

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS BESHALLACH**

**BY
HESCHEL GREENBERG**

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS
BESHALLACH**

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS BESHALLACH**

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS BESHALLACH

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B”H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Beshallah* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

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In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Beshallah is obviously a fundamental parsha with respect to Redemption for it is the parsha that describes the culmination of the very first Redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage which is the forerunner of all other Redemptions including the Messianic one.

ESSAY ONE

FEAR OF PHILISTINES

We are now standing on the threshold of a new age, the Age of Redemption, which parallels the Exodus from Egypt.

We must be mindful of the threat that comes from the modern day Philistines; from those who deride and mock all attempts at our liberating ourselves from the shackles of exile.

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ESSAY ONE

FEAR OF PHILISTINES

The Villainous Philistines

One of the numerous and persistent villains the Jewish people faced in Biblical times were the Philistines. When the Jewish people emerged from Egypt as a free nation, G-d did not allow them to use the direct and shorter route on their way to the Promised Land. Instead, He had them take a circuitous route, to avoid subjecting the Jews to a military confrontation with the Philistines.

In the Torah's own words:

“When Pharaoh let the people leave, G-d did not lead them along the way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near; for G-d said: ‘perhaps they change their minds when they would see war and return to Egypt.’”

On the surface it seems that G-d had them take the longer route to avoid fighting a war.

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Upon deeper reflection, however, one has to wonder as to why the Torah follows this up with a statement that “the Jewish people went up armed out of the land of Egypt.” If they were well equipped to fight a battle, they obviously anticipated the eventuality of a battle. After all, the Egyptians might have second thoughts about letting the Jews go, and would decide to pursue them – as they eventually did. This, of course, would have necessitated a battle.

In addition, there was always the possibility, that the Jews would have to fight the many hostile tribes that inhabited the area, such as Amalek, which is, in fact, what occurred, as recounted later in this week’s Torah portion. And, of course, they certainly anticipated entering the Promised Land, where they would inevitably have to engage the indigenous population in battle. Now, if the Jews were prepared to fight, why was G-d so concerned with this particular battle?

One answer to this question, provided by *Rashi*, lies in the close proximity this battle would have occurred to Egypt. The danger of them wanting to return to Egypt was much stronger if the return trip was so straight and simple. G-d was not concerned with the eventuality that the Jews would have to fight. He just wanted to make sure that it would not happen so close to Egypt.

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A Lesson for the Education of Our Children

There is a lesson we can derive from G-d's concern for the fledgling Jewish nation for the education of our children in our own times. A nation, in its formative stages, needs to have peace and tranquility for it to survive. So too a young impressionable mind should not be subjected to all sorts of spiritually hostile influences that pervade our society. When we educate our children we should be most careful to expose them only to the most pure, positive and spiritual ideas..

And while we have to equip our young with the means to fight and prevail over these negative influences that will inevitable threaten us, we should not rush to expose them to what might be harmful to their spiritual development.

Avoiding the Cynics

There is also an additional lesson to be learned from the fact that G-d wanted to prevent them from engaging the Philistines in battle. What was so terrible about the Philistines?

According to our sages, the Philistines were known for their carefree lifestyle, caring for nothing and mocking everything and everyone serious. The Philistines were thus a constant

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source of irritation to the Jewish people whose mission in life was a G-dly one.

The greatest danger that confronts our spiritual growth – and especially the growth of our youth – comes from those who sneer at our beliefs and practices.

For this reason, the *Shulchan Aruch*, Code of Jewish Law begins with an admonition not to be deterred by the mockers, because that is the most formidable challenge to our commitment to all that follows in the Code of Law, especially for beginners.

When the Jews left Egypt, the one battle this fledgling nation could not handle, was the battle against this spirit of mockery and derision that characterized the Philistines.

Mocking G-d and Moshiach

As we stand on the threshold of a new age, the Age of Redemption, which parallels the Exodus from Egypt, we must also be mindful of the threat that comes from the modern day Philistines, from those who deride and mock all attempts at our liberating ourselves from the shackles of exile.

Indeed, King David (Psalm 89) predicted that before the coming of Moshiach there will be those that will mock G-d

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and Moshiach. This is a reference to people who deride the faith that Jews have that G-d will make good on His promise and bring Moshiach who will usher in an age of total freedom, goodness and an era of G-dly enlightenment. Our task now is resist the modern day “Philistine” attitude of scorn and march joyfully towards the Redemption.

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ESSAY TWO

MOVE-ON!

The entire process of the Jewish people being in Egypt and then leaving with its wealth was intended to “liberate” the sparks of holiness embedded in Egypt.

The principal goal of liberating these sparks was to set the stage for the ultimate giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which enables us to transform the world.

That transformation is incomplete when the world exhibits signs of resistance. The ultimate goal of Redemption is to have the world consent and willingly submit to G-d’s rule.

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ESSAY TWO

MOVE-ON!

Moses' Coercion

“And Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea...”

The term “led Israel onward” used here is traditionally thought to imply that the Jewish people were hesitant to move from the site where they crossed the Red Sea and Moses had to force them to continue on their journey.

Rashi, citing the Midrashic work Mechilta, explains that indeed Moses had to force them to leave because the Egyptians had decorated their horses with gold and silver ornaments, and precious stones. The Jewish people were so engrossed in removing these treasures from the bodies washing up on the shore of the sea that they were not ready to continue their journey.

Commentators raise the question why Moses forced them to leave. Wasn't G-d's promise to the Jewish people that they would leave Egypt with great wealth? Indeed, G-d “pleaded” with Moses to get the people to borrow the

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possessions of the Egyptians so that G-d's promise to Abraham that his progeny would leave with great wealth would be fulfilled. Presumably, there were no upper limits given as to what constituted great wealth, and as much as the Jewish people amassed in Egypt proper, there was no reason why they couldn't acquire more from the Egyptian dead. If so, weren't they engaged in a Mitzvah, complying with G-d's will that they leave with great wealth?

Receiving with Dignity

When G-d told Moses to tell the Jewish people to take the wealth of Egypt with them, he prefaced that request with the following words:

“And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians.”

Only after this introduction did G-d state to Moses:

“And it shall come to pass, that when you go, you shall not go empty. But every woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of who dwells in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and garments; and you shall put them upon your sons and upon your daughters, and you shall spoil the Egyptians.”

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And, indeed, in the next Parsha the Torah records how G-d's request was fulfilled:

“And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they asked of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of gold and garments. And G-d gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And they despoiled the Egyptians.”

From the above passage we see that G-d wanted the Jewish people to take the wealth of Egypt in a *respectable* manner. G-d wanted the Egyptians to look favorably on the children of Israel and actually desire to part with their wealth.

G-d Wants a Receptive World

The mystical rationale behind this is that, in truth, the entire process of the Jewish people being in Egypt and then leaving with its wealth was intended to “liberate” the sparks of holiness embedded in Egypt. The principal goal of liberating these sparks was to set the stage for the ultimate giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, which enables us to transform the world. That transformation is incomplete when the world exhibits signs of resistance. The ultimate goal of Redemption is to have the world consent and willingly submit to G-d's rule.

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This helps explain why G-d did not allow King David to build the Bais Hamikdash. It is traditionally ascribed to David's coarsening role as a warrior. But David's wars were necessary; indeed he performed his duty as a monarch by defeating the nations attacking Israel and for this he was not allowed to build the Temple? Why did the Jewish people have to wait for King Solomon to build it?

One answer to this question is that King David's wars, while necessary, indicated that the world was not yet receptive to G-d's plan of making His dwelling place on Earth through the construction of the Bais Hamikdash. Only in King Solomon's time, when the nations of the world paid homage to him, indicating that the world had demonstrated receptivity to G-d's Master Plan, was it possible to build the Bais Hamikdash.

The first step in this process occurred when the Egyptians viewed the Jewish nation favorably. That was an opportune time to take their wealth, which set the stage for Sinai and enabled the use of those materials in constructing the Mishkan.

When the Egyptians had a change of heart and pursued the Jewish nation, signaling the reverse of their good will, it indicated that they had taken only a baby step and did not indicate that they had truly changed. Indeed, it is not until the Messianic Age that will we see the nations of the world

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being transformed and supportive of the Jewish people and their role in making the world a “dwelling place for G-d.”

As we are living in Messianic times now, as the Rebbe has told us, we can see this process coming closer to fruition. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, arguably the greatest manifestation of Exile, and Russia’s support of Jewish interests (although, by no means perfect) we can already see how this transformation process is closer to fruition than ever before. However, when the Jews left Egypt three millennia ago the process was still in its infancy and subject to vacillations.

This may explain why Moses was unhappy with the Jews tarrying at the banks of the Red Sea to pillage the wealth of the Egyptian dead. Although they were commanded to take the wealth of the Egyptians with them, there was a proviso: they must do so with the consent and good will of the Egyptians. Otherwise it was not a step in the direction of Sinai, but a meaningless desire to accumulate even more of the wealth of Egypt; a step in the wrong direction.

The lesson for us in our own day and age is that while we have been given a license to enjoy our material blessings, we must always be mindful of our motives. Our intention should be for elevating and transforming the material to get us closer to Moshiach.

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Changing Roles

A second way of answering the question of why Moses was unhappy with the Jewish people's tarrying at the Red Sea involves a better understanding of the changing roles that occurred at the splitting at the sea.

As long as the Jews were in Egypt, they were commanded to take the treasures of Egypt with them to liberate the sparks embedded within Egypt. This process, however, has its limits. When a requisite number of sparks are liberated, the focus has to change.

Once they had been liberated from Egypt and were out of reach of its army, Egypt was no longer allowed to be their focus. While there might still have been some unliberated sparks left there, as evidenced by the gold and silver worn on the horses of the Egyptian pursuers, it was no longer the mission of the Jewish people to liberate them. Now their mission was to march forward to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

Before the sea was split, the Jewish people responded to the crisis of impending attack by a vengeful foe in four ways. One group said "let us return to Egypt;" a second: "let us fight them;" a third: "let us drown ourselves in the sea;" while a fourth group said "let us pray." G-d rejected all four responses. Why?

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The Rebbe explains that none of these responses was correct in this situation. They had been told that their Exodus from Egypt was tied to receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. March forward towards Mount Sinai! should have been their only response.

Certainly, after the tribes had crossed the sea, Egypt should have been outside of their purview. Whatever mission they had had in conjunction with their stay in Egypt was now over; now the focus must be directed, exclusively, forward to receive the Torah.

The New Direction Today

A similar pattern of reluctance to move away from the past and confront the new present direction can be seen today.

The Rebbe has revealed to us that the process of “liberating the sparks of holiness” which necessitated our going into exile has drawn to its end. “Now,” the Rebbe said, “our mission is to welcome Moshiach.” While in the past observance of the commandments was focused on self and world-refinement, today, the focus must be on preparing ourselves to greet Moshiach.

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What is the difference?

It certainly does not mean that we take the Mitzvos less seriously. The distinctive Jewish belief in a Messianic Era means that our fidelity to the observance of the commandments will become even stronger than it is today. Not only will we not decrease the number of Mitzvos we observe, G-d forbid, our Mitzvos will increase in number because we will be able to fulfill the commandments that require performance in the Bais Hamikdash, etc.

What this means is that our focus should no longer be on repairing what is wrong with society, but on realizing what potential for the Redemption exists right in front of our noses and then attempting to reveal that potential. This does not mean that there are no ills in society and that we should not attempt to repair them, but it means that we repair them by revealing the Messianic energies that already exist, which will extinguish the remaining negatives.

A simple analogy can illustrate this point. While embarked on a journey we cannot focus solely on our destination. Rather, we must put our attention on the journey itself. This means following directions, obeying signs and signals, not falling asleep and defending ourselves against any distraction that can cause us to lose our way.

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Only when we reach our destination can we change our focus to see that we are properly attired, etc., consistently with the importance of that destination. It would be foolhardy for us to think about the trip itself because we have already reached our destination.

The Rebbe explained that the Redemption is here, waiting in front of us. Now our mission is to “open our eyes” and recognize the new reality; “prepare ourselves for the imminent Redemption” and usher it into our lives by living a life of Redemption. We should stop looking back at history and cease fighting ancient battles. The crucial battle that we have left is the battle to keep our eyes open.

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ESSAY THREE

LEADERS AND HEROES

Moses' greatness is not measured by what he was, i.e., his knowledge, piety etc., but by what he was *not*.

Moses was so close to G-d that he was totally self-effacing.

He had completely surrendered his ego, not by falsely denying his own qualities, but by recognizing how everything he possessed was from G-d.

His every deed, word or thought, every fiber of his being, was devoted to G-d. Every aspect of his life revolved around G-d.

