). G-d is removed from all anthropomorphism, so in what sense is Israel His firstborn son?

Before the sin of the Golden Calf, the firstborn were designated to serve as priests. After the sin of the Golden Calf, the role was transferred to the Levites. When G-d refers to Israel as His firstborn son, the implicit meaning is that the Jewish People is to act as "a kingdom of priests, "to teach the other nations of the world the ways of G-d. (Cf. Rabbi Abraham Maimonides, Commentary to Exodus 19:6, citing his illustrious father.) The firstborn acts as an educator to his younger brothers.

Because of this relationship that exists between Israel and the nations of the world, an injustice committed against Israel is not merely a sin against a particular nation, but rather an injustice to the entire world. In hurting Israel, a nation hurts itself as well. (Just as when one hurts one's teacher, one suffers oneself.)

The Egyptians were not punished because of their affliction of the Hebrews, but rather because of the damage they did to the entire world. If in truth, the punishment of the Egyptian firstborn were on account of Israel, then it would not have been possible for Israel at that very moment to benefit from the divine presence. The fact that Israel was so privileged, meant that the Egyptian firstborn were smitten for some other reason. Their suffering was the result of Israel's status as "firstborn son," which is to say priest-teacher to the world: *"You shall say to Pharaoh, Thus said the Lord, My firstborn son is Israel. And I said unto you, let My son go, that he may serve Me, and you refused to let him go; so, behold, I am slaying your firstborn son."* (Exodus 4:22,23)

translated by Rabbi Bezalel Naor

Between Mountain and Sea

based on the *Sichos of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*

You know the feeling: we wake up to the realization that the world isn't as we would like it to be. A common experience, but there are many ways how to react.

One man embarks on a quixotic crusade to change the world. A second gives up on the world and retreats into whatever protective walls he can erect around himself. A third takes the "practical" approach, accepting the world for what it is and does his best under the circumstances. A fourth recognizes his inability to deal with the situation and looks to higher authority for guidance and aid.

Our ancestors had this rude awakening after their exodus from Egypt.

The Ten Plagues forced Pharaoh to let Israel go. After two centuries of slavery, the Jews were headed toward Mount Sinai and a covenant with G-d to be a "light unto the nations." Indeed, the goal of the Exodus was, as G-d told Moses "upon leaving Egypt, you will serve G-d at this mountain."

But the sea was right ahead, as Pharaoh's army closed in behind. Egypt was alive and well. The sea was oblivious to the new nation's destiny.

How did they react? The Midrash tells us that the Jewish people divided into four camps. Some said "Let us cast ourselves into the sea." A second group said "Let us return to Egypt." A third faction argued "Let us battle the Egyptians," and a fourth camp advocated: "Let us pray to G-d."

But Moses rejected all four options, telling Israel, "Fear not, stand by and see G-d's salvation today; As you see Egypt this day, you shall not see them again, forever. G-d will fight for you, and you be silent."

The Midrash explains that "Fear not, stand by and see the salvation of G-d" is Moses' response to the desperates who wanted to plunge into the sea. "As you have seen Egypt this day, you shall not see them again," is meant for those ready to surrender. "G-d shall fight for you," is the answer to those who wished to do battle, and "you shall be silent" is Moses' rejection of those who said, "This is beyond us. All we can do is pray."

What are we to do when caught between a hostile world and an unyielding sea? "Speak to Israel," G-d told Moses, "let them go forward."

The road to Sinai was rife with obstacles and challenges. The same is true of the road from Sinai, our 3,000 year quest to implement Torah ideals in our world. Now, as then, there are several possible responses to an adverse world.

There is the "Let's throw ourselves into the sea" approach of those who despair of resisting, much less impacting, the big bad world out there.

Let us plunge into the sea, they say, the sea of the Talmud, the sea of piety, the sea of religion. Let us sever all contact with an apostate and promiscuous world. Let us build walls to protect ourselves from the alien storms outside, so we can foster the Sinai legacy within. In the chasidic idiom such a person is 'a tzaddik in peltz--a righteous man in a fur coat.' There are two ways to warm up on a cold day: you can build a fire, or wrap yourself in fur.

When the isolationist tzaddik is asked, "Why do conserve your own warmth? Why don't you build a fire to warm others as well?" he replies, "What's the use? Can I warm up the entire world?" If you point out that one small fire can thaw several frozen individuals, who may, in turn, create enough fires to warm a corner of society, he just doesn't understand. He is a perfectionist. There's no place for partial solutions in his life. "It's hopeless," he sighs with genuine sadness, and retreats into his spiritual Atlantis.

