

# **Fear and Faith**

**Doorposts and Lintels,  
Fighting Fear When Homes Become Tombs,  
Leaps of Faith from Narrow Places  
in  
Haiti and Egypt**

**Parashat Bo / Beshallach 5770**

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## THE SYMBOLISM OF THE WORD "MITZRAYIM" (EGYPT)

פסוק 1/13

The root word of *Mitzrayim*, according to Brown, Driver and Briggs, is *mem/tzadi/resh*, מצר, *metzeir*, meaning *to border, to shut or to limit*. Other sources claim the etymology of the word *Mitzrayim* lies in *tzar*, either צר or צור, the verb, means *to bind, tie up, be restricted, narrow, scant, or cramped*, while צר, a noun, means *straits, or distress*, and as an adjective means *narrow, or tight*.

All commentators agree that *Mitzrayim*, the word, represents *hardship, distress, oppression, a narrow place or straits* etc.

The prefix *mem* [ "מ" ] can modify the meaning of a root word and thus create a noun with the meaning "the place of..." [E.g., *Mezuzah* (מְזוּזָה) is derived from "the place of" מוּזָה / *to move, move about* – i.e. the doorpost on which the door moves.] Using this morphology, *Mitzrayim*, based upon the root צר or צור, means *the place of restriction, a cramped and narrow place* etc.

*Mi-Mitzrayim* (from/out of *Mitzrayim*) ...

"In each and every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of *Mitzrayim*" (Pesachim 10:5).

Emerging בִּי (from/out of) hardship and bondage, from *the place of* [the prefix, "מ"], i.e. *narrowness, bondage or restriction*, and of "צר," *straits or distress*, creates the phrase *mi-Mitzrayim* (from *Mitzrayim*) a word that in essence encapsulates and precipitates *the Story of Redemption*. The word *Mitzrayim* thus represents an enduring "spiritual" association with Israel's redemptive experience.

*Mitzrayim* thus becomes both the symbol and the experience of captivity, of being caught/bound in narrow place(s), and our symbol of deliverance, both of which are captured so beautifully in Psalm 34:7,

זֶה עֲנִי קָרָא וַחֲי שָׁמַע וּמַכֵּל-צָרוֹתָיו, הוֹשִׁיעוּ

Here was a lowly man who called,  
and the LORD listened,  
and delivered him from all his troubles.

2

The lowly/humble one, עֲנִי / *oni*, *calls/cries out* ...and the LORD delivers him/her from all *straits/distress*, (צָרוֹתָיו / *his trouble*, from the root צר).

Source: <http://www.etz-hayim.com/resources/articles/mitzrayim.php>

3- צָרוֹתָיו הַשְׁתָּה לוֹ אֵל וְהוּא עֲנִי

We dream / MLK - But dreams can be dangerous -  
(Monty Python)

1

But dreams sustain us / Nobody knows the עֲנִי  
... we see - but we shall live

# Emerging from the Narrow Places – in Song

**Exodus 15:20** And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

**כ** ותקח מרים הנביאה אחות אהרן, את-התוף--בַּיָּדָה; ותצאנן כל-הנשים אַחֲרֶיהָ, בַּתִּמְבִּילִים ובמחלות.

**21** And Miriam sang unto them: Sing ye to the LORD, for He is highly exalted: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea. {S}

**כא** ותען להם, מרים: שירו ליהוה כי-גָּאֹה גָּאֹה, סוס ורכבו רָמָה בָּיָם. {ס}

## Haiti: Woman rescued one week on 'came out singing'



This is the amazing moment that Mexican firefighters pulled a woman to safety after she spent a week buried under rubble following the Haiti earthquake.

Anna Zizi was rescued on Tuesday about 3.30pm local time from the wreckage of a priest's residence at the main Roman Catholic Cathedral in Port-au-Prince.

She was brought out on a stretcher but was singing when she emerged, said Sarah Wilson, of Christian Aid. She was put on a drip and taken to hospital on the back of a truck.

Wilson watched as the firefighters finally rescued the woman after working for days among the wrecked buildings.

"It was an amazing thing to witness, no one could believe she was still alive," said Wilson, who is working with an assessment team that is part of the ACT alliance, an international grouping of faith-based charities.

"It seems rescuers were communicating with her and managing to get water to her through a tube. She was singing when she emerged. Everyone clapped and cheered," she said.

Photo credit: Paul Jeffrey, ACT alliance



## ***Standing at the Door – Confronting the Destroyer – The Question Arises: Stay or Leave?***

**Sent:** Fri, January 15, 2010 6:43:10 AM

**Subject:** a message from Amelia in Haiti

Dear practically everyone,

First of all, thank you for all your heartfelt messages on Facebook and email. I read them all, and it really touches me. It reminds me that I do not live in a vacuum, and that the world is watching - apparently with dedicated interest, everything that is happening on this tiny, and now truly, god-forsaken island. It is hard for me to respond to you all, because I don't have much time, and we have very limited computer access - and I am spending most of my time trying to get the material we are filming out to the world.

But rest assured, I am fine. Tired of course, a bit undernourished, but I have enough water and a more or less stable place to sleep. I am right next to the airport, and if evacuations are necessary, then I am in a good place for that.

I want to tell you a little of what has happened to me, and what I have seen - only because I am realizing that many of you are struggling to picture how life is for us - for me - and you want to know that I am ok.