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ESSAY THREE

LEADERS AND HEROES

Believing in Moses

This week's Torah portion, *Beshallah* features the splitting of the Red Sea (or: The Sea of Reeds), the crossing of the Jewish people and the drowning of the pursuing armies. This event marked the end of the Exodus from Egypt. The Jewish nation was now free to forge ahead towards Mount Sinai and the Promised Land of Israel.

Not only was this the culmination of the physical process of the Exodus, but, it also represented the spiritual growth of the Jewish nation. This spiritual sophistication is captured by the Torah's statement in this week's parsha: "And they believed in G-d and in Moses His servant."

The Midrash comments on this verse:

"One who believes in the leader of Israel, it is as if one believes in He who created the universe."

Obviously, the Midrash wishes to express the idea that the faith the Jewish people reached at the Sea of Reeds was of

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a uniquely high level of faith because they also believed not only in G-d – but in Moses as well.

This statement begs for an explanation. Why is belief in Moses so crucial to one's belief in G-d? Furthermore, wouldn't belief in anything else but G-d detract from our belief in one true G-d?

Greatness Measured by what He is Not!

The answer to these questions requires a better understanding of who Moses and other great tzadikim (righteous Torah leaders) were. Moses' greatness is not measured by what he was, i.e., his knowledge, piety etc., but by what he was *not*.

Moses was so close to G-d that he was totally self-effacing. He had completely surrendered his ego, not by falsely denying his own qualities, but by recognizing how everything he possessed was from G-d. His every deed, word or thought, every fiber of his being, was devoted to G-d. Every aspect of his life revolved around G-d.

Not Hero Worship

Because he had no ego, he was able to successfully serve as an intermediary between G-d and the Jewish people. By

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connecting to Moses, one was connecting to a person whose whole being was characterized by its receptivity and openness to G-d -- thereby making oneself receptive and open to Him as well.

The novice in matters of faith accepts G-d without being prepared to surrender his/her whole being. True, the egocentric person can also believe in and serve G-d. But, there is always the danger that one's ego and personal interests might interfere with one's relationship with Him.

When the Jews crossed the Red Sea, they achieved the level of "G-d-centricity," which manifested itself in their faith in Moses His servant.

The emphasis on faith in righteous people found in Jewish teachings is rooted, not in conventional hero worship, but in the tzadik's righteous person's ability to bring us closer to an awareness of – and, therefore, a connection to – G-d that we could not achieve on our own. Hero worship enhances our own egos, faith in tzadikim enhances G-d's presence in our lives.

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ESSAY FOUR

THE ESSENCE OF JOSEPH

Moses, knowing that ultimately the Jewish people will be going through a long and arduous exile—symbolized by their journey through the desert —prepares them for the journey by taking Joseph’s essence (literally: bones) with him.

No matter how far and how long the exile, no matter how far a Jew may stray, Moses and all the Jewish leaders of each and every generation, personify the Joseph trait of caring for those lost souls and bringing them back into the fold, so that no Jew will be left behind when Moshiach takes us out of exile.

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ESSAY FOUR

THE ESSENCE OF JOSEPH

Joseph's Bones

The newly formed Jewish nation has just left Egypt and become a free people. In describing their journey out of Egypt, the Torah mentions what seems to be a detail of secondary importance.

“Moses took Joseph's bones with him, because he had made his brothers swear saying, ‘G-d will surely remember you, and you shall bring up my bones from here with you.’”

Why is this detail of Joseph's bones highlighted here?

The Midrash enlightens us by applying the verse in Proverbs, “A wise heart takes Mitzvos” to Moses, who occupied himself personally with transporting Joseph's bones.

Commentators are baffled by the application of the term “wise” in relation to Moses' involvement with the Mitzvah of transporting Joseph's bones. What wisdom did that

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display? If anything it was a sign of his piety, his devotion to Mitzvos, and his concern for the dignity of Joseph. In what way was it a testimony to his wisdom?

Bones and Essence

To better understand the significance of Moses' carrying Joseph's bones in the context of the Exodus, we should focus our attention on the Hebrew word for bones-*atzamos*. The same word, according to the Kabbalistic work *Megaleh Amukot*, also conveys a different translation, which is "essence." Hence, the phrase "*atzmos Yoseph*" which is usually translated as, "Joseph's bones" can actually be rendered, "Joseph's essence." What Moses did was not just transport his bodily remains but, in addition, in doing so he was actually carrying Joseph's essence.

What is Joseph's essence?

If we had to describe Joseph we could say many things about him based on all the Torah's narratives with the light shed on them from our Oral Torah as it is preserved in the Talmud, Midrash and Zohar. Joseph was a precocious child, brilliant scholar, favorite of his father, hated by his brothers, industrious, good-looking (inside and out), a slave, manager of his master's household, resistor of temptation, manager of the prison's affairs, all of these

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arising from his inner moral strength and courage, compassion, prescience, regal bearing, a leader forgiving and nurturing.

But what is Joseph's essence?

Joseph's Name

The Rebbe addresses this question (in his voluminous work *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 26) and refers to Joseph's name as his essence, because it is our Hebrew name that is the very source of our existence. The Torah tells us that G-d created the world with Divine speech. The forces of creation are thus the Hebrew letters. Each letter represents a Divine energy which possesses creative powers. The Hebrew name therefore represents the very life force of the person with that name.

What does the name "Joseph" mean?

The Torah explains that when Rachel bore Joseph—her first child after many years of childlessness—she named him Joseph saying, “May G-d add [*Yosef*] another son for me.”

In other words, Joseph represents the desire to increase the family's children. His life is about growing the Jewish people.

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But there is more to it than just increasing the number of Jews quantitatively. The text does not just say, “May G-d add a son.” It inserts the word “another”—“another son.” The *Tzemach Tzedek* (the third leader of Chabad) derives from this additional word that Joseph’s name—and therefore his essence—relates to Joseph’s ideal as one who takes “another,” i.e., a person who is an outcast, outside the pale of the Jewish people, and transforms him into a son, an insider.

Joseph’s essence, the Rebbe concludes, is a qualitative increase. Not only do we try to increase our numbers; the greatest increase is when we take a Jew who appears lost to us and bring him back into the fold, into the domain of holiness.

So when Moses prepares the Jews for a long circuitous sojourn through the desert—as mentioned in the preceding verse: “G-d led the people on a circuitous route through the desert... ” he needed to arm himself with Joseph’s essential trait, his ability to transform the most threatening situations and daunting challenges into a “son.”

The Jewish people’s journey through the desert after the Exodus the Rebbe proceeds to apply to our own experience in exile. The desert is a foreboding and hostile place and a fitting metaphor for exile. We need to take with us Joseph’s essence and bring every Jew back into the fold by bringing

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the light and warmth of the Mitzvos to every Jew no matter how far he or she may have strayed.

Modern Day Joseph

The Previous Rebbe (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn of sainted memory, the sixth leader of Chabad-Lubavitch, whose passing in 1950 occurred on the Tenth day of Shevat, which we will observe this week) was—as his successor, the Rebbe, stresses—an heir to the Joseph tradition in our own time. He pioneered the movement of reaching out to every Jew by reaching into his or her inner core and revealing that the “outsider” and stranger status of the Jew is only that: on the outside. Within lies within is a warm and receptive Jewish heart and soul—a son.

With the Rebbe’s premise we can now also understand why the Midrash refers to Moses’ carrying Joseph’s bones from Egypt as a form of wisdom, not just an act of piety.

The definition of “Wisdom” according to the Talmud is one who can see now what the future will bring: “Who is a Chacham? One who sees the future.”

Moses, knowing that ultimately the Jewish people will be going through a long and arduous exile—symbolized by their journey through the desert —prepares them for the

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journey by taking Joseph's essence with him. No matter how far and how long the exile, no matter how far a Jew may stray, Moses and all the Jewish leaders of each and every generation, personify the Joseph trait of caring for those lost souls and bringing them back into the fold, so that no Jew will be left behind when Moshiach takes us out of exile.

Joseph's Essence – Second Dimension

There is another dimension of Joseph's essence that is reflected in yet another translation of Joseph's name. And as we shall see, even the essential trait of Joseph to transform the outsider into an insider is but his *modus operandi*. The second interconnected translation of his name relates to Joseph's goal and ultimate objective.

Where do we find a hint to this second aspect of Joseph?

We find it in the very last words Joseph uttered to his brothers before his passing at the end of the Book of Genesis. The Talmud teaches us that everything follows the end or seal of a text—its “bottom line.” Here too, as we shall see, Joseph's parting words, with which the entire Book of Genesis concludes—its seal—capture Joseph's essence:

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“Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am going to die. G-d will surely remember you and take you out of this land, to the land He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’”

Joseph then adds:

“Joseph made the children of Israel swear, saying, ‘G-d will surely remember you, and you should take my bones [read: essence] out of here.’”

Joseph’s last will and testament was about his people’s liberation from exile and the removal of his bones from there. Joseph did not speak to them about their next two centuries in Egypt. He did not advise them on his death bed about any of the things which related to his role as a Viceroy of Egypt. Joseph’s obsession was the getting out of Egypt—Geulah-Redemption! That was Joseph’s essence!

It is true that in order to reach this goal one must go through the desert of exile and confront the hostile conditions, withstand them, and transform the “other” into the “son.” However, we must not forget that that this is but the role of the Jew still on his or her way to the final Redemption.

When we were years, decades, centuries away from the Redemption we had to focus on the journey itself, and, to

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some extent, of necessity required to put the goal on a “back burner.” But now that we are so close to the final Redemption we have to look at the other translation of Joseph’s name the Rebbe often refers to when discussing his illustrious father-in-law, the Previous Rebbe, whose name was also Joseph:

The prophet Isaiah (11:11) states: “And on that day, G-d will again [*yosif*], a second time, extend His hand to recover the remnant of His people...” Here too, the prophet uses Joseph’s name in conjunction with the future Redemption. Indeed, the Midrash on the beginning of Exodus links this verse with Joseph’s name.

Goal and Methodology

In other words, Joseph’s name describes both his methodology and the goal of his efforts. His goal is to bring us to the time when we will all be liberated from all that is undesirable in exile, and the methodology is through lovingly reaching even those of our children who have become alienated.

This adds yet another layer of meaning to the characterization of Moses’ carrying Joseph’s bones as “wisdom.” Wisdom, as noted above, refers to the ability to see into the future. Moses does not only see Joseph’s bones

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(read: essence) as a means to help cope with the challenges of exile; he even sees beyond this and recognizes the second definition of Joseph's essence—the goal of bringing the ultimate and final Redemption.

Yud Shevat, the anniversary of the passing of the Previous Rebbe, and also the ascension to leadership of the Rebbe, is the appropriate time to articulate and integrate the twin, interwoven Joseph essences. We must not lose sight of the goal and recognize that we are standing on the very threshold of “another” Redemption—one that will be unlike all the preceding ones in its magnitude and finality. Simultaneously, we must employ Joseph's essence, i.e., the methodology of reaching into ourselves, our families, and every Jew to find the “son” even where the facade says it is an “other”, a stranger.

And just as we accept every Jew no matter how far he or she may have strayed because they are our children, we ask G-d to look at us the same way and take us out of the state of “otherness” and exile-induced alienation and bring us to the state of Redemption when we will experience the embrace of the Divine “otherness.”

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ESSAY FIVE

THE SONG OF THE FUTURE

Shaloh quotes the Midrash that says:

“In the future, Israel will sing praise in the future.”

As soon as the news of the Redemption is announced, they will sing praise for the future miracles even before they will happen.

Just by hearing that the Redemption with its attendant miracles are imminent will suffice to inspire us with faith, joy, and song.

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ESSAY FIVE

THE SONG OF THE FUTURE

The Ten Songs

The song that the Jewish people, led by Moses, sung when they crossed the Red Sea is one of the most powerful expressions of praise, joy, and gratitude there has ever been. According to the Midrash (Mechilta) it is one of Ten Songs that are mentioned in the Torah—the tenth being the one we will sing in the Messianic Age. Indeed, it is the first song that is mentioned explicitly in the Torah. (According to the Mechilta, the first of the ten songs was actually sung the night of the Exodus. That song, however, is not mentioned in the Torah; it is alluded to in the Biblical book of Isaiah.)

Another factor that makes this song stand out is that in it we already have allusions to the last song that will be sung in the future Messianic Age, after the Resurrection of the Dead. The song opens with the words “*Az yashir Moshe*”, which is usually translated as “Then sang Moses.” However, Rashi notes, the literal translation should be, “Then Moses

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shall sing.” One of Rashi’s explanations for the use of the future tense is that while Moses was singing praise for the miracles that the Jewish people witnessed then, he was also alluding to the miracles of the future Messianic Era, after the Resurrection of the Dead, when Moses will be back to sing the ultimate tenth song.