A second "camp" says: "Let us return to Egypt." Plunging into the sea is not an option, argues the Submissive Jew. G-d placed us here. Our mission is deal with it, not escape it. We'll just have to lower our expectations.

This Exodus was obviously a pipe dream. How could we presume to liberate ourselves from the rules and constraints that apply to everyone else? To be G-d's "chosen people" is nice, but we are a minority, dependent on Pharaoh's goodwill that holds sway in the real world.

It is our duty to influence the world. But a Jew has many duties: it is his duty to pray thrice daily, to give charity and observe Shabbat. So we'll do what we have to. Yes, it's a tough life, keeping the laws while not antagonizing the neighbors; but who said that being a Jew is easy?

A third response to a hostile world is the Fighting Jew. He knows that it is wrong to escape the world, and equally wrong to submit to it.

So he takes it on, both barrels blazing. The Fighting Jew strides through life with a holy chip on his shoulder, battling immorality, apostates, antisemites, "Hellenist" Jews and non-fighting Jews. Not for him is the escapism of the first camp or

the subservience of the second, he knows that his cause is just, that G-d is on his side, and ultimately he will triumph. If the world won't listen to reason, he'll knock some sense into it.

Finally, there is the Jew who looks at the world, looks at the first three camps, shrugs his shoulders and lifts his eyes to heaven. He knows that turning his back on the world is not the answer, neither is surrendering to its dictates and conventions. But he also knows that "The Torah makes peace in the world, for its ways are pleasant, and all its paths are peace."

"You hope to peacefully change the world?" say the other three camps. "When was the last time you looked out the window? You might as well try to empty the ocean with a spoon."

"You're right," says the Praying Jew. "Realistically, it can't be done. But who's being realistic? Do you know what the common denominator between the three of you is? Your assessments and strategies are all based on natural reality. But we inhabit a higher reality. Isn't the very Jewish existence a miracle? Ours is the world of the spirit, of the word."

"So basically your approach is to do nothing," they counter. "Again you are employing materialistic standards," answers the Praying Jew, "a world that views prayer as 'doing nothing.' But prayer from the heart can achieve more than a secure fortress, a flattering diplomat or powerful army."

What does G-d say? "Speak to the Israel, Let them go forward." True, it is important to safeguard and cultivate all that is pure and holy in the Jewish soul, to create an inviolable sanctum of G-dliness in one's own heart and one's community. True, there are times when we must deal with the world on its own terms. True, we must battle evil. Certainly we must acknowledge that we cannot do it all on our own. True, each of these four approaches have their time and place. But neither is the vision to guide our lives and define our relationship with the world about us. When headed toward Sinai and confronted by a hostile or indifferent world, our response must be: go forward!

Not to escape reality, not to submit to it, not to battle it, not to deal with only on a spiritual level, but to go forward. Do another mitzvah, inspire another soul, take one more step toward your goal. Pharaoh's charioteers are breathing down your neck? An impregnable sea bars your path? Don't look up; look forward. Move toward Sinai.

When we do, that insurmountable barrier will yield and that ominous threat will fade away. Despite "evidence" to the contrary, we have the power to reach our goal. Even if you have to split some seas. If only we move forward.

Customs for Shevi shel Pesach

The Gerer Hassidim gather in the *shtibl* on the seventh night of Pesah; they drink wine and they dance. They then pour a barrel of water on the floor, lift up their long cloaks, and "cross the sea" while declaring the towns which are located on the way to Gur. At each "town" they drink *l'hayyim* and then continue to Gur. When they "reach" Gur after "crossing the sea", they once again drink *l'hayyim* and thank God for reaching their destination.

Reb Ephraim Tzibile used to lead his wife and children through the Sea of Reeds. Since there was no sea in his house, he created a miniature "sea". He turned over the keg of water which stood by the door and flooded the room with water. He then took his family and crossed the "sea" with them, from one side of the room to the other. Many people used to gather there that night to witness the demonstration.

In Jerusalem the hassidim of Reb Arele in Meah Shearim recreate the splitting of the Reed Sea in a different fashion. The disciples act as the sea and the rebbe represents the Children of Israel. The rebbe passes through them and the students slowly part, allowing him to pass through.