**Essentially, the entire world here changed in a matter of about 45 seconds. I went to work on Tuesday morning with a strapless maternity dress on that my sister gave me, and little pumps and a red bead necklace. At 4:48 I was calmly sitting at my computer, thinking about going home soon. I had just been talking through the door that splits my office with my cameraman's office, Blago, about leaving in the next 20 minutes. And I hear this noise that I thought was a really huge bumbly truck coming down the driveway by my office. So I stood up to see the truck - I mean, what kind of vehicle makes a noise like that really? And as I walked to the window, my brain computed that the building was vibrating, then swinging wildly from side to side. I wasn't scared, I was just perplexed, and trying to remember what to do in a situation like that - is it "hide under the desk" or "run outside". For some reason, I thought it was "stand in a door jam" so I was trying to get to the door of the building, which is 7 feet from my office. And I kept falling, and Blago was behind me, and I fell, and he laid on top of me to cover me - I guess he thought the answer was "lay on your colleague in an earthquake". And our other colleagues were behind us, one of them, crazy Logan the camera man who runs boot camp classes in his free time, was bounding down the hall, bouncing off walls and screaming "GET OUT! GET OUT! GET OUT!" He grabbed Blago by the neck and somehow I found myself falling down our front steps, landing on our car which had crashed into our building. And then we were all kneeling on the pavement, rubbing our eyes. The shaking stopped. Then started again. And someone said "where is our headquarters?" Because all we could see was dust. No sunlight, no buildings, no thing more than 4 feet in front.**

It took us more than 20 minutes to verify that our 6 story headquarters were no longer there. It's the type of thing that just does not compute. New Yorkers will understand this after Sept 11 - the building is supposed to be there, and you look to see it, but your brain can't figure out why it's not there.

In the shantytown outside our offices, the fates were the same. We sat huddled in the parking lot of our HQ, in the dark, listening to tens of thousands of people scream and cry and wail. Wail. I mean really, like a tide. And every time there were tremors and aftershocks, the hills moaned in panic and fear.

I sat there for five hours, and wondered if my family knew what was happening. I know they listen to NPR while making dinner, and was picturing what they were doing when the news broke. And I was wondering how the news would break, because we had no power, no cell phones, no nothing. And people were wondering about the other islands. Was there a tsunami? What? At

around 11pm, I found a person in the lot with a small transistor radio. He was listening to Radio France International, which was reporting a massive earthquake in Haiti, epicenter in Port-au-Prince. Good god, I thought, is God really trying to finish this little island - I mean, how much more can it take? It seemed so unfair that Haiti had to take this on. And it was surreal that we were sitting in the center of the mess, and couldn't know what was going on - we had to listen to news reporting from Paris, that was getting their information from CBS in America. very bizarre. Me sitting there in my strapless maternity dress and heels, smudged with dirt and mud, sitting with my knees up and thinking of my family. And I really was regretting my choice of wardrobe in that moment.

I spent the night watching the rescue operations. Which were very sparse. It's hard to pull people out of hundreds of tons of concrete. Maybe they pulled 10 people out, and we struggled to see the faces. Is it anyone I know? Please be one of ours. I sat with a colleague whose husband was missing, and whose 1 year old boy was in her 4th story apartment in the hills above the city. She was stone-faced and silent, eyes wide watching the rubble. She was able to get home and rescue her child at 2am, her husband's whereabouts are still unknown.

We are just now beginning to understand who is not showing up, whose faces have been absent in the little recovery area we've set up in the logistics base by the airport. This is where I am now. It's an awful experience. To know that the people that you meet for coffee, the ones you say hi to at parties and bars, the ones you have stupid arguments with over email about catty, dumb shit - that suddenly those very people could be dead. Or worse, trapped in a small space, without air, in pain.

I think many of us get by right now on these things. First, the notion that "I survived". I survived. I am still alive. That building came down, and by some miracle, I'm still here. So I better be happy about it and not waste it because many people are not so lucky. And second, "there is very important work to do". There is - tons of it. Tons of rock to be moved, tons of people to be saved, tons of bodies to be picked up, tons of food to be handed out - and water. And for me, tons of TV to be sent out to the world. So we throw ourselves into these things, with gusto. It's better than sitting around waiting, and feeling helpless. And last, "miracles do happen". One of the security officers - a guy who would have been on the team that Eduardo was to join next week - was stuck under the rubble somewhere on what used to be the 4th floor. He could talk on his radio. He was awake, stuck in a hole. And the workers couldn't get to him - there was 2 meters of concrete between him and them, constant tremors, and too many fears of dislodging the whole mountain of stuff to get to him. But finally, today, after nearly 48 hours without food and water, he walked free from the debris, unscathed. And promptly resigned from the UN - who can blame him? When we heard this, many of us cried. "Thank you god - and please let this happen again".

So a few more details, and then I go. I am sleeping on the floor in the logistics base - outside actually, because nobody really feels that comfortable being indoors and asleep. We all have a reflex to stay near exits now. I have my yoga mat and a sheet. I'm ok. I work all day, feeding TV material to broadcasters. Our camera people go out in the field, I am the one who gets the tape, edits it, and sends it off via internet. We have rationed water, and one MRE (meal ready to eat) per day, and we scrounge around for other snacks. So far I am fine. And with the international crews coming in, I am sure we will get more food and help very soon.

The city is... well. I don't really know how to describe it. It's sort of like everyone you know - EVERYONE - getting into a serious car accident on the same day, at the same time. Some come out without a scratch, and others - don't. Many of my colleagues lost everything. Some lost children, others a husband or wife. Logan lost his entire apartment and everything inside it. Me - in the face of all that - I am doing pretty darn well! And very thankful that Eduardo was not here when this happened. I don't know what I would do if I couldn't find him.

I thank you all again for your love and messages, I read them all, every one, and they give me a happy sort of feeling in this sad dark place. So keep us in your prayers. Donate money or - something - to a valid humanitarian organization. And keep in touch with me, I love hearing from you. I send all my love, I am sorry I can't write more, please don't worry, I am safe.