Indeed, as *Ba’al HaTurim* notes, the word *yashir* is a composite of two words: *yud shir*, which means “ten songs,” intimating that all ten songs were already implicit in the song they sang when they crossed the sea.

Another hint to the ten songs can be found by counting ten letters from the letter *shin* of the word *shirah*-song, a count that will lead us to the letter *yud*. If we count another ten letters we will find the letter *reish*, and then counting another ten letters will bring us to the letter *hei*. These four letters coded into the text at intervals of ten yield the word *shirah*-song!

A Song of Faith

The question is what was it that prompted Moses and the Jewish people to sing such an exalted song which had eluded them before, during the time when they witnessed the incredible miracles of the Ten Plagues and then their actual departure from Egypt?

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While it is true, as noted above, that they did sing praise on the night of the Exodus, that song is neither recorded in the Torah nor does it contain any enduring message that will be repeated in the future. The song of the crossing of the sea, by contrast, is indeed connected to the future as well. It is of enduring value. What is so unique about this particular song?

According to *Shaloh* (the seventeenth century, Halachic authority and Kabbalist), based on the Midrash, the key to understanding the power of this song can be found in the verses which precede the song. There it states that “they believed in G-d and Moses His servant.” It is the strong faith that they exhibited that provided them with the Divine inspiration to sing this exquisite song.

Feminine Anticipatory Faith

However *Shaloh* makes an astute observation: With respect to the men’s song, the Torah employs the feminine term *zos* for the word “this (song),” whereas in the song led by the women the Torah uses a masculine word *lahem* for the word “(to) them.”

Shaloh answers by establishing the premise that the women’s faith was on a much higher level than that of the men. Their song was therefore described in the more “muscular-masculine” form as opposed to the song of the

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men which exhibited a much weaker faith and was therefore phrased in the more diffident, feminine form.

What was it that was lacking in the men's faith?

Shaloh answers that the men did not fully believe in the miracles that were to happen until they had actually happened. Although they were told by G-d through Moses that these miracles would occur, this promise did not move them. They were not motivated to sing praise to G-d for something that hadn't happen yet.

Thus the Torah introduces the song of Moses with the words, "Then Moses and the children of Israel sang," with the emphasis on the word "then." Moses was suggesting that only then was he able to give expression to the miracles through the medium of song. He could not have sung until that point, at which they finally expressed their faith in G-d.

The women by contrast exhibited their faith even before they witnessed the miracles. Proof of this is the fact that they had their tambourines with them because they anticipated that these miracles would occur and were fully prepared to make use of their instruments. They were in the joyous singing mode even before they witnessed the miracles. For the women, just hearing from Moses that these miracles would occur sufficed.

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In the Future Song before the Miracles

Shaloh states that in the future things will be different. He quotes the Midrash that says: “In the future, Israel will sing praise in the future.” *Shaloh* questions the repetitive language and provides an ingenious and inspirational answer:

As soon as the news of the Redemption is announced, they will sing praise for the future miracles even before they will happen. Just by hearing that the Redemption with its attendant miracles are imminent will suffice to inspire us with faith, joy, and song.

This, the *Shaloh* says, is the meaning of the order of the words in Psalm (98:1): First it states concerning the future, “Sing unto G-d a new song,” followed by “for He has wrought wonders.” First we will sing the new song of Redemption, and then we will experience the miracles.

Rectifying the Past

Perhaps we can connect the two diametrically opposite explanations of the introductory word *az*-then. The *Shaloh*, as mentioned above, understood its meaning as saying, “only then did he sing, but not earlier.” On the other hand, Rashi interpreted *az* to mean that he will sing this song in the future.

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It can be suggested that Moses was already hinting to the fact, that notwithstanding their hesitation to sing before they saw the miracles, in the future we will indeed then sing the song even before the miracles occur. What they were lacking in the past, as exemplified by their use of the word “then,” which Moses and the Children of Israel sang only after witnessing miracles, will be rectified “then.” In the future—“then”—we will sing praise even before all the miracles unfold.

Sing Now!

The lesson for our times is obvious. Our generation has been privileged to hear the Rebbe declare that we are living on the very threshold of the Redemption. Indeed these are clearly momentous times as we have already witnessed some of the greatest miracles of history with the collapse of the Soviet Union among all the miracles that involve Israel’s survival and growth. But there are still many more miracles waiting to occur. The Rebbe has also made the declaration, quoting the words of the Midrash, “the time of your redemption has arrived.” We must respond to this anticipation for the ultimate and imminent Redemption with joy.

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While joy has always been an indispensable part of Judaism it is now much more crucial. Now—despite all the negative things that have been occurring during the last few years that we must respond to appropriately—is the time to increase in joy. This joy, which expresses itself in song, is the ultimate means for us to demonstrate our faith in, and prepare for, the imminent coming of Moshiach and the true and complete Redemption.

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ESSAY SIX

TWO RIGHT HANDS

A wedding today is a combination of two features:

It is a reenactment of the first union of Adam and Eve that miraculously brought together two opposites, just as in the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea.

It is also a portent, a sample and a taste of the wedding of the future, where the unity of opposites will be experienced on the highest level.

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ESSAY SIX

TWO RIGHT HANDS

The Mother of All Miracles

The miracle that stands out among all miracles is arguably the splitting of the Red Sea (or the Sea of Reeds as some would translate it). Proof of this is that whenever the Talmud seeks to describe something that is extremely “difficult” for G-d it refers to this miracle. The most familiar example of this comparison is the statement in the Talmud (Sotah 2a) that for G-d to match a couple together in marriage is “as difficult as the splitting of the Red Sea.”

Obviously, no miracle is difficult for G-d. Chassidic thought explains that the meaning of difficulty in this context means that the miracle involved G-d’s unconventional powers. Whereas nature is also G-d’s power and handiwork, it is His power as it is cloaked in natural “garments.” It is said to come from the Divine name *Elokim*, which has the numerical value of the word *hateva*, which means nature. This is the G-dly force that is contracted and screened so that its true intensity and

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luminescence is obscured and it appears as if it is limited and finite. This is G-d's conventional power that we call nature.

When G-d performs a miracle—and the greater the miracle the more so—we experience G-d's unfiltered power. The world could not endure this power on a continuing and protracted basis. This aspect of G-dly revelation is associated with the name of G-d that we cannot and may not pronounce—the four lettered Tetragrammaton that is colloquially referred to as the name *Havaye*.

Concerning these two manifestations of G-dly power the Psalmist states: “For G-d [*Havaye*] Elokim are like the sun and its shield.” Chassidus explains that Havaye is the unfiltered light of G-d and compares it to the intense light of the sun that we could not endure but for the sun's sheath that shields us from its powerful rays. This shield is identified by the name Elokim.

But even with respect to miracles, some stand out as unique and therefore express an even more sublime and unfiltered G-dly energy. The splitting of the Red Sea is such a miracle.

In light of this analysis, the question may be asked, why is making a marriage considered so difficult? Isn't it quite natural for two single people to get married? Doesn't it say

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in the Torah with respect to the very first marriage, of Adam and Eve, “It is not good for man to be alone.” Isn’t it quite natural for marriage to take place? Why make the radical comparison to the Splitting of the Red Sea, the “mother of all miracles?”

Splitting the Sea and Marriage

To answer this question it is necessary to understand the thematic connection between the miracle of the splitting of the sea and marriage.

When the Torah describes the splitting of the sea it states, “the water was for them a wall on their right and on their left.” G-d could have performed this miracle—which allowed the Jews to escape and the Egyptian pursuers to drown—in any number of ways. What symbolism is there in choosing to have the water stand like a wall on both sides? Indeed, when Joshua split the Jordan on the way into the Land of Israel some forty years later, the Biblical text describes the water as piling up on one side. Why was it necessary to have the water form two walls?

The Midrashic work, Mechilta, explains that the walls that were on the right and on the left represent the two modalities of Torah and prayer, or Tefillin and Mezuzah.

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We merited this miracle, according to the Mechilta, because of our fidelity to these diverse Mitzvos.

Now we can easily understand how Mezuzah and Tefillin are connected to right and left. The Mezuzah is placed on the right doorpost and Tefillin are worn on the left arm. But how do Torah and prayer fit into the right and left configuration?

Torah-Right, Prayer-Left

Chassidic thought explains that Torah represents G-d's flow of wisdom from its Divine source down to our human intellect. Torah is thus compared to water that flows downward. This trait of flowing downward is also an expression of kindness where the one more fortunate—"above"—showers his or her resources on one who is less fortunate—"below." Torah is thus also referred to in the Book of Proverbs as *Toras Chesed*, the Torah of kindness.

Prayer, by contrast, represents the effort of the human being to raise himself or herself to a higher level. The ladder in Jacob's dream, the Zohar states, is the ladder of prayer that enables a lowly human being to rise upward to the heavens. The process of prayer is one of self-judgment and refinement. These qualities are associated with *gevurah*

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- severity or judgment – the trait that is the opposite of *chesed*/kindness.

Torah and prayer, which represent *chesed* and *gevurah*, and similarly Tefillin and Mezuzah, are therefore symbolized by the two parallel walls that were a result of the splitting of the Red Sea.

Duality

We can now see that the splitting of the sea into walls on the right and on the left reflected G-d's system of duality - between *chesed* and *gevurah* - in the spiritual realm which translates imperfectly in the physical world as the disparate and opposite forces of right and left.

In the realm of spirituality, right and left are both positive although they come from different directions and involve opposite traits. When these two modalities manifest themselves in the material world, however, the right and left become more divergent, and degenerate to the point where the right may symbolize goodness and kindness and the left may represent the negative forces in our world, including outright evil.

These two opposite forces of right and left provide us with two separate challenges. The positive or prescriptive

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Mitzvos-commandments we perform are designed to generate positive energy associated with the right. The negative or proscriptive Mitzvos are the means by which we resist, fight and negate the negative—symbolized by the left.

Unification of Right and Left

This explains the greatness of the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. This was not just a means to save the Jewish nation from the Egyptian pursuers. G-d could have done that in so many other ways. It was also not simply a way of punishing the Egyptians for centuries of barbaric torture of the Jews. The splitting of the Red Sea was the divine combination of right and left. It was the ultimate act of kindness and compassion for the Jewish people, who might not have been quite so deserving at that time. Simultaneously, it was a time when G-d unleashed the ultimate forces of destruction associated with the left-handed attribute of *gevurah*.

For these two diametrically opposite attributes to coexist defies our understanding of the natural order. Right and left cannot coexist unless a Higher power which transcends both right and left unifies them. That was the aspect of the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea that is described as

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“difficult.” It was not just a miracle where the laws of nature were suspended; it was a miracle that confounded our belief that opposites such as right and left cannot possibly coexist.

A similar dynamic is true of marriage. The successful union of the two opposite spiritual forces that are male and female can only exist when there is an overarching Divine force that brings them together in a most harmonious fashion.

Two Dimensions of Marriage

But even in marriage there are two dimensions.

In a discourse delivered for this Shabbos (forty years ago) the Rebbe elaborated on how the dual modalities of right and left will change in the Messianic Age. In that era evil will cease to be. The prophet Zecharya prophesized, “the spirit of impurity I will obliterate from the earth.” Yes, there will still be two modalities but rather than opposing forces of right and left, both entities will be associated with the right. There will be no evil and we will no longer need to negate it. Both of our forces will be directed to spiritual growth and elevation.

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In truth, even today the two disparate forces that we have are in their root and source truly one. However that unity is not evident in most areas of life. In the Messianic Age that will change. We will be able to see that what appear as separate forces are actually one and the same.

We can now appreciate more deeply the blessings recited at a Jewish wedding. One of the blessings in the Sheva Berachos-Seven Blessings refers to the first wedding of Adam and Eve. The blessing concludes with the words: “He Who brings gladness to the bridegroom and the bride,” as if they are entities linked together by marriage. The next blessing describes marriage in the future. This blessing concludes with the phrase, “He Who gladdens the Bridegroom with the bride,” suggesting a total or completely bonded union.

A wedding today possesses aspects of both features: It is a reenactment of the first union of Adam and Eve that miraculously brought together two opposites, just as in the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. It is also a portent, a sample and a taste of the wedding of the future, where the unity of opposites will be experienced on the highest level.

ESSAY SEVEN

SEA TRANSFORMED INTO DRY LAND OR DRY LAND BECOMING SEA

According to Rambam, there will be no fundamental changes to the nature of the world in the initial stage of the Messianic Age.

However, with the advent of the Resurrection of the Dead, a period of radical change to nature, there will be changes in the way we relate to Torah knowledge as well.

