

*Parashat B'shalach* (Exodus 13:17-17:16)

*Parashat B'shalach* describes a moment of exultation. The Israelites are free from slavery, yet are pursued by Pharaoh's army. In response to the miracle of the splitting of the sea, Moses (and Miriam) leads the people in song. That is why this Shabbat is known as *Shabbat Shirah*, the Shabbat of Song.

*Shirat Hayam* (the Song of the Sea) comprises eighteen verses of poetry describing God's majesty. It ends with a prophecy: The Israelites' enemies will be rendered powerless "... until your people have crossed, O God; until the people You acquired have crossed over" (Ex. 15:16). This refers to crossing the Jordan River to freedom in the Land of Canaan. The repetition of the phrase *ad ya-avor* (crossing over) is interpreted to predict two crossings: First Joshua will lead the people into the land to conquer it, and second Ezra will lead the return from the Babylonian exile to rebuild it (Babylonian Talmud B'rachot 4a).

Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935; first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine) interprets further: The two crossings represent the first and second Temple periods, respectively. Each of those periods of history represents a distinct aspect of *k'dushah* (sanctity). The first is an innate *k'dushah*, inherited from the Biblical patriarchs and matriarchs. The second is an acquired *k'dushah*, which results from our own individual actions. Kook claims innate *k'dushah* is revealed only through acquired *k'dushah*. That is, your innate *k'dushah* remains inert until your acquired *k'dushah* activates it. Put another way, pride in heritage is meaningless unless you actively contribute yourself to the ongoing saga of the Jewish people.

Gut Shabbos/Shabbat Shalom