Love,  
amelia

**NIPS** basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. <sup>23</sup>For when the LORD goes through to smite the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the lintel and the two doorposts, and the LORD will pass over the door and not let the Destroyer enter and smite your home.

<sup>24</sup>“You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. <sup>25</sup>And when you enter the

**RASHI** not “threshold” as it more often means. The phrase is repeated to prevent you from thinking that one could apply blood to the two doorposts and the lintel by dipping the bunch just once. Rather, each of the three applications of blood had to be made directly from “the blood that is in the basin,” one dip for each application. **None of you shall go outside.** This tells us that once the Destroyer is given permission to harm, he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked. And night intrinsically gives permission to those who cause harm: “You bring on darkness and it is night, when all the beasts of the forests stir” (Ps. 104:20).

**23 The LORD will pass over.** Will take pity. Of course, it also means “pass over.” [Q.]

**25 When you enter the land.** The observance of Passover was made dependent on their entering the land. The only passover offering they were obligated to make during the

[Q] See Rashi’s comment to v. 13.

**NAHMANIDES** our Sages. **None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning.** This is why they were commanded to put the blood on the lintel, so they would be protected inside; see v. 13. I do not understand Rashi’s citation of Ps. 104:20; he would seem to be saying that this verse prohibits people from going out of their homes on any night. He should have said that the Destroyer was given permission to harm on *this* night, and they were therefore warned against him. But Rashi did not see his way clear to saying this, because it was the Holy One Himself who struck the blow on this particular night. The same comment is given in the Mekilta, but somewhat differently. According to the Mekilta, the Israelites in Egypt were warned not to go out of their houses that night because the Holy One was passing through Egypt like a king preceded by armed guards to make sure that no one would meet him or see him. Similarly, when Moses asked to see God, he was put “in a cleft of the rock” (33:22) to protect him from the seraphim and the rest of the heavenly retinue. Since we have found that once the Destroyer is given permission to harm he does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, people are not permitted to violate the custom of the Patriarchs (described in rabbinic literature) and go out at night, because that is the time when beasts, who cannot distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, are given permission to hunt. But it is not this verse that prohibits going out at night.

**23 The Destroyer.** The angel who causes destruction in the world at a time of plague, e.g., the angel who “extended his hand against Jerusalem to destroy it” (2 Sam. 24:16) after David took a census. But it was not he who would destroy the Egyptians, for it was the Holy One Himself who would strike that blow. [L]

**24 You shall observe this.** “This” refers to the passover offering mentioned in v. 21, even though it is somewhat remote, and not to the verses that follow it about putting blood on the doorposts, which was commanded only for the original passover in Egypt.

**25 This rite.** This, too, refers to the passover sacrifice. Deut. 15:17, “Do the same with your female slave,” provides another example where a shorthand reference refers not to what immediately precedes it but to something farther back.

[L] But the Destroyer would be present, and the Israelites would need protection from him.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS** priest’s right forefinger (Gersonides). **To the lintel and to the two doorposts.** They are given in reverse order from v. 7 to show that the exact order does not matter (Hizkuni). **None of you shall go outside.** As our Sages said in B. BK 60b, “When there is an epidemic in town, keep your feet inside the house” (Bekhor Shor). Some think this was meant to keep them from being scattered hither and yon at the moment the exodus was to start (Abarbanel).

**23 Not let the Destroyer enter.** The rabbinic comment “I and not an angel,” etc., means that God Himself came down and accompanied the destroying angels (Hizkuni). In my opinion, this “Destroyer” was a kind of moldy air that was inhaled into the body and went straight to the heart; naturally this air would have no way to discriminate between the righteous and the wicked (Abarbanel).

**OJPS** blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side-posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. <sup>23</sup>For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.

<sup>24</sup>And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. <sup>25</sup>And it shall come to pass, when ye be

**IBN EZRA** interprets *ezov*, the word translated “hyssop,” as Arabic *zaatar*, which in Europe is called “oregano”; it is an herb notable for its use in many delicious dishes. But this cannot be. According to 1 Kings 5:13, *ezov* is something that “grows out of the wall.” I have no idea what it is, but since it is contrasted in that verse with “the cedar in Lebanon,” one must assume that it is not a large plant. **The basin.** Over which the passover was slaughtered. Others interpret the word to mean “the threshold,” as in Ezek. 40:6, assuming the passover to be slaughtered at the threshold of the house. **Until morning.** See my comment to v. 31.

**24 As an institution for all time.** If the commandments were as they appear to us from the text, this would be saying that the application of the blood with a bunch of hyssop was “an institution for all time,” especially since the reason given for it in v. 27 is that God passed over the houses. Logically, this would be correct. Our predecessors, however, transmit the utterly true tradition that this expression refers to the passover offering. The children (v. 26) are asking about the unusual meal, unlike that of any other holiday—not about the hyssop.

**25 When you enter the land.** Only now does the text make clear that the passover offering can only be done in the land of Israel. The passover offered in the wilderness (Numbers 9) was offered on the basis of an explicit divine commandment for that one occasion; it was never again offered in the wilderness. On that occasion, being near settled parts, they had unleavened bread. The rest of the time, when they were

raoh's people at seeing their slaves depart, for with them went the dread of death that had obsessed them. They were like the portly gentleman riding an ass. The rider feels uncomfortable and longs for the moment of alighting, but his longing cannot compare in intensity with that of the ass groaning under the corpulent burden, and when their journey's end is reached, the ass rejoices more than his master. So the Egyptians were happier to be rid of the Hebrews than these were to be free.<sup>239</sup>