In the initial stage, the Rebbe explains, the world will remain in its natural state but will be exposed to previously hidden dimensions of G-dly knowledge.

In the second stage of the Messianic Age, the entire world will be subsumed into that sea of G-dly knowledge.

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ESSAY SEVEN

SEA TRANSFORMED INTO DRY LAND OR DRY LAND BECOMING SEA

Completion of Rambam's Magnum Opus

The central narrative of this week's parsha, Beshallah, describes the splitting and crossing of the Red Sea. It represented one of the greatest miracles witnessed by the Jewish nation and their Egyptian pursuers. Raging waters were transformed into dry land only to revert to their natural state when the Egyptian pursuers entered.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that nothing happens by coincidence. Certainly nothing relating to Torah is mere happenstance. This week, hundreds and thousands of Jews will have concluded the study of Maimonides' monumental and encyclopedic work, known as the *Mishneh Torah* or *Yad Hachazakah*. Since there are no coincidences, there must be a connection between this historic event, the weekly parsha in general and the story of the splitting of the sea in particular.

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The first connection that comes to mind is the very name *Yad Hachazakah*, which translates as “the mighty hand.” When the Torah concludes with G-d’s eulogy for Moses, the very last verse (Devarim 34:12) states: “And for the mighty hand ...” According to the Targum Yonoson, Nachmanides and other sources, this refers to Moses’ splitting of the sea.

It is fascinating to see the parallel here between Moses and his future namesake, the Rambam (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon). The first Moses demonstrated his mighty hand in splitting the sea and Maimonides, whose epitaph states “from Moses to Moses none has arisen like Moses,” demonstrated his own mighty hand in composing the *Yad Hachazakah*.

We must now try to understand the deeper underlying connection between Moses’ splitting of the sea and Maimonides’ writing of his magnum opus. On the surface, these two events represent totally different genres of might. The first is the power to control nature and the latter is the power to codify Jewish law.

Transforming “Sea” into “Dry Land”

To understand the connection between these two manifestations of a mighty hand, we must first consider the

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significance of the sea splitting and turning into dry land. The question has been raised why G-d chose to save the Jewish people through this method. G-d could have simply plucked the Jews out of Egypt. Why the need for such a dramatic double miracle of splitting the sea and drowning Pharaoh's entire army?

Chassidic philosophy answers that this event was actually intended as a prelude to and preparation for the revelation at Mount Sinai. The giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai represented a profound revolution in the nature of things. Before Sinai, the physical and spiritual realms were dichotomous entities. It was impossible to imbue a physical object with a spiritual character. G-d removed that barrier between the physical and the spiritual at Sinai. In the words of the Midrash, "the upper [spheres] can descend downward and the lower [spheres] can rise upward." Before Sinai the two dimensions were discrete and disparate, much like parallel lines that can never meet. After Sinai, we were empowered to merge these two spheres. Whenever we perform one of the Mitzvahs given at Sinai, we reveal G-d's power within the physical dimension of the world.

The realignment of the spheres at Sinai was foreshadowed six weeks earlier when G-d transformed the sea into dry land. The "sea" represents that which is normally concealed

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and “dry land” alludes to that which is normally revealed. The transforming of the water into dry land was thus not simply intended as a demonstration of G-d’s awesome power. Rather it transformed the hidden dimension of G-dly energy, symbolized by the sea which covers up all that is in it, into “dry land”, i.e., into a state of revealed G-dly energy.

Revealing Hidden Knowledge

We can now understand the deep connection of the splitting of the sea that we read about in this week’s parsha, in which G-d displayed His mighty Hand through Moses, and the *Yad Hachazakah* of the Rambam.

The Rambam’s work revealed heretofore ambiguous and even concealed knowledge. More than any other previous work, *Yad Hachazakah* made this elusive knowledge accessible to everyone. In the words of Rambam’s introduction:

“I Moses, the son of Maimon of Spain, ... contemplated all these texts and sought to compose a work derived from all these texts ... all in clear and concise terms, so that all the laws be revealed to small and big ...”

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Before Rambam's *Yad Hachazakah* one would have to have been exquisitely proficient in the Talmud to know these matters. The average person could not hope to swim in the "Sea of the Talmud" and emerge onto "dry land." Rambam took his metaphoric "staff," struck the "sea" of Torah knowledge and turned these secrets into "dry land."

Covered by the Sea

Indeed, the analogy between the splitting of the sea and Maimonides' magnum opus is reflected in the concluding words of his work:

"In that Era there will be neither famine nor war, neither envy nor competition, for good things will flow in abundance and all the delights will be as freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know G-d. The Jews will therefore be great sages and know the hidden matters, and will attain an understanding of their Creator to the [full] extent of human potential; as it is written [*Yeshayahu 11:9*], 'For the world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the ocean bed.'"

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These concluding words capture the essence of Rambam's contribution toward our reaching that goal, when no Divine knowledge will remain concealed.

A Major Difference

However, there is a significant metaphorical difference between the sea turning into dry land and the knowledge of G-d engulfing the entire world. In the former there ceases to be a sea whereas in the latter the entire world becomes a sea!

One can suggest a solution to this matter based on the Rebbe's discourse he delivered in the year 5751 and briefly again in 5752 on the occasion of the completion of the study of the entire *Yad Hachazakah*. The Rebbe demonstrates that this description of a world transformed into a sea of knowledge applies to the second stage of the Messianic Age, when radical, positive changes will occur.

According to Rambam, there will be no fundamental changes to the nature of the world in the initial stage of the Messianic Age. However, with the advent of the Resurrection of the Dead, a period of radical change to nature, there will be changes in the way we relate to Torah knowledge as well.

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In the initial stage, the Rebbe explains, the world will remain in its natural state but will be exposed to previously hidden dimensions of G-dly knowledge. That process by which the hidden dimensions of knowledge are revealed to us, one might suggest, is analogous to the splitting of the sea.

In the second stage of the Messianic Age, the entire world will be subsumed into that sea of G-dly knowledge. While the physical world will exist no less literally than before, we will cease to be spiritual “land creatures.” Instead we will become spiritual “aquatic” beings. Rather than revealing the seabed (read: hidden dimensions of knowledge) we will become one with that knowledge.

The Hand that Defeats Amalek

There is yet another connection between the Rambam’s work and this week’s parsha:

At the very end of the Parsha we read of the war the Jews waged against the evil nation Amalek shortly after their miraculous transit of the Sea. Amalek was defeated, the Torah says, while Moses’ hands were raised. This might be understood, allegorically, as a reference to the future Moses - Maimonides - whose “mighty hand” will neutralize the last vestiges of Amalek that separate us from Redemption.

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What is Amalek's modus operandi?

The Book of Devarim (25:17-18) describes Amalek's tactics. Among them we find: "... he cut off all the weak people at your rear." In other words, he used the tactic of divide and conquer. Our strength as a people is our unity. By separating Jews into classes, such as the strong and the weak, the big and the small, etc., Amalek undermines our ability to forge ahead.

The Rebbe's campaign to encourage the study of *Yad Hachazakah* was designed, among other objectives, to unite the entire Jewish people. As mentioned above, the Rambam's work was intended for all, both the "small and the big." It therefore has the capacity to unite the Jewish people.

Another one of the spiritual Amalek's tactics is to sow doubt in our lives. Indeed, the very word Amalek has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for doubt, *safek*. One of the features of the *Yad Hachazakah* is the absence of disputes and lengthy analysis likely to confuse the reader and sow doubts about the Torah's intention. Rambam's work confounds those doubts.

Amalek also attacks the people when they are weary from their travels. This is true specifically with respect to our generation, which has become weary from the length of

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our exile. We may easily become impatient with the time it has taken for the Redemption to materialize. As a result, people can lose faith and hope in the coming of Moshiach.

The Rambam's work is an antidote to that hope-poisoning tactic of Amalek. One of the main sources in Torah for knowledge about Moshiach and Redemption is indeed the *Yad Hachazakah*. Rambam devotes the last two chapters of his *Mishneh Torah* to the laws of the Messianic Age. The Rebbe explained that the study of Torah regarding the Redemption, in and of itself, helps condition our minds to think in ways consistent with a Geulah mentality rather than a Galus mentality.

The “mighty hand” of Moses that defeated Amalek then will rid us of Amalek now and prepare us for the ultimate true and complete Redemption.

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ESSAY EIGHT

ALL THE KING’S HORSE

When G-d created the world, Kabbalah teaches us, He did so by using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are actually divine instruments, or the DNA of creation.

These “letters” are forever vested within creation. And if G-d would withdraw them, the world would revert to its original state of nothingness.

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ESSAY EIGHT

ALL THE KING'S HORSE

Why the Singular Horse?

In this week's parsha, the Torah describes the splitting of the Yam Suf (translated either as Red Sea or Sea of Reeds) and the way the Egyptians with their horses drowned in that sea:

“And the Egyptians pursued and came after them, all of Pharaoh's horse[es]...”

Rashi makes the observation that the word for horse in this verse is in the singular (*Sus*), which raises the question, “did Pharaoh have only one horse?” Rashi provides the following explanation:

“This teaches us that they were all as significant before G-d as if they were only one horse.”

In truth, Rashi's answer seems only to generate another question. Is this the true greatness of G-d that He was able to defeat all of Pharaoh's horses as easily as one horse?

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Another question can be asked. When Rashi refers to G-d in his commentary on this verse he uses the uncommon term “*Hamakom*,” which really means literally “the Space,” and figuratively, “the One who fills all of space;” or “the Omnipresent One.” Why doesn’t Rashi use one of the other names he almost always employs for G-d?

Horses: A Metaphor for Letters of Speech

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, the horse, which was then the primary means of transporting one from place to another, is a metaphor for the letters of speech. Just as a horse takes its rider from one location to another so too letters of speech, as well as the written letters, convey a message from a person’s mind to the outside.

When G-d created the world, Kabbalah teaches us, He did so by using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, which are actually divine instruments, or the DNA of creation. These “letters” are forever vested within creation. And if G-d would withdraw them, the world would revert to its original state of nothingness. Hence, these letters are the most essential building blocks of creation.

Metaphorically, then, the reference to the horses of Pharaoh is an allusion to the divine letters that were instrumental in the process of the creation of the universe.

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And here the Torah informs us that all of the multifarious horses-letters (read: the infinite number of letter combination that are responsible for every atom and quark of existence) are in relation to G-d as if they were all just one letter.

From G-d's perspective the creation is not a fragmented and discombobulated world the way it frequently appears to us; it is a unified world, where everything expresses the absolute Oneness of its Creator.

Unity, Even Down Here

Moreover, the name for G-d used here is "*Makom*," which implies the aspect of G-d that is intimately involved in the process of creation; the aspect of G-d that "fills all the space." Even from this "lower" aspect of G-d there is absolute unity.

It goes without saying that from the vantage point of the infinite and transcendent aspect of G-d, all of the "king's horses" are no more significant than one horse; that there is no real division. The point here is that even from the perspective of the immanent Divine force that relates to the creation, "fills it," and is internalized within it, there is only one "horse."

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Many Windows but One Sun

This thought echoes the discussion in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 39a) between a heretic and Rabbi Gamliel. The Talmud relates that a heretic argued with Rabbi Gamliel:

“You say that the Shechinah (Divine presence) rests on every assembly of ten. How many Shechinas have you?”

Rabbi Gamliel replied with an analogy of the sun’s light which enters through many windows. Despite the multitude of windows there is but one sun and one light. Even when the light shines through different stain-glassed windows and the light appears to acquire the different colors and hues of the glass; it is obvious that the differences are only in the eyes of the beholder. From the perspective of the light itself there is only one light that can be refracted into many colors or hues, but in essence is one.

This then is the deeper meaning of Rashi’s statement that even from the perspective of the Divine presence that pervades our world and is contained within the parameters of space there is total unity—one “horse.”

The fact that this realization was made at the time of the splitting of the sea, is because this phenomenon was a prelude to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, at which time

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the power to bring G-d's presence into this world was to become a reality.

“I have Returned to the Garden”

In a landmark discourse issued by the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe to be studied on the day of his passing (Yud Shevat, the Tenth day of the month of Shevat. The anniversary of his passing and the ascension of the Rebbe to the leadership of the Chabad movement, was observed yesterday) the Rebbe cites a verse in the Song of Songs:

“I have returned to my garden, my sister my bride.”
The Midrash explains that this is G-d's address to His beloved people at Sinai: “I have returned to my garden-dwelling where I once resided.”

When G-d created the world, His presence was manifest within it. The world was therefore a veritable paradise, in both the physical and spiritual sense of the word. However, when Adam sinned, the Divine presence removed itself from creation. Subsequent sins only caused G-d to be further distanced from His creation and more inaccessible.