R. Ya'akov Moshe Harlap developed a custom which was continued by his disciple, R. Shaul Yisraeli. Hundreds of Jews – young and old, *hassidim* and *mitnagdim*, *halutzim*, yeshiva students and soldiers – would congregate at his house in the *Sha'are Hessed* neighborhood of Jerusalem. Rabbi Harlap would deliver *divrey torah* interspersed with singing. At twelve midnight, Rabbi Harlap would stand up, put on a white *kittel* and begin to chant *Shirat Hayam* (Exodus 15). He would sing a special *niggun* (tune) with the assembled, followed by responsive singing of *Shirat Hayam*, one verse at a time. After *Shirat Hayam*, they would sing the *Melekh Rahaman* paragraph from the *Musaf* service and dance with great fervor. Indeed, those who were there said that *Hayam* was an abbreviation of *Harav Ya'akov Moshe*.

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Filled with lively talk and activity, flowing with wine and discussion and brimming with custom and tradition, the Seder nights are the highlights of Passover. From there on, the eight day holiday seems to continue uneventfully, following only the basic rules of eating matzah and avoiding chametz. But just as the holiday draws to a close, Passover rises to a grand finale, with the celebration of Achron shel Pesach.

"Yet another special holiday?" "Isn't it already all over and done with?"

"What now, when we've already eaten our fill of matza, and look forward to switching back to chametz?" "Shouldn't we go pack up the Passover dishes?"

Actually, the eighth and final day of Passover is not an end, for it represents an historic beginning. The Haftarah reading in the synagogue on Achron shel Pesach is a scriptural selection that vividly describes a prophetic vision of Isaiah. In a most moving narrative, Isaiah introduces us to the idyllic glorious era of Moshiach, the long awaited redeemer of Israel who will return us from exile.

We read of the special branch that will sprout from the House of David.. the twig that will flourish from his roots... on whom the Divine spirit will rest.. The lion will lie with the lamb.., peace will reign all over... and the whole world will be filled with Divine knowledge as the waters of the sea.."

Achron shel Pesach reminds us that Passover did not end with the Exodus 3300 years ago, but is a continuous process that began with Moses and will conclude with Moshiach. One is incomplete without the other.

It is therefore customary to celebrate a Seudas Moshiach by eating Matzah and drinking four cups of wine on the last evening of Passover. A beautiful tradition instituted by Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov and later Sages, we join together to express our belief and yearning for the coming redemption.

We share insights, stories and L'Chayim wishes with our friends seated at the table and with all of Israel. This nostalgic farewell to Passover reaches a climax with the singing of melodies and tunes, and ends on a high note of fervent Jewish Faith in the future.

It ain't over till it's over! In just a few moments we will close up Passover for the year. But what's the rush? The Synagogue Rabbi has to leave to buy back the chametz, but where's everyone else running? Can't we wait a little longer before biting into the first bagel? Let's hold on to the holiday and enjoy it a little bit longer! Of course, we'll go help pack the Passover dishes. But let's not pack away the Passover spirit of Redemption in the boxes deep in the basement. Seudas Moshiach gives us a taste of great things to come. It feeds and nurtures our belief in this basic Jewish principle, to prepare ourselves for Moshiach. Seudas Moshiach has no formal Hagaddah to read or blessings to say. It's just our thoughts, feelings, hopes and yearnings for the righteous Moshiach, very soon. Next year in Jerusalem!

The festivities continue...

by Judy Lash Balint

For thousands of other Israelis, the close of Pesach means not only clamoring for bread but the beginning of Mimouna. Call it a return to roots or a belated awakening of interest in our ethnic traditions. In recent years the Mimouna celebration has become one of Israel's most popular festivities, embraced by Israelis of all origins.

While no one can quite tell you why Mimouna is celebrated --some say it's to mark the passing of the father of the revered 12th century Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (the Rambam) who died right after the conclusion of Passover-- Moroccan Jews have used the occasion to throw open their homes for neighborhood parties to feast on freshly-made traditional pastries (muflettot), let loose and toast the end of Passover.

Here in Israel, where tens of thousands of Moroccan Jews settled during the turbulent 1950s and 60s, the parties have been elevated to national status and expanded to parks and synagogues. The Mimouna celebrations are a mandatory stop for politicians of all stripes. This year's main festivities took place in the Ashdod Opera House and provided an opportunity for Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to issue a plea for unity in the face of "all the difficult things we have to deal with." During the day, the Mimouna festivities continue with large gatherings in parks in every city in the country. The largest crowd is expected in the southern town of Netivot, home to the tomb of the Baba Sali, a revered Moroccan kabbalist rabbi. In the words of the traditional Mimouna greeting: "Torbakhu u-tsa'adu," May you prosper and be successful.