In general, the Israelites were not in a joyous mood. The strength of men is readily exhausted, mentally and physically, by the strain of a sudden change from slavery to freedom. They did not recover vigor and force until they heard the angel hosts sing songs of praise and joy over the redemption of Israel and the redemption of the Shekinah, for so long as the chosen people is in exile, the Shekinah, who dwells among Israel, is also, as it were, in exile. At the same time, God caused the earth to exhale and send aloft a healing fragrance, which cured them of all their diseases.<sup>240</sup>

The exodus of the Israelites began at Raamses, and although the distance from there to the city of Mizraim, where Moses abode, was a forty days' journey, yet they heard the voice of their leader urging them to leave the land. They covered the distance from Raamses to Succoth, a three days' march, in an instant. In Succoth God enveloped them in seven clouds of glory, four hovering in front, behind, and at the two sides of them, one suspended above them, to keep off rain, hail, and the rays of the sun, and one under them to protect them against thorns and snakes. The seventh cloud preceded them, and prepared the way for

them, exalting the valleys and making low every mountain and hill.<sup>241</sup> Thus they wandered through the wilderness for forty years. In all that time no artificial lighting was needed; a beam from the celestial cloud followed them into the darkest of chambers, and if one of the people had to go outside of the camp, even thither he was accompanied by a fold of the cloud, covering and protecting him.<sup>242</sup> Only, that a difference might be made between day and night, a pillar of fire took the place of the cloud in the evening.<sup>243</sup> Never for an instant were the people without the one or the other to guide them: the pillar of fire glowed in front of them before the pillar of cloud retired, and in the morning the cloud was there before the fire vanished.<sup>244</sup> The clouds of glory and the pillar of fire were sent for the protection of Israel alone, for none beside, not for the heathen and not for the mixed multitude that went up with them; these had to walk outside of the cloud enclosure.<sup>245</sup>

The cavalcade consisted of six hundred thousand heads of families afoot, each accompanied by five children on horseback, and to these must be added the mixed multitude, exceeding the Hebrews vastly in number.<sup>246</sup>

So profound was Israel's trust in the Lord, that they followed Moses uncomplainingly into the wilderness, without supplying themselves with provisions.<sup>247</sup> The only edibles they took were the remains of the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs, and these not to satisfy their hunger, but because they were unwilling to separate themselves from what they had prepared lovingly at the command of God. These possessions were so dear to them that they would not entrust them to the beasts of burden, they carried them on their own shoulders.<sup>248</sup>



Lo ti-ra mi-pá·chad lái·lah,  
mei-cheitz ya-uf yo·mam.  
Mi-dé-ver ba-ó-fel ya·ha·loch,  
mi-ké-tev ya·shud tzo·ho·rá·yim.  
Yip-pol mi-tzid·d'cha é-lef,  
u-r'va·vah mi-mi·né·cha,  
ei-lé·cha lo yig·gash.

Rak b'ei·né·cha tab·bit,  
v'shil·lu·mat r'sha'im tir·eh.  
Ki At·tah, A·do·nai, mach·si,  
El-yon sám·ta m'o·né·cha.  
Lo t'un·neh ei-lé·cha ra·ah,  
v'né·ga lo yik·rav b'o·ho·lé·cha.

Ki mal·a·chav y'tzav·veh lach,  
lish·mor·cha b'chol d'ra·ché·cha.  
Al kap·pá·yim yis·sa·ún·cha,  
pen tig·gof ba·é·ven rag·lé·cha.  
Al shá·chal va·fé·ten tid·roch,  
tir·mos k'fir v'tan·nin.

“Ki vi cha·shak va·a·fal·l'téi·hu,  
a·sag·g'véi·hu ki ya·da sh'mi.  
Yik·ra·éi·ni v'e·e·néi·hu,  
im·mo A·no·chi v'tza·rah,  
a·chal·l'tzéi·hu va·a·chab·b'déi·hu.  
Ó·rech ya·mim as·bi·éi·hu,  
v'ar·éi·hu bi·shu·a·ti.”  
Ó·rech ya·mim as·bi·éi·hu,  
v'ar·éi·hu bi·shu·a·ti.

## PSALM 91

לֹא תִירָא מִפֶּחַד לַיְלָה,  
מִחֶץ יָעוֹף יוֹמָם.  
מִדֶּבֶר בְּאַפֵּל יְהִלָּךְ,  
מִקָּטָב יִשׁוּד צְהָרִים.  
יִפֹּל מִצִּדְךָ אֵלֶיךָ,  
וּרְבֻבָה מִיְמִינֶךָ,  
אֲלֵיךָ לֹא יִגָּשׁ.

רַק בְּעֵינֶיךָ תִּבְטֹחַ,  
וְשִׁלְלַת רָשָׁעִים תִּרְאֶה.  
כִּי אַתָּה, יְיָ, מַחֲסִי,  
עֲלִיוֹן שְׁמַת מְעוֹנֶיךָ.  
לֹא תֵאַנֶּה אֵלֶיךָ רָעָה,  
וְנִגַּע לֹא יִקְרַב בְּאַהֲלֶיךָ.

כִּי מַלְאָכָיו יִצְוֶה לָךְ,  
לְשָׁמְרֶךָ בְּכֹל דְּרָכֶיךָ.  
עַל כַּפַּיִם יִשְׁאֹוּנֶךָ,  
פֶּן תִּגְף בְּאַבֶּן רִגְלֶךָ.  
עַל שַׁחַל וְפֶתֶן תִּדְרֹךְ,  
תִּרְמָס כָּפִיר וְתִנְיֹן. ←

”כִּי בִי חֶשֶׁק וְאַפְלָטָהוּ,  
אֲשַׁגְבֶּהוּ כִּי יַדַּע שְׁמִי.  
יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ,  
עֲמוּ אָנֹכִי בְצָרָה,  
אֲחַלְצֶהוּ וְאֶכְבֶּדְהוּ.  
אֲרַךְ יָמִים אֲשַׁבִּיעֶהוּ,  
וְאֶרְאֶהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי.”  
אֲרַךְ יָמִים אֲשַׁבִּיעֶהוּ,  
וְאֶרְאֶהוּ בִישׁוּעָתִי.