Seven successive generations from Abraham through Moses reversed that process of G-dly “withdrawal” from His world. He became increasingly more accessible until the

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revelation at Sinai and the subsequent building of the Sanctuary, whereupon G-d says to His people: “I have finally returned to My garden-dwelling.” From that point onward, humanity has the full capacity to make the world into a paradise on earth through its efforts at introducing G-d into the world through the performance of the Mitzvos.

Unity is Popular Today

This notion of unity within creation has become increasingly accepted and popular in all segments of society, negating and replacing the anachronistic view of a multifarious and fragmented universe. Science is arriving at the belief that there must be a single theory that explains and unifies all the forces of creation.

The reason the world is coming to this realization is because we are so close to the coming of Moshiach and the final Redemption, which is the end process of the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai. The potential for the world to perceive the Divine unity in everything that was inaugurated at Sinai will be fully actualized in the Messianic Era. And as we stand on the cusp of a new era we can already detect the emergence of unity within the fragmentation.

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For us to take all of the “King’s horses” and transform them into one “horse,” it behooves us to bring unity into our own lives. Every act of unity in our lives—unity between G-d and His world, unity between one person and another, unity between our bodies and souls— help to generate the final force of unity that will change the world forever.

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ESSAY NINE

TRANSFORMING THE IRRATIONAL HATRED

The Rebbe often referred to the phenomenon in recent times whereby hidden forms of good and evil have surfaced in the world at large and within individuals.

This phenomenon, the Rebbe stated, was a symptom of the Messianic Era.

Hidden evils are now surfacing, but, at the same time, hidden levels of goodness and holiness have also surfaced.

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ESSAY NINE

TRANSFORMING THE IRRATIONAL HATRED

The Power of Hate

When Pharaoh had a change of heart and decided to pursue the newly liberated Jewish people, the Torah relates how he prepared himself for that pursuit:

“He harnessed his chariot and took [or: persuaded] his people [to come] with him.”

Rashi makes the observation that Pharaoh harnessed his own chariot. Apparently, Rashi’s intention is to point out how unusual it was for a powerful monarch to harness his own chariot and not delegate the task to a servant!

Why would Pharaoh behave this way? And why would the Torah point out this anomaly?

At first blush, one is tempted to explain Pharaoh’s bizarre behavior by referring to the Torah’s statement that the heathen prophet Bilam saddled his own donkey on his way to curse the Jewish people. There too Rashi makes the

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observation that Bilam personally saddled his donkey and explains:

From here we can derive that hatred undermines the rules of normal behavior, for he saddled it himself. Said the Holy One Blessed is He, “Wicked one! Their Abraham had already preceded you as it says, ‘He woke up early in the morning and saddled his donkey.’”

Rashi interprets Bilam’s saddling of his donkey as a demonstration of his irrational hatred for the Jews and implies that Abraham’s act of saddling his own donkey was evidence of Abraham’s irrational love for G-d. Indeed, Rashi (Bereishis 22:3) applies the saying “love undermines normal behavior” to Abraham’s saddling of his own donkey.

The Difference Between Bilam and Pharaoh

Based on the foregoing it would seem that Pharaoh’s personal involvement in the harnessing of his chariot was also motivated by hatred, which can cause an otherwise normal person to behave irrationally.

However, if this is true one can ask why Rashi stresses, “from here [i.e., the story of Bilam] we can derive that hatred undermines the rules of normal behavior,”

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intimating that the earlier incident with Pharaoh does not convey that message. Why doesn't Rashi cite Pharaoh's unconventional behavior of harnessing his own chariot as an even earlier source for the lesson that the power of hatred can cause one to behave irrationally?

Moreover, the Midrash does, in fact, compare the hatred of Bilam, who personally saddled his donkey, to the hatred of Pharaoh, who harnessed his own chariot. Why does Rashi deviate from the Midrash in this regard?

The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos*, volume 28, p. 162) explains that there was a fundamental difference between Bilam's behavior and that of Pharaoh. Bilam was consumed with an abiding and profound hatred for the Jewish people. Pharaoh, on the other hand, wanted to convince his people to join him in pursuit of the Jewish people to retrieve the wealth they took from the Egyptians. In other words, Pharaoh's behavior was not irrational and was not motivated by hatred but by greed and the need to convince his subjects to follow him in the pursuit of the fleeing Jews.

The question can be raised: While this explains Rashi's approach, what can we say with respect to the Midrash? Why does it impute the motive of hatred to Pharaoh and compare him to Bilam? Wasn't Pharaoh motivated by greed and Bilam by hatred?

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Two Dimensions of Hatred

The answer to this question seems to hinge on the different approaches of Rashi and the Midrash which are reflected in the way they view the text of the Torah and, by extension, the way we are to understand and interpret people's motives.

Rashi follows the dimension of *p'shat*, the simple, straightforward and surface level of the Torah. When Rashi reads the text of how Pharaoh harnessed his own chariot he reads it in context. Right before this verse the Torah states,

Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart towards the people, and they said, "What have we done, that we have sent away Israel from serving us?"

In other words, they regretted having freed the Jews and thereby having lost the benefits of slavery.

Another "clue" that his harnessing of his own chariot was not an overt act of hatred is the way the Torah states, "He harnessed his chariot, and took the people with him." This, Rashi explains, means Pharaoh convinced them to join him by promising them he would lead the charge and divide the spoils equally. Harnessing his own chariot was a calculated and rational gimmick.

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The root of the word Midrash means to investigate and probe beneath the surface. It is in the Midrash that we dig deeper into the text and into human behavior.

Yes, it is true that Pharaoh was motivated by greed and the desire to get back his wealth and his slaves. But beneath the surface greed there lurked a deep-rooted hatred for the Jewish People.

Modern Day Forms of Anti-Semitism

In modern times two models—the Bilam and Pharaoh models—of anti-Semitism have emerged. There are some who do not hide their irrational hatred for the Jewish People; they state openly what violence they desire to do to us, may Hashem protect us from their designs! Tragically, we have seen too much of this evil in recent times. But there is an even more insidious form of antipathy to the Jewish people although it is often couched in other terms. While some state openly that they despise us, others hide behind neat clichés and euphemistic expressions. Some—the so-called intellectually elite such as many academics, journalists, political leaders, etc.—even sound as if they truly care for us; if we would only give up another part of the Land of Israel, they would love us! They charge us with all sorts of injustices even as they turn a blind eye to all of

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the injustices perpetrated against the Jewish People, as well as all the others in the world who suffer from the forces of evil.

We ought not be fooled by these fake excuses for their opposition to the Jewish People. Underneath their pronouncements lurks hatred, much like Pharaoh's underlying motive for pursuing the Jewish people. While the *p'shat* declares that their opposition to us is based on other considerations, the Midrash reveals the truth of their hatred for us.

One may suggest that the more insidious a form of evil is, the harder it is to combat and neutralize it. Often the hater himself does not believe he is motivated by hatred. As we see in the current international climate, the greatest critics of Israel and the Jews bristle at the suggestion that they are motivated by anti-Semitism.

Now that we know who our enemy is, we must know how we can defeat both the overt and covert forms of anti-Semitism.

Abraham's Legacy

The answer is provided in a better understanding of Rashi's comments. Rashi cited G-d's response to Bilam that

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Abraham had preceded him with the unconventional saddling of his own donkey. The Rebbe (in the foregoing citation) suggests that Abraham's unconventional devotion to G-d not only neutralized the hatred of Bilam, but also empowered us to transform the curses of Bilam into blessings.

How can we apply the transformation of Bilam's curses into blessings insofar as this hatred is concerned?

The Rebbe explains that Judaism encompasses two areas of service to G-d: doing good and refraining from evil. Love is what motivates us to perform the "positive" or active Mitzvos, whereas our hatred and revulsion of evil endows us with the strength to resist it.

However, the two areas of service are themselves divided. There are two levels of love of G-d and doing good and two levels of the parallel hatred for evil: a rational, measured and limited form of love and hate and an unlimited, supra-rational form. It was this supra-rational love of good and abhorrence of evil that Abraham bequeathed to us. This is the powerful force which enables us to transform Bilam's hatred of the Jews and all that is holy to them into hatred of all that is evil.

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Hidden Levels Emerging

We may take the Rebbe's analysis of the transformation of Bilam's hatred and apply it also to the hidden hatred of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's anti-Semitism is particularly insidious. The Pharaoh's of this world must dig very deep into their psyche to discover the root cause of their antipathy to Jews.

When we transform this brand of evil, we can develop the ability to resist, neutralize and transform even the most insidious forms of evil.

The Rebbe often referred to the phenomenon in recent times whereby hidden forms of good and evil have surfaced in the world at large and within individuals. This phenomenon, the Rebbe stated, was a symptom of the Messianic Era. As the prophet Daniel predicted, everything will become clarified and crystallized in that Era. Hidden evils are now surfacing, which explains why so many people whom we thought of as civilized, reasonable and decent have turned against us.

When we consider the pervasive nature of this hatred throughout the world, where supposedly decent people have teamed up with the greatest of haters or given them tacit support, we cannot become intimidated. Instead, how can we find the strength to cope with this new situation?

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In truth, we have already been given that strength. Our father Abraham's unconventional love of G-d has empowered us, his descendants, to unleash our heretofore hidden powers to neutralize and even transform that hidden evil. Although, Abraham's power was always available to us, it has become most accessible in these last moments of exile. We are about to say our final goodbye to Galus and welcome Moshiach and the Final Redemption, when all forms of evil will be obliterated and transformed into good.

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ESSAY TEN

PERISH THE THOUGHT!

For close to 2,000 years, the Jewish people collectively have not forgotten that their real home is in G-d's home; in the Land of Israel, in Jerusalem and the Holy Temple.

We have never—as a people—even harbored a fleeting thought that we belong anywhere other than in His home.

For close to two thousand years, our persistent prayers reflect our passion and obsession with returning home to the Promised Land, led by Moshiach who will usher in the true and complete Redemption.

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ESSAY TEN

PERISH THE THOUGHT!

Going in Circles

This week's parsha begins with the words:

“When Pharaoh sent the people away, G-d did not lead them through the land of the Philistines because it was close. This is because G-d said, ‘When the people see a war they may regret (leaving) and return to Egypt.’ G-d led the people on a roundabout route through the desert to the Red Sea.”

Commentators ask why G-d was “compelled” to take them through the circuitous route. Even if the Jewish nation would see war and want to return to Egypt, couldn't G-d have prevented them from returning? G-d could have also performed great miracles so that they would easily have defeated anyone that would dare wage war against them. Why then would G-d delay their entry into the Promised

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Land simply because they might be intimidated by the prospects of war and consider returning to Egypt?

A second question: When G-d did change course and took them in this roundabout route towards the Red Sea, and they were pursued by the Egyptians, some did indeed protest and wished to return to Egypt. If G-d was concerned that the prospects of war would induce them to want to return, what did He gain by taking them the other way?

...Because it was Close

The key to answering these questions can be found in the intriguing commentary of the Midrash of the word “close” that appears in the text of the Torah:

The Midrash defines the words “because it was close” in a rather novel way. Instead of interpreting the term “close” to refer to the direct route through the land of the Philistines, it applies to the Jewish people. It is because they—the Jewish people—are close to G-d. G-d did not want to take them through this route because He was too close to them. It was His concern for the people that made Him make the Jews follow this roundabout route.

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What prompted our Sages to reinterpret the simple meaning of the word close?

One answer given is that G-d was certainly not concerned that the Jews would actually return to Egypt. Even if that were the case, G-d could have easily thwarted their retreat just as He did when they came to the sea. G-d's concern rather was not that they would actually succeed in returning to Egypt. He was concerned that they would have even entertained the thought of returning. Even to harbor this thought on their part would have been "painful" for G-d, as it were. To see those who were so close to Him even harbor the desire to go back to Egypt would have proven painful. Therefore G-d said, "I will not take them through the short route lest they harbor a desire to return to Egypt."

However, the question still remains. Why was G-d not troubled when they harbored that very thought of returning when they stood at the sea pursued by the Egyptians?

The difference is that if they had gone straight from Egypt to the Land of Israel this desire to return would have surfaced from time to time. There would have never been a sense of "closure" to their experience in Egypt. The option to return would have lurked somewhere in the recesses of their hearts and minds. They would have been tormented

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by anxiety associated with the fear of war in their new land and returning to Egypt would have been a viable option under those circumstances. At the very least, subconsciously, their inability to emotionally adjust to their new life in the Land of Israel, would have kept them forever attached to Egypt.

On the other hand, when they reached the sea, even though some were considering the prospects of returning, it was a onetime aberration. For as G-d told Moses to tell them: “For as you have seen Egypt today you will never see them again.” This was their final connection to Egypt.

Seen through this prism, their desire to return to Egypt was not a totally negative experience. By bringing to the fore their anxiety and fear of the Egyptians and their desire to capitulate, they now had the chance to once and for all get Egypt out of their systems. By seeing the end of Egypt it brought closure to that experience, without which the memory and threat of Egypt would have lingered on. These thoughts of returning would never allow us to be comfortable in our new life in the Promised Land. Ultimately, it would have interfered with our lives as Jews.

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The Thought of Returning to Egypt was Revolting to G-d

On a deeper level one could suggest that because G-d considered us “close” to Him—His children—He could not countenance even the possibility that we should even harbor the mere thought of returning to Egypt even if it wouldn’t affect our Judaism. The mere thought of returning to exile would have been, in and of itself, a blotch on our Jewishness.

We can better understand this notion by way of analogy.

Normally, we are concerned with the actions of others towards us. We might even be offended by the words some use against us. But we really cannot get bent out of shape if someone harbored a negative thought about us.

Similarly, the Talmud teaches that when G-d judges us for our behavior He will only hold us accountable for our evil actions and speech. But—with the exception of idolatry—we are not held accountable for the undesirable thoughts that enter our minds.

However, that is true with regard to accountability and the way we are judged. But when we deal with someone who is close to us, the mere fact that he or she entertained a negative thought about us we are troubled. How can someone so close to me think that way about me?

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The same is true of our relationship with G-d. If we were not so close to G-d, the mere thought of returning to Egypt—not accompanied with concomitant action—would not disturb Him. But when we are dealing with the nation that is so close to Him—the nation whom G-d referred to as “My first born son Israel”, and the nation about whom the Midrash writes “they arose in My thoughts”—He could not countenance even a mere fleeting thought on our part to choose to be back as slaves to Pharaoh instead of being with G-d in His home, in the Holy Land.

Never Abandoned our Desire to Return to Our Home

For close to 2,000 years, the Jewish people collectively have not forgotten that their real home is in G-d's home; in the Land of Israel, in Jerusalem and the Holy Temple. We have never—as a people—even harbored a fleeting thought that we belong anywhere other than in His home. For close to two thousand years, our persistent prayers reflect our passion and obsession with returning home to the Promised Land, led by Moshiach who will usher in the true and complete Redemption.

ESSAY ELEVEN

THE RESPECTFUL SEA AND THE NATURE OF NATURE

One approach to miracles is that when a person devoted to G-d wants to realize his divine mission, the general rule is that nature itself will accommodate that effort.

This is so not because nature will change, but rather because nature itself was so programmed at the very time of creation.

And while there are exceptions to every rule, as well as certain variables such as the degree of righteousness of the individual, the importance of the mission, etc., the general rule is that nature is our ally and not our adversary.

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ESSAY ELEVEN

THE RESPECTFUL SEA AND THE NATURE OF NATURE

Keeping its Promise

The Jewish nation was sandwiched in between the sea and the pursuing Egyptian army. At that point the great miracle occurred. The sea split and the Israelites all crossed safely, while the pursuing Egyptians all drowned.

The event that brought the waters crashing down is described thus:

“Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and in the early morning the sea returned *l’eisano* to its [original] strength.”

Our Sages comment that the word *l’eisano*, when rearranged can spell *lit’na’o*, which means “to its stipulation.”

This is a reference to the Midrashic teaching that when G-d created the sea He stipulated with it that it would split when the Jewish nation would have to cross it. At this point—when the sea completed the fulfillment of its

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promise to split—the Torah informs us that the sea did indeed keep its promise.

How Could the Sea Resist?

This raises an obvious question. Why did G-d have to stipulate with the sea at the time of its creation that it would eventually have to split? How could the sea possibly go against G-d's will? If G-d wants it to split, then it would split!

We find an incredible story in the Talmud that is reminiscent of the story of the splitting of the sea:

Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to redeem some captives. When he approached the *gina'i* river [that prevented him from crossing], He said to the river: "split your waters for me so that I can cross."

The river replied: "You are going to do the will of your Maker, and I am doing the will of my Maker. However, in your case it is not certain that you will succeed [in redeeming the captives], but in my case it is definite [and I will not split for you]."

He [Rabbi Pinchas] then said to [the river]: "If you do not split, I shall decree upon you that water will never have flowed through you."

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At that point the river split.

Here too, several questions arise:

First, wasn't the river's argument a good one? Why should the river that does the will of its Creator defer to the will of a person who is doubtful as to whether he will fulfill the will of the Creator?

Second, what did Rabbi Pinchas mean when he said: "I shall decree upon you that water will never have passed through you?" How could he decree that water has never passed? He could only decree that the river should dry up and cease to have water flowing from that time onward, but how can he decree that water should never have flowed?

Rabbi Dovber—known as the Maggid of Mezeritch and the successor of the Ba'al Shem Tov as the leader of the Chassidic movement—and successive Chassidic masters, answer these questions by referring to the aforementioned Midrashic statement of the splitting of the sea. G-d stipulated with the sea at the time of its creation that it would split for the Jewish nation at the appointed time. Similarly, at the time of their creation, all of existence was charged with the responsibility to conform to the will of those righteous people who are on their way to fulfill G-d's will.

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By not splitting at the appointed time, the river demonstrated that it did not abide by the original stipulation made at the time of its creation. Hence, it had no basis to exist. Its existence was not in conformance with G-d's will and therefore it would cease to exist.

Now, anything that exists temporarily, and whose existence is tentative, is in reality not a true existence even before its existence ceases. Evidence of this fact can be found in the Mishnah, which refers to rivers that dry up every seven years as "false rivers," because their existence even when they flow is not genuine.

Two Ways to Look at a Miracle

From all of the above a different picture about the sea splitting emerges that sheds light on the nature of many other miracles and provides us with encouragement in the performance of the Mitzvos.

There are two ways of looking at a miracle:

The first approach is that G-d intervenes with nature and alters its course.

The second approach is that when a person devoted to G-d wants to realize his divine mission, the general rule is that nature itself will accommodate that effort. This is so not

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because nature will change, but rather because nature itself was so programmed at the very time of creation. And while there are exceptions to every rule, as well as certain variables such as the degree of righteousness of the individual, the importance of the mission, etc., the general rule is that nature is our ally and not our adversary.

The Nature of Nature

From all of the above a powerful lesson about the nature of nature itself comes to light. As stated, the general rule is that nature is not an impediment to G-d's will, on the contrary. And if it seems that there are natural barriers that do not allow us to realize our G-dly purpose, it is most likely just a test to see whether we are truly intent on carrying out the Divine will, as in the abovementioned story of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair.

When Rabbi Pinchas stated unequivocally that he decrees that the river split, it was his way of saying that I am so committed to doing G-d's will that I will not take no for an answer. It is that attitude that the natural order was "ordered" to respect and accommodate.

In the world we live today, there are many obstructions that confuse us about the true character of nature. As a

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result, we often view the world around us as being hostile to our spiritual advancement.

In the Messianic Age—that we are poised to enter—the world will see clearly how all of nature was created for G-d's glory, as Ethics of the Fathers" states:

“All that the Holy one, Blessed by He, created in His world, He created solely for His glory, as it is stated: ‘All that is called by My name, indeed, it is for My glory that I have created it, formed it, and made it.’”

ESSAY TWELVE

BE SILENT!

There are times when we are preoccupied with lofty matters such as prayer, literally or figuratively.

G-d then says to us, “Be silent, stop praying, get up and help another person split their sea.”

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ESSAY TWELVE

BE SILENT!

Two Mindsets of Prayer

As the Jewish people were standing at the sea, pursued by the Egyptian armies they did what Jews are expected to do in such situations. They prayed. Their prayer was more than just a perfunctory response to a bad situation; they actually cried out to G-d. Theirs was a heartfelt prayer of persons who are desperate for G-d's assistance.

There are two mindsets of prayer.

One is where we ask G-d to help us. In our minds, we feel that we are essentially in control of our situation—whether it is good health, sustenance, having children, success in raising them, peace and prosperity—but we want G-d to give our efforts a boost. It's not that we are desperate, but that we recognize that G-d's blessing can be helpful. In a medical situation, for example, we may put our trust primarily in the physician and the medication, but still reach out to G-d for His input as well.

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The other mindset is when the situation seems hopeless and our only recourse is to turn to G-d for His salvation.

This approach is truly what prayer is all about.

According to Maimonides, prayer is the means by which we demonstrate that we depend on G-d. In truth, in every situation—no matter how good the prognosis may be for the future, G-d is totally in control. And a person with this understanding will always pray with the feeling that they utterly depend on G-d. However, in most situations our prayers do not seem that urgent and are not as powerful and meaningful as those when we are desperate and feel our total dependence on G-d.

In light of this analysis one would have thought that when the Jews were standing between the pursuing Egyptian armies and the sea, with absolutely no where to go, their prayer was clearly the most urgent, desperate, heartfelt form of prayer, and an expression of their profound faith in and dependency on G-d. Yet, we are told, incredulously, in this week's parsha, that G-d told Moses to tell the Jewish people: "Be silent!" Desist from prayer. Why?

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Paradox of Prayer

One Kabbalistic answer is based on the paradoxical nature of prayer. On the one hand, for one to pray they must generate the feeling that they are standing before G-d whom they petition for the things that they need. On the other hand, if we were truly aware of G-d's awesome presence we could not open our mouths to say anything. When a person reaches that point of total submission to G-d they are speechless, and there is no need for prayer. Their needs are automatically taken care of.

When G-d told them not to pray, He was not shunning their heartfelt prayers, He was just saying to them, that the experience of the splitting of the sea will be of such a magnitude as to preclude the ability and the need to pray.

Stop Praying and Help Someone!

Another dimension of this answer that conveys a practical message to us in our own lives is the realization that there are times when we are preoccupied with lofty matters such as prayer, literally or figuratively. G-d then says to us, "Be silent, stop praying, get up and help another person split their sea."

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The splitting of the sea, besides its literal meaning, also alludes to the things in people's lives that cover up their inner goodness and spirituality, as the sea covers and conceals all that is in it. Helping someone else “split their sea” can be a far more G-dly experience than the preoccupation with our own spiritual and material needs. Certainly prayer and self-refinement have their place, but it can sometimes be overridden and enhanced by our efforts to help others.

Helping Others Prepare for Moshiach

This message is especially poignant in the present pre-Messianic era, as we stand ready to enter into a world in which the sea will always be split. Nothing will truly conceal the treasures that lie within the world and humanity. As we prepare for that momentous occasion, it would serve us well to reflect on the message of reaching out and helping someone else be prepared for the momentous spiritual reenactment of the splitting of the sea, the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE THREE PRONGED ATTACK

**Torah study is the antidote to the aspect of Amalek that
sows doubt and confusion in our lives.**

Torah gives us clear direction.

Indeed, the word Torah itself means guidance.

**Torah is always associated with light because it shines the
light of truth and exposes the true meaning and purpose of
everyone and everything.**

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ESSAY THIRTEEN

THE THREE PRONGED ATTACK

Three's a Crowd

The end of this week's parsha, Beshallah, discusses the attack of the Amalekites and the way the Jewish people waged war against them. The Torah recounts how Moses went to the top of a mountain and raised his arms. The Torah then states that whenever his arms remained aloft the Israelites would prevail, but whenever his arms dropped, the Amalekites would have the upper hand. To help him keep his arms raised, they placed a rock underneath him and had his brother Aaron and his nephew Chur support them. He then was able to keep his arms raised until the sun set and the Amalekites defeated.

The question is why did he bring Aaron and Chur to the top of the mountain with him? Initially, it was only Moses who actually prayed with his arms raised. Only after his hands became "heavy" as the Torah states, did they get involved. Why then did he bring the two others with him? And why did he bring specifically these two people?

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Three Pillars

Kli Yakar, one of the classic commentators of the Torah, explains that Moses wanted to have Aaron and Chur at his side because the three of them constituted a triad of spiritual power. According to the Mishnah, the world stands on the three pillars of Torah, service (this refers to the sacrifices in the Temple and prayer) and acts of loving kindness.

Moses represented Torah, as he was chosen by G-d to be the one to bring the Torah to the Jewish people.

Aaron, was the high priest, whose life was devoted to Divine service in the Temple.

Chur was the son of Miriam, Moses' sister. Miriam—one of the midwives who defied Pharaoh's decrees of killing the Israelite babies—was known for her nurturing nature and her acts of kindness.

Why, we may ask, was it necessary to invoke all three of the pillars in this battle with Amalek? When the Jews fought other adversaries in subsequent years, we do not find the same pattern of having all the three pillars represented. Why was the battle against Amalek different?