<sup>1,2</sup> You will not fear the terrors of darkness,  
or the arrows of daily life.

The plague of certain death,

<sup>3</sup> or the torments along the way.

A thousand may fall at your left side,

ten thousand at your right,

but these terrors will not reach you.

Look with your eyes,

you will see how wickedness is repaid.

Because you took God as your protector,

the transcendent God as your haven,

no harm will befall you,

no plague will approach your home.

For God will assign angels

to guard you wherever you go.

They will carry you in their hands,

so that your feet will not be hurt by stones.

You will trample lions and scorpions

you will overcome all sorts of adversaries.

<sup>4</sup> Speaking of you, God will say:

“Because you are devoted to Me, I will rescue you.

I will protect you, because you know my Essence.

When you call to Me, I will respond.

I will be with you in times of trouble.

I will rescue you and cherish you.

You will have fullness of days,

and I will show you My salvation.”

<sup>5</sup> You will have fullness of days,

and I will show you My salvation.

## SIDDUR FIT RATON

### KAVVANOT

<sup>1</sup> The following kavvanah may be recited here:

Did the author of this psalm believe literally that “no harm will befall you” if you trust in God? Did the author test this belief by seeking out “lions and scorpions” to trample? Probably not.

The consequence of faith is not the absence of plague and arrows, but the absence of fear. The “terrors of darkness” will still be there, and we will still experience the “arrows of daily life” [literally, “arrows that fly by day”]. They will still be there, but if you position yourself beneath God’s “protective wings,” then “you will not fear the terrors of darkness,” you will be able to deal with them.

The promise of Psalm 91 is that if you “live under God’s sheltering presence,” the difficulties of life “will not reach you” – אֵילֶיךָ לֹא יִגָּשׁ – eilécha lo yiggash.

### COMMENTS

<sup>2</sup> The right column on page 24 is blank. Just as we break the glass at a wedding as a reminder of the destruction that befell us 2000 years ago, we leave each “completed” project slightly unfinished as a reminder that the world remains broken and is far from complete.

<sup>3</sup> The meaning of this phrase is unclear, as is reflected in its usual translation: “or of the destruction that wastes at noonday.” In the Talmud (P’sachim 112a), “keshed” is seen as a type of demon. Although we reject such beliefs as superstitious, we still speak of facing “demons,” thus we can understand this verse as: “If you place your trust in God you need not fear any demons you encounter.”

<sup>3</sup> This line, “Speaking of you, God will say,” is not in the text, but is added here to make it clear who is quoted in the lines that follow. Accordingly, there is a blank line on the left side of the page.

<sup>4</sup> The last verse of Psalm 91 is repeated in the Siddur, apparently to underscore God’s promise.

## 4

We Possess the Power  
and the Ability

Exodus 14:10–16

As a result of Moses and Aaron's forceful confrontation with Pharaoh and the power of the ten plagues, the king of Egypt relents and allows the Israelites to leave. However, once the Israelites flee Egypt, Pharaoh and the Egyptians have a change of heart and give chase. And though the Children of Israel leave Egypt defiantly,<sup>1</sup> Pharaoh and his chariots quickly overtake them (Exodus 14:5–9). As the Egyptians draw near, the Israelites raise their eyes and catch sight of them. In raising their eyes, the Israelites gaze heavenward, once again longing to witness God's protective presence, just as they experienced it in Egypt. But all they can see are the powerful Egyptians in pursuit.

## WITNESSING ISRAEL'S LOSS OF FAITH

Seeing the Egyptians bearing down on them, the Israelites become greatly frightened, *va-yir'u* (14:10). Here their vision leads to fear, indicated by a subtle wordplay on the Hebrew roots *ra'ah* (see) and *yarah* (fear).<sup>2</sup> They cannot see their way out of the predicament at the sea and therefore lose their faith. Even though they are saved from Egyptian slavery through the actions of God and Moses, all they can now envision is dying in the desert at the hands of the very Egyptians

from whose clutches their God released them. As a result, they challenge Moses, asserting, "Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us into the wilderness to die? What is this that you have done to us, taking us out of Egypt? ... It is better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert" (14:11–12). They prefer to be persecuted and die of their suffering in Egypt, than die in the barrenness and aridity of the desert.<sup>3</sup>

Forgetting all that God has done to redeem them from Egypt, including the awesome power exhibited by God through the ten plagues, the Israelites cry out (*va-yitza'ku*) to God (14:10), just as they had during their persecution by the Egyptians prior to the redemption.<sup>4</sup> They revert to a pattern of recrimination that preceded their experience of God's redemptive power, and to expressions of doubt that reflect their earlier response to God's promises: "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 to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?'" (14:12). Although the Israelites never actually say these words to Moses while they are in Egypt, they surely reflect the doubt that they must have felt when they are first assured that God will free them from Egyptian slavery. They now believe that it is better to suffer the pain of slavery than die at the hands of the Egyptians, especially in the desert where they cannot even be buried with dignity.<sup>5</sup>