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Amalek, we discover, was not just an evil nation that was bent on the destruction of the Jewish people, it personified evil in its most insidious form.

The Three Forces of Amalek

If we examine what the Torah and the Sages say about the way in which Amalek—the external as well as the internal one—tries to destroy us, we will discover that there are three forces it marshals.

First, Amalek is said to have “met us on the way.” The Hebrew word for “met” is *karcha*, which also has the connotation of coldness and desensitization. Amalek is the force that tries to cool off our enthusiasm for matters of goodness and holiness.

Second, Amalek is also said to have the numerical value of the Hebrew word *safek* which means doubt. Amalek is the force of evil that sows doubts about our Jewishness and creates confusion in our lives.

Third, Amalek is also said to be the numerical value of the word *barzel* that means “iron,” and has the connotation of violence, inasmuch as swords were made from iron.

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The Three Pronged Antidote

Torah study is the antidote to the aspect of Amalek that sows doubt and confusion in our lives. Torah gives us clear direction. Indeed, the word Torah itself means guidance. Torah is always associated with light because it shines the light of truth and exposes the true meaning and purpose of everyone and everything.

This explains what the Sages meant when they said that the world stands on three things, listing Torah as the first of its pillars. Without Torah, the world would teeter. There are so many influences that pull us in so many directions. Even absent the forces of negativity that can hold sway on us, we often vacillate as to which direction of good we should follow. Only the Torah can instruct us as to the: who, what, when, where and how of our lives.

Moses' role, as the one who transmitted the Torah, was to neutralize the power of Amalek to obfuscate and thereby instill doubts.

Aaron, whose life was devoted to the second pillar—Divine service—was the counterforce to Amalek's objective to cool us off and desensitize us to the spiritual. One could even study Torah and have a clear sense of direction, but Torah study that is devoid of warmth, excitement and enthusiasm is sorely deficient. Only fervent prayer that awakens the

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emotions of the soul can counter the coldness that Amalek attempts to instill in our Torah study.

Amalek tries to extinguish the passion of the soul even as it attempts to cloud the Jewish mind. If Moses was the one to attack the state of doubt and confusion associated with Amalek, Aaron's function in the war was to melt the frigidity of Amalek.

But, even the combined team of Moses and Aaron cannot defeat Amalek, for Amalek also sets his sights on the kindness and generosity of the Jewish people. Amalek sought to instill in them the power of the sword that is represented by iron. By forcing the Jewish nation to defend themselves, Amalek felt it had a win-win situation on its hand. Even if they would not defeat the Israelites, they could still force them to lose their innocence, love of life and obsession with nurturing others, if they could get them to fight.

Chur inherited from his mother Miriam the dedication to nurture others. And he was therefore the personification of the third pillar—acts of loving kindness. Through Miriam/Chur's influence the Jewish people were given the power to retain their innocence and their passion for goodness and peace.

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Defeat of Amalek Prerequisite for Redemption

Our Sages tell us that Amalek's defeat is one of the prerequisites to the future Redemption. As long as the spirit of Amalek lurks beneath the surface, the pillars that hold the world together are standing on shaky ground.

The era of Redemption will be one in which Torah will be taught with utmost clarity. Moshiach will reveal dimensions of Torah that were never before revealed to humankind. His teaching of Torah, we are told, will be visual so that all the ambiguities will be removed. This will be in contrast to the way we grasp Torah in the stifling atmosphere of exile where our understanding of Torah itself is clouded. In the Messianic Age, however, the clouds that eclipse the radiance of Torah will be removed so that it will illuminate the world and provide us with unprecedented guidance.

Likewise, the future Redemption will also enable us to serve G-d with all of our emotions unleashed that will reverse the exile conditions—especially the Amalek syndrome—that have dampened our enthusiasm for G-dly matters.

And the defeat of this Amalek syndrome will also facilitate the emergence of unparalleled goodness that will engulf the world. And in its wake there will be universal peace and brotherhood.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RAISING MOSES' AND MOSHIACH'S HANDS

Moses' role in the war against Amalek was no longer going to be channeling a Divine revelation as he did for the Exodus.

Now, Moses had to ignite the spark of Moses within each and every Jew.

No Divine staff could do this.

Moses had to inspire the Jews to change and direct their hearts heavenward by raising his own hands heavenward.

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ESSAY FOURTEEN

RAISING MOSES' AND MOSHIACH'S HANDS

The Enemy: Doubts!

The Jewish nation emerged from Egypt where they experienced great miracles, culminating with the splitting of the Red Sea. At the very moment they were rid of one threat they confronted another: Amalek.

Amalek's attack, our Sages tell us, was provoked when the Jewish nation expressed doubt whether G-d was still with them when they ran out of water in the desert. The word Amalek is numerically equal to the Hebrew word for doubt: *safeik*. Amalek is the external manifestation of an internal Amalek, which sows doubt in the hearts and minds of people.

It follows then that the war waged against the external Amalek was a reflection of the war one must wage against the internal Amalek.

Let us examine how this external war was won. While the Jewish people, commanded by Joshua, fought what would

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seem to be a conventional war, the power behind winning that war was anything but conventional.

The Torah describes Moses, his brother Aaron and his nephew Chur, climbing a mountain with Moses carrying “G-d’s staff” in his hands.

Moses’ Hands

It would seem that the power to win the war was vested in this Divine staff, the very one with which Moses performed miracles in Egypt.

Yet, as we read further, the Torah describes how the war was won:

It came to pass that when Moses would raise his hand, Israel would prevail, and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail.

In other words, it was not the Divine staff that Moses used to support the troops fighting Amalek but the raising of his hand!

Rashi anticipated the question of why Moses had to raise his hands for the Jewish people to win, when he had the power vested in the staff with which he performed some of the greatest miracles ever.

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Rashi cites the words of our Sages, as recorded in the Mishnah:

Did Moses' hands win the war? Rather, when the Jewish people gazed heavenward and subjugated their hearts to their Father in heaven they were victorious, but if not they would falter.

The Torah continues:

Now Moses' hands were heavy; so they took a stone and placed it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Chur supported his hands, one from this side, and one from that side; so he was with his hands in faith until sunset.

The Four Questions

At this point several questions arise:

First, why didn't Moses' staff, which worked so well in Egypt, suffice to bring about the miraculous victory?

Second, why did Moses need Aaron and Chur to help him in prayer?

Third, if Moses' hands were heavy and needed support, why does the Torah state that they placed a rock

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underneath him? How did sitting on a rock help to support his arms?

Fourth, when the Torah stated that they supported his hands it is self-evident that they were standing on his two sides. Why does the Torah add: “one from this side, and one from that side?”

Two Dynamics

The answer lies in the very different dynamics of the battle against Pharaoh’s Egypt and the battle against Amalek.

To be sure, both struggles were not just physical. The exile experience in Egypt was more than just bondage, it was stifling and constricting of the soul. The Jews in Egypt were as much in a spiritual prison as they were in physical confinement. They had degenerated and begun to fall into the spiritual abyss. They could not pull themselves out; they needed Moses to use G-d’s staff, i.e., G-d’s singular power, to remove the physical and spiritual shackles.

The situation with Amalek was markedly different. The Jewish nation was no longer in exile. While they were not yet in the Promised Land—and had not even received the Torah—they were nevertheless out of Egypt. With all the

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miracles they experienced first-hand they had begun to bask in G-d's transcendent light.

At this point, when the Jewish people expressed doubts about G-d's presence in their midst, those doubts were not going to be remedied by a Divine revelation. This new scenario demanded that they roll up their proverbial sleeves, get out of their comfort zone and fight both the external and internal Amalek.

Moses' Role

We must now try to understand Moses' role in this battle. Why was he needed if it was the Jewish people who had to pull themselves out of the spiritual quagmire they got themselves into?

The answer lies in our understanding that Moses, the paradigmatic Jewish leader, possessed two aspects of leadership. Moses, on the one hand, was G-d's messenger and instrument to perform all the miracles. And as G-d's instrument he was the most qualified to lead because of his humility. His "transparency" enabled him to serve as an unobstructed channel to G-d's energy.

This explains why when we recite from the Haggadah at the Seder we speak of how G-d redeemed us and not

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delegate this role to His messenger. The question has been raised, how could we say that there was no messenger, when Moses initiated every plague? Wasn't Moses G-d's messenger?

The answer is that unlike G-d's other messengers, Moses was so self-effacing and transparent that it was as if he were not there.

Connection

By contrast, Moses' role in the war against Amalek was no longer going to be channeling a Divine revelation. Now, Moses had to ignite the spark of Moses that is within each and every Jew. No Divine staff could do this. Moses had to inspire the Jews to change and direct their hearts heavenward by raising his own hands heavenward.

However, Moses felt there was something amiss. Moses, whom the Torah testifies never lost any of his physical strength, even on the day of his passing, suddenly experienced difficulty keeping his hands aloft!

Moses realized that something was seriously wrong, but rather than ascribing his weakness to the people who were still not cleansed of their internal Amalek, Moses humbly attributed this to his own inadequacies.

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Moses thus sat down upon a rock. Rashi points out that Moses chose to sit on a rock and not on a cushion, because he wanted to share the pain of his brethren. Moses perhaps attributed their losses in the battle against Amalek to his lack of empathy for them. When can a leader best inspire his flock? When he is connected to and has great empathy for them.

Moses, in his humility, felt he was not doing enough as a leader to connect with the people, so he sat on the rock to feel their pain and reinforce his bond with them.

In truth, Moses the “faithful shepherd” was not the one responsible. The problem with the faulty connection between Moses and the people was a “frayed wire” in their connection to Moses.

Connecting to the Right and Left

In his attempt to strengthen his connection to the people Moses realized that he had to relate to them in a specific way. He had to connect to their individual personalities and shore them up,

When a person needs inspiration, it must relate to the individual’s specific character. Just instilling a general feeling of faith and inspiration will not suffice. One needs

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to augment that faith with a deep feeling of love and reverence for G-d.

Moses therefore took his two deputies, Aaron and Chur, for support. Aaron was the epitome of kindness, and Chur the model of rigid discipline. In the parlance of Kabbalah, Aaron's soul was associated with the attribute of *chesed* while Chur's was the embodiment of *gevurah*. By having them support his arms, Moses inspired the Jewish nation to strengthen its own soul-powers of *chesed* and *gevurah*, which translate into love for and awe of G-d.

The Torah does not end the scene there. The Torah continues on to mention that they were standing “on this side one and on this side one.” This was meant to underscore that while these two traits are diametrically opposites, one on the right and one on the left, nevertheless they both relate to the “Oneness” Of G-d. When a person lives a unified life because everything he or she does is directed towards the one G-d, the differences between right and left become irrelevant.

Parallels to Our Time

There are many parallels to our time. We too are in the interim period between Galus-exile and Geulah-Redemption. We have witnessed incredible miracles, of

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Biblical proportion, when we saw the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the modern day Egypt that enslaved its Jews physically and spiritually. As the Rebbe stated, this and other miracles of recent times were actually the product of Moshiach's impact and a sample of what will come next. These were G-dly actions, channeled through Moshiach, in the same way as the miracles of the Exodus came directly from G-d, channeled by Moses. Moses only served as a conduit while using G-d's staff.

Moshiach, like Moses before him, has a second role consistent with a new reality. In this transitional period, while we are standing on the threshold of the final redemption, there are those plagued by doubts. We don't see the overt miracles we saw in the past, while we are witness to negatives such as terrorism and other ills. These doubters raise the question, "Is G-d within us, or not?"

To deal with this new scenario, Moshiach must put on a different hat, so to speak. He is not only a channel for G-d's energy to change the world, he also seeks to cement his connection to us and our connection to him so that we are freed from our internal Amalek.

While, in the past, we passively enjoyed the benefits of modern day miracles, to defeat Amalek now we have to be proactive and strengthen the hands of Moshiach. If we do not take the cue from Moses'/Moshiach's uplifted arms, it

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means that we, the people, have failed to eradicate our internal Amalek.

Whether we are on the right or on the left (spiritually speaking), whether we are Aaronites or Churites, as long as we are directed to the goal of bringing G-d's oneness to the world, we will succeed in destroying Amalek and bringing about the ultimate Redemption!

ESSAY FIFTEEN

DOUBLE PRAISE

In the future Redemption, after living through thousands of years of exile, we, as a people, did not and will not lose our faith and trust that G-d would redeem us and bring Moshiach.

Even in the Death Camps, thousands of Jews went to their deaths singing, yes singing, the melody to the words “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach.”

This hope and trust will pay off.