The double irony here is that the expression *va-yitza'ku* (they cried out) generally means in the Bible that the Israelites prayed to God.<sup>6</sup> But just when we think that they are again praying for God's intervention, their words are actually directed against Moses in a most sarcastic manner,<sup>7</sup> as they continue addressing Moses directly (14:11). Nachmanides goes as far as to posit that even though they prayed to God, still believing in the Divine, they begin to doubt Moses and his authority and intentions.<sup>8</sup> Philo's extension of Israel's sudden accusations against Moses points up how the people's fear is turned into anger directed against their leader: "Is not ... slavery a lighter ill than death? You enticed [us] with the hope of liberty, and then have saddled it with the greater danger that threatens [our] lives. Did you not know that we were unarmed, and [did you not

recognize] the bitterness and savage temper of the Egyptians? Do you not see how great are our troubles; how impossible to escape? What must we do? Can we fight unarmed against the armed? Can we fly, surrounded as in a net by merciless enemies, pathless deserts, seas impassable to ships, or, if indeed they are passable, what supply of boats have we to enable us to cross?"<sup>9</sup> The people, facing crisis in the desert, immediately question Moses's authority and leadership, and voice the desire to return to Egypt.<sup>10</sup> This is a challenge addressed most personally to Moses, as seen by the clear emphasis in the text: "You brought us to die in the wilderness ... What is this that you have done [*mah zot asita*] to us? ... Is this not the very thing that we told you in Egypt?" It is all Moses's fault; the result of his megalomania!<sup>11</sup>

Ironically, the Israelites, in their condemnation of Moses, echo the Egyptians when they express regret at letting the slaves leave: "What is this that we have done (*mah zot asinu*)?" Both the Israelites and the Egyptians agree that the People of Israel are better off in Egypt. In fact, in attacking Moses's unwise, miscalculated, and dangerous initiative, the Israelites utter the name of Egypt five times, falling back on what they know, rather than trusting Moses. They can hardly mention *Egypt* often enough.<sup>12</sup> Great leaders rarely accomplish their mission without encountering internal opposition, which sometimes takes the form of personal attacks. Adversity can easily derail a leader who lacks fortitude, but it only energizes leaders with a strong purpose.<sup>13</sup>

Opposition and complaints assail Moses nonstop. Every time things go awry for the Israelites in the desert, they blame Moses. It is Moses, not God, who led them out of Egypt.<sup>14</sup> Even after the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea and the jubilant song of praise that follows, the people's anger is again directed at Moses. They use the interrogative, *Mah*, "What shall we drink?" (15:24). The Israelites are caught up in themselves and their own needs. It is always about them, and the people's contrarian nature seems to justify Moses's earlier skepticism about them.<sup>15</sup>

But the rabbinic tradition does not view the People of Israel as a monolith. It is hardly possible, according to the Rabbis, for Israel to plead for God's deliverance and at the same time complain so bitterly against Moses. So perhaps these sentiments reflect different seg-

ments of the people; those who believe in God's redemptive powers pray to the Divine: "*Va-yiz'aku Bnai Yisrael* [literally, they cried out] ... *el Adonai*," while others cry out and complain against Moses.<sup>16</sup> In fact, there may have been multiple voices present among the people, and the Rabbis pass down a tradition through the centuries that Israel was divided into four different camps as it stood before the Red Sea: "One camp said, 'Let us throw ourselves into the sea.' One said, 'Let us return to Egypt.' One said, 'Let us fight them.' And one said, 'Let us cry out against them.'"<sup>17</sup> Moses's words to the People of Israel at the Red Sea are the basis on which the Rabbis build the notion that there were four different attitudes among the Israelites, and his words are understood as embodying his responses to them. Moses is pictured as responding to each camp in unique ways, addressing each of their doubts, fears, and complaints. The camp that says, "Let us throw ourselves into the sea," is told, "Stand still and witness the deliverance of the Lord" (14:13). To the one that calls out,

"Let us return to Egypt," Moses says, "For the Egyptians you see today, you will never see again" (14:13). The one that cries, "Let us fight them" is told, "The Lord will fight for you" (14:14). And to the one that asserts, "Let us cry out against them," Moses replies, "You hold your peace" (14:14).<sup>18</sup> One of the most difficult challenges that every leader faces is to recognize the uniqueness of each individual. Too often, we tend to treat constituents as a unit—nameless faces without unique needs and individual stories. In Moses's responses to the various concerns expressed by the people, he models how to allay people's fears and guide them toward consensus. Would that we all could be so wise and insightful.

**D**ave Komansky, CEO at Merrill Lynch, stated that it is essential for people to know that you care about them. That does not mean you have to pander to them, or that you don't call attention to things that go wrong, or that you are afraid to say no. But they have to know that you care about them as individuals and respond to each in appropriate ways.<sup>19</sup>

### MOSES IS OVERCOME BY DOUBT

Moses responds to his people, addressing all their concerns, and ends by directing them to hold their peace. When they cry out to God, *va-yitza'ku el Adonai* (14:10), Moses urges them to be silent, *taharishun* (14:14). But then, the next thing we read in the biblical text is God saying to Moses, "Why are you crying out [*titz'ak*] to me?" (14:15). The irony is that the very action symbolizing the people's doubts and fears, *tza'ak*, cry out, is now used by God to describe Moses's state of mind and actions. Moses himself cries out to the Divine.<sup>20</sup> Although God has guaranteed Moses that the Divine will triumph over Pharaoh (14:4), Moses experiences doubt himself. Facing the sea with the enemy in pursuit, Moses seems not to know what to do and he himself cries out to God.<sup>21</sup> Moses prays to God: "Master of the Universe, I am like a shepherd who took his sheep from the level plains, and led them on high mountains, from where I can no longer bring them down ... I simply do not know what to do. We are trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea with no place to turn."<sup>22</sup> There are times when even the greatest leaders are lost and begin to doubt their own ability. No matter how much power Moses is able to wield in Egypt, confronted by the people when they behold Pharaoh's army in pursuit, he begins to cry out to God. And God responds to him: "Why are you distressed?" You have the ability to act.<sup>23</sup> Each and every one of us must realize that we possess the power to act, even when we face difficult challenges.

However, since Moses has just urged the people to stand strong and not fear the Egyptians, promising that God will lead the battle against them, thus ensuring victory (14:13–14), it is possible that his cry is not directed against God, in whom he continues to trust, but rather against the people. He may have been devastated by their challenge to his authority and their lack of faith.<sup>24</sup> He doesn't believe that they have the faith to enter the sea. In reaction to Moses's cry, God then says, "Why are you crying out to Me? Why are you so distrustful of your people? Just speak to them and they will move forward [into the water]. They will not disobey you!"<sup>25</sup> But just in case there did exist some doubt on the part of the Israelites concerning Moses's power and authority, God then directs him to raise his rod and extend

his arm over the waters of the Red Sea, thus recalling the miracles he performed in Egypt, which all began with his use of the *mateh*, the rod, as he stood before Pharaoh.<sup>26</sup>

### MOSES, AS LEADER, RESPONDS TO THEIR FEARS AND DOUBT

Despite his anger against the people because of their lack of belief in God's power and trust in his leadership, Moses is not dispirited, neither by the danger inherent in the moment nor by the censure of his people.<sup>27</sup> He is still able to understand their doubts,

Facing tremendous loss of sales and the possible closure of the plant in Mexico, Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, CEO of Nestlé, needed a new, courageous manager for the company's Mexican operation. He hired an individual who had his doubts about whether the operation could succeed, but possessed a courage that was greater than his fear. The manager conveyed in a measured but firm way to each employee his resolve and confidence, and assured Brabeck-Letmathe: "If you have confidence in me, I will get it done."<sup>31</sup>

given the predicament they are facing, and he responds to them.<sup>28</sup> The tradition emphasizes his ability to pacify the myriad of Israelites, responding directly to each of their fears: "Don't fear [*al tir'au*]. Stand firm and see [*re'u*] God's deliverance" (14:13).<sup>29</sup> Moses acknowledges their fears, but encourages them to "see" their situation differently. The sound play on *tir'au* and *re'u* underscores his response to his people: They have nothing to fear, for they will indeed no longer see the Egyptians again in the same way, as God will defeat them. The threefold occurrence here of the verb *to see* [*ra'ah*] is not coincidental. Fear is the product of a way of seeing, of perspective; a change in the way they see will change their feelings and thinking.<sup>30</sup> Like every great leader, Moses had to subordinate his own feelings of disappointment, hurt, or even rejection by his followers in order to fulfill his role as leader. It is difficult

to suppress one's own ego and even personal comfort in the name of the larger mission—in this case, the deliverance of the People of Israel from bondage. Perhaps Moses's ability to tolerate the people's fears, doubts, and even their challenges to his authority comes from the recognition of his own human misgivings and his self-doubt.

Fearing an all-out and seemingly futile battle against Pharaoh's soldiers, Moses offers the simple visionary declaration: "God will do

**H**erb Kelleher, Southwest Airlines' CEO, said, in this spirit, "You have to be willing to take risks for your people. If you won't fight for them, then you can count on the fact that your people will [not support you]."<sup>37</sup>

battle for you; you simply hold your peace" (14:14). The Israelites no longer have to murmur and groan about their situation,<sup>32</sup> since God will protect them as the Divine did in Egypt. God will act and all they have to do is stand by and

witness God's redemptive power. It is the powerful simplicity of Moses's words and actions that bolster his people as they face the enemy and the sea.

After responding to his people's fears and complaints, assuring them that God will save them, Moses turns to God, as we can see from God's reaction: "Why do you cry out to me?" (14:15). Moses cries out on behalf of his people, embodying their fears and needs.<sup>33</sup> When they cry out, he also cries out.<sup>34</sup> The tradition consistently understands Moses's cry as his praying on behalf of the people.<sup>35</sup> When Moses tells them that God will save them, the people do not have the strength of belief to await God's intervention and redemption. As a result, Moses prays to God to show them the Divine's power. According to a rabbinic legend, God shows them the accompanying ministering angels who will defend Israel against the Egyptians.<sup>36</sup> Leaders have to lay themselves on the line for their people, especially when the people face tremendous challenges to their success or even their survival. Leaders have to be able to articulate the hope that the people's mission will be fulfilled and communicate to the people their essential belief in them.

## MOSES MUST ACT IF THE PEOPLE ARE TO BE SAVED

Moses believes with his entire being that God will intervene on behalf of the Jewish people, destroy the Egyptians, and enable his people to cross the Red Sea. He is convinced that he and the Israelites merely have to stand by and quietly observe the manifestation of divine power, just as they did during the ten plagues in Egypt. Yet after telling his people that God will do battle for them, nothing happens. There appears to be a gap in the biblical account, since the very next thing we as readers learn, following Moses commanding the people "to hold their peace,"

is that God asks Moses, "Why are you crying out to me?" (14:15). 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 yet acted. In this gap in our story, Moses himself perhaps begins to become anxious as he awaits divine intervention and none of the tribes of Israel is daring enough to

enter the waters of the sea. The Rabbis in the Midrash say that one person, Nachshon ben Aminadav, the head of the tribe of Judah, is brave enough to jump into the Red Sea. When Moses sees, however, that Nachshon is drowning, he begins to cry out prayerfully to God to save Nachshon and, by extension, all the people. It is then that God finally responds to Moses, saying: "Moses, my friend—Nachshon? ... the people as a whole?—is drowning in the water, the sea is closing in upon him, the enemy is in close pursuit, and you stand there praying! Do something!" Moses responds to God: "Ruler of the universe, what can I possibly do?"<sup>38</sup> Moses, who is every leader and every person, doubts that he has the power and ability to ensure his people's deliverance. But

**F**acing the perils of the Antarctic, Ernest Shackleton frequently contrived ways for each of his crew members to play some kind of meaningful role. He recognized that they all had to feel that they were doing something important, even if they weren't. For example, when their ship was trapped in ice, he had the men attempt to pick, saw, and ram their way out, even though he knew that they would most likely have to wait for the thaw.<sup>39</sup>

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

It is said that Winston Churchill's supreme talent was in motivating people to act. He understood that nearly all human organizations are subject to inertia, which results in an "it-can't-be-done" attitude, and he found this totally unacceptable. He knew how to communicate to people in order to goad them into giving up their reasons for not acting. Churchill once urged a diplomat: "Continue to pester, nag, and bite. Demand audiences. Don't take no for an answer."<sup>41</sup>

no such thing as passive redemption!

As a result, the first thing that God commands Moses to do is to "speak to the Children of Israel." If he does so, God guarantees him that "They will move forward [into the water]" (14:15). Every leader must clearly communicate his expectations to the group; only then will they respond positively and act. Articulating a vision—in Moses's case, what God expects of the

people and what will happen if they act—is foremost if change is to occur.

At this moment, crying out to God in prayer—even speaking to the Israelites—is not enough. When God silences Moses by saying to him: "Why are you crying out to me?" (14:15), it is clear that words are insufficient to ensure Israel's redemption. This is no time to pray or to speak with the Israelites, since Israel is in grave danger.<sup>40</sup> God, in effect, is saying to Moses: "Stop talking and act!" And the emphatic, *ve-atta*, "And as for you, Moses," which stands as a counterpoint to Moses's statement to the people, *ve-attem*, "And as for you [pl.], hold your peace" (14:14), underscores Moses's most important role: to act himself. It is not enough for him to speak to the Israelites; he must be a model of action. Therefore, God continues commanding him: "Raise your rod and extend your hand over the sea" (14:16). It is as if God were telling him, "You should have acted on your own initiative, by instructing Israel to proceed into the water, instead of crying out to Me. You should have used your staff to bring about the

means for such a crossing of the Red Sea."<sup>42</sup> Leaders must exemplify action in the face of adversity if they want their followers to learn that they, too, must act to improve their world. Mustering the courage to act, the leader inspires her followers to take similar corrective action.

Every leader, including Moses, must learn that he possesses the power to act. Moses has to raise his rod—the symbol not only of God's presence, but also of Moses's own ability—and place it over the waters of the sea, and they will indeed part (14:16). And lest the people, or even Moses himself, believe

that he can only perform miracles using the staff of God, God gives him the double command: "Raise your rod," and then adds, "and extend your hand over the sea." Only then will the sea split. In a sense, Moses has to divest himself of the rod and then extend his empty hand over the waters.<sup>44</sup> Moses's hand channels, or even becomes, God's own hand, which is described as being extended [over the waters] in the Song of the Sea (15:12).<sup>45</sup> Or perhaps it is God's hand that guides Moses's hand and causes the waters to part.<sup>46</sup> In any event, when Moses stretches out his hand, God parts the waters (14:21). If only all religious leaders—even all human beings—would learn that when we act in the world, we act in God's stead and, in those moments, we fulfill our divine potential. And we, like Moses, must also learn that if we do *not* act, nothing will happen. The Rabbis emphasize that if Moses had not raised his rod and extended his hand over the waters, the sea would not have been divided.<sup>47</sup>

Yet another tradition put forth by the Rabbis emphasizes that the sea splits only when the Israelites themselves move into the waters.<sup>48</sup> According to one version, the miracle occurs when the

Jon Carlzon, CEO of SAS Airlines, when standing up to Air France, which threatened to stop SAS from flying to France, noted: "We had the courage to act ... and once we dared to take the leap, we gained much more than we ever could have imagined." His ability to act in the face of severe challenges was a tremendous morale booster for SAS and united his staff behind him.<sup>43</sup>

waters reach their nostrils, that is, when they are ready to sacrifice their lives.<sup>49</sup> When they overcome their doubt and faithfully take the first step into the Red Sea, Moses is finally able to perform the miracle of dividing the waters.<sup>50</sup>

The people need to feel that they are participants in this pivotal moment, that they have a role in ensuring their own survival. The tradition therefore stresses that even when Moses commands the people to “be silent and witness God’s redemptive power” (14:14), the people should have acted by raising their voices in praise and exaltation of the Divine.<sup>51</sup> A leader must make her followers feel that they are contributing in a meaningful way, especially when they are facing serious challenges. A leader has to truly understand—and then convey to her followers—that their actions will make a difference. At times it may be difficult to find something worthwhile for everyone to do, but giving everyone a role is one crucial psychological aspect of leadership.

The People of Israel continue to grumble, even after the parting of the Red Sea and their miraculous deliverance from the hands of the Egyptians. As noted earlier, after they leave the sea and set out on their journey through the desert, they complain again to Moses that they have nothing to drink! (15:24) Dwelling more on their own immediate situation and needs, they fail to recognize God’s protective

Winston Churchill infused his leadership with historical perspective. “The longer you can look back,” he wrote, “the farther you can look forward.” He also noted, “I have tried to [bring] history up a little nearer to our own times ... that it should be a helpful guide in present difficulties.”<sup>53</sup>

commit to action because of their unwavering belief.<sup>52</sup> Second, God always keeps faith with those of earlier generations, to whom God promised the deliverance of their progeny—individuals who embody

a belief that leads to action—such as Abraham’s circumcision of or his binding of his son, Isaac.<sup>54</sup> These ancestors served as models by which those of a later generation, leaders and followers alike, can learn what is expected of us all, thus ensuring Israel’s future.



presence and Moses’s leadership ability.

So if the Israelites have not changed, why does God deliver them in the first place? The answer may be twofold. First, God always acts for the meritorious few—those in every generation, like Nachshon ben Aminadav, who