When the ultimate miracle finally arrives, we will offer a twofold and two-dimensional praise to G-d:

Thanks for all the faith and trust we had in You, and thank you again G-d for the actual Redemption.

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ESSAY FIFTEEN

DOUBLE PRAISE

The Praise of the Future

When the Jewish nation crossed the *Yam Suf* (Sea of Reeds) they sang praise to the A-mighty for all the miracles that they experienced. One of their praises to G-d was: “This is my G-d and I will exalt Him.”

The Midrash comments that the Israelites who crossed the Red Sea mentioned “This is my G-d” only once. In the future Redemption, however, we will recite a similar refrain twice, as it is stated:

“Behold, this is our G-d, we have hoped for Him that He would save us. This is the G-d that we hoped for, we shall rejoice and be happy in His salvation.”

Let us attempt to understand the point the Midrash has made. At first glance the difference between the past and the future forms of praise are of little import.

What is the significance of repeating the praise? If the praise was meaningful the first time, what does repeating it add? And if it was not sincere the first time around, why

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would mere repetition contribute to its sincerity?

Implicit Trust

Commentators explain that the difference between a solitary praise and the repeated one is not just a quantitative difference; there is also a substantive difference between the two praises. The solitary praise of the past and the repetitive one of the future reflect two modes of awareness of G-d's role in our deliverance from harm.

The first individual has no implicit trust that G-d will help. He does not wait and anticipate G-d's salvation, although he might pray and ask for it.

And when the miracle finally materializes and this individual is saved, he will certainly be grateful to G-d and praise Him. However, it is a simple and straightforward praise that comes from the recognition that G-d is truly great. This individual did not invest anything before the miracle. There was no sense of closeness to G-d that preceded the miracle.

By contrast, there is another type of individual who recognized G-d's greatness His ability to save him from his misfortune. before he was saved. This individual's relationship with G-d is one that can be compared to that

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of a parent and a child or two people who are in love with one another. The child is secure in the knowledge that its father or mother will come to its assistance. The child sincerely hopes for and eagerly anticipates the salvation to come.

Since the hope and trust is an overt manifestation of the affinity that exists between G-d and ourselves, this hope in and of itself is a catalyst to bring about G-d's salvation.

Thus, when the miracle finally occurs, this individual will experience a two-fold joy and will express his praise and gratitude to G-d in two parts.

Not only will he or she rejoice at having been saved, but, moreover, he or she will express joy and satisfaction for the trust in G-d that proved our worthiness and that G-d truly regards him or her as His child.

The Biblical words cited above capture the person's praise and hope:

“Behold, this is our G-d, we have hoped for Him that He would save us. This is the G-d that we hoped for, we shall rejoice and be happy in His salvation.”

The praise is for the salvation as well as for the fact that we hoped for it.

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One Dimensional Joy for the Exodus

When the Jewish nation left Egypt, their faith and trust in G-d was compromised. The suffering they endured took its toll on their souls as well as their bodies. It was hard for them to maintain the faith that G-d would make good on His word, particularly after Moses had spoken to Pharaoh and things deteriorated. And even when the miracles of the Ten Plagues, did finally come, their cynicism that resulted from centuries of slavery and persecution coupled with past disappointments, made them skeptical about future miracles.

Indeed, when they arrived at the Sea of Reeds and realized that they were pursued by the Egyptians, instead of trusting G-d that He would not abandon them, they complained to Moses:

“Is there not sufficient graves in Egypt that you took us into the desert to die in the desert?”

Even after the Ten Plagues and their miraculous departure from Egypt, they still harbored doubts.

When the miracle finally arrived and they were saved, they readily praised G-d for it, but they could not say, “This is the G-d that we have hoped for.” Their joy was simple, one dimensional.

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Multi-Dimensional Joy in the Future

In the future Redemption, however, after living through thousands of years of exile, we, as a people, did not and will not lose our faith and trust that G-d would redeem us and bring Moshiach. Even in the Death Camps, thousands of Jews went to their deaths singing, yes singing, the melody to the words “I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach., and even though he tarries, we shall await his coming every day.”

This hope and trust will pay off. When the ultimate miracle finally arrives, we will offer a twofold and two-dimensional praise to G-d: Firstly thanks for all the faith and trust we had in You that was a powerful catalyst in bringing about the positive events of the future, and thank you again G-d for the actual Redemption.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE TWELVE TUNNELS

It is axiomatic in Judaism that a community is considerably more than the sum total of its components.

There is a special holiness that is introduced into a community that is infinitely greater than the any of its parts.

For example, a *minyan*, is much more than just a collection of ten people in one room.

It is a completely new entity with its own identity that provides us with the opportunity to recite special prayers such as the Kadish.

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ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE TWELVE TUNNELS

Was it a Necessary Miracle?

When the Jewish people crossed the Reed Sea, our Sages inform us the sea split into twelve different channels; one for each of the twelve tribes.

One is entitled to ask, why?

Why did G-d perform this incredible, but apparently unnecessary miracle? There is a well-known principle that G-d does not perform useless miracles. Every miracle that occurred at the time of the Exodus was necessary to either save the Jewish people or to teach them and the Egyptians valuable lessons. But what lesson can we derive from the fact that each tribe had its own tunnel?

Furthermore, the Torah always seeks to emphasize the ideal of Jewish unity. The need to express this unity appeared to have been even greater at this juncture, considering the fact that the Egyptians exhibited unprecedented unity in their pursuit of the Jewish people, as is indicated by the

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singular usage of the words “and Egypt traveled (*no’say’a*) after them, “ instead of the plural “and Egypt traveled (*nos’im*) after them.” To counter the single minded hostility for the Israelites should G-d not have removed the barriers between tribes, not cement them?

Upon deeper reflection, however, we will realize that the differences between tribes was crucial, particularly at that time that marked the genesis of the Jewish nation. What occurred then set the tone for the future of the Jewish people.

Three Formulas for a Nation

There are three possible formulas for a nation, or for any collective body. One can focus on the collective nature of the community, ignoring and even denying the role and interests of the individual components of the group.

The second formula is to be concerned only with the individual, hardly recognizing the role of the community.

Both of these systems are obviously deficient. In the first case, the weakness lies in its failure to recognize that the strength of a community lies in each and every individual. To neglect the individual and his/her unique contribution is to undermine the very foundation of the community.

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Similarly, the second formula that denies the collective and communal dimension is also flawed. It is axiomatic in Judaism that a community is considerably more than the sum total of its components. There is a special holiness that is introduced into a community that is infinitely greater than the any of its parts. For example, a *minyan*, is much more than just a collection of ten people in one room. It is a completely new entity with its own identity that provides us with the opportunity to recite special prayers such as the Kadish.

Vive La Difference!

And this is precisely what G-d wanted to demonstrate to the Jewish people as they were leaving Egypt to form a new nation.

On the one hand, great emphasis was placed on the notion of Jewish nationhood. But, simultaneously they were instructed to not abandon their distinctions and the qualities they possessed as individuals, otherwise the entire nation will suffer. But even as they were reveling in their own distinctive identities, it was also crucial that they share it with their fellow tribes.

This might explain why the tunnels that separated the twelve tribes were transparent, suggesting that each

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individual tribe had to be able to see and appreciate the qualities of the other tribes and integrate these parochial interests into their own lives.

This dual emphasis on community and individuality as they are fused into one philosophy of life, served as a prerequisite to the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. And this focus on the combination of collectiveness and individuality is the approach we must take in our contemporary crossing of the sea on the road to the ultimate redemption through our righteous Moshiach.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SING ALONG

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, known as the Alter Rebbe) once remarked:

“Speech is the pen of the heart, song is the pen of the soul.”

This means that while one can express one’s ideas and even feelings by way of speech, one cannot express one’s inner soul with the spoken word. To reveal one’s innermost spiritual sentiments, one must have song.

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ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SING ALONG

A Shabbos with its Own Name

Every Shabbos has a distinctive character. Usually it is based on a special theme that can be found in that week's Torah reading. It can also be a holiday that the Shabbos coincides with, that gives the Shabbos a distinctive ring. There are several weeks, however, where the Shabbos is given its own name. This week's Shabbos is one such Shabbos. It is referred to as "*Shabbos Shirah*—The Sabbath of Song" because of the reading of the song the Israelites sang when they crossed the Sea of Reeds.

One might ask, why is the fact that we read a song the Jews sang when they crossed the sea, more important than the reading of the very miracle of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds itself?

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The Kabbalah of Song

The answer to this lies in a better understanding of the concept of song in Judaism in general and in Chassidic literature in particular.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (the founder of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, known as the Alter Rebbe) once remarked:

“Speech is the pen of the heart, song is the pen of the soul.”

This means that while one can express one’s ideas and even feelings by way of speech, one cannot express one’s inner soul with the spoken word. To reveal one’s innermost spiritual sentiments, one must have song.

Furthermore, R. Schneur Zalman explains, the only way we can rise to a higher plane of spirituality is by way of melody. Thus, the angels who are in constant pursuit of higher spiritual levels, are always singing. Without song, we cannot “get away” from the state we are in.

(To be sure, not all melodies can express one’s inner soul and elevate a person to a higher spiritual plane. The songs that are contained in the Torah, as well as songs that were composed and sung by holy people, are capable of that. There are, however, certain songs that can actually have a

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deleterious effect on one's inner soul and stunt the process of spiritual growth.)

Thus, when the Jews left Egypt, making a transition from one state of existence to a much higher one, they needed to sing. Their song ensure that their movement out of Egypt was more than just a geographic change, but primarily a major spiritual transformation.

Shabbos Transition through Song

What happened then in terms of “space” is true of every Shabbos in terms of “time.” Just as the Exodus from Egypt was a twofold movement; a physical and geographic transition coupled with a spiritual transformation that was reflected in their song, similarly, every Shabbos is a twofold movement. It is a physical transition in time, moving from the weekday to the Shabbos, but it is also a spiritually transforming experience as well. As the Sages of Kabbalah have taught us, on the Shabbos the entire universe is elevated to a higher plane of existence.

Just as the transition from Egypt to the desert required song to imbue the transition with soul and spiritual meaning, so too, the transition we make from the weekday to the Shabbos and the process of the elevation of the world, occurs through the medium of song.

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We can now appreciate the significance of this week's designation as *Shabbos Shira*, the Sabbath of Song rather than the Shabbos of the Crossing of the Sea of Reeds.

The song that was sung by the Jewish people then, in one important way, was more significant than the miracle of the splitting of the sea itself, because the song reflected the dynamic of change that was going on within them and was the underlying spiritual catalyst for the entire miracle.

Future Redemption through Song

We therefore also find many references to the fact that the future Redemption will be accompanied by song. Not only will song express our obvious joy for having been redeemed, but it will also be the medium through which we express our innermost divine feelings and the force behind the transition from the state of exile to the state of Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

The lesson from the narrative of the Jews going into the sea is that in times of crises there is no time to stand on ceremony.

True, in times of peace there must be a system of priority, who goes first and who follows. Each tribe is entitled to vie for the responsibility and honor of being first.

When it comes to times of crises, even Benjamin, the youngest of the tribes can override the system and jump into the sea.

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ESSAY EIGHTEEN

VIVE LA DIFFERENCE

Split Four Ways

According to the Talmud and Midrash, the differences amongst our people began to develop at the very beginning of our emergence as a nation and they continue to this day.

Even before we crossed the Sea of Reeds, and were totally out of the grasp of Pharaoh and his pursuing armies, we were already divided about what we should do.

At first the Jewish nation was split four ways as to what they should do when they found themselves squeezed between the sea and the onslaught of the Egyptian army. The first group said they should return to slavery. The second group insisted they should fight the Egyptians, while the third despaired and wanted to drown themselves. The fourth group decided to pray to G-d for salvation. In the end G-d decided that they continue their journey towards Sinai.

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Who's First?

Even at that point, the Talmud (Sotah 36b) records that a dispute broke out as to who should be the first tribe to jump into the sea.

According to the opinion of Rabbi Meir:

“One tribe declared, ‘I will jump into the sea first,’ while the other tribe said, ‘I will jump into the sea first.’ At that point, the tribe of Benjamin jumped into the sea first...”

Rabbi Yehudah, however, disagreed with Rabbi Meir and said to him: “No, this was not what happened! Rather, this one said: ‘I will **not** go into the sea first,’ while the other one said, ‘I will **not** go into the sea first.’ At that point, Nachshon, the son of Aminadav, jumped into the sea first.”

In other words, there was a dispute amongst the Talmudic Sages about the dispute of the Jews! According to the opinion of Rabbi Meir, they were divided as to which tribe will be the first to jump into the raging waters. Each tribe vied for this honor. And it was the tribe of Benjamin that did not wait for a formal announcement. They took the initiative and jumped first.

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Don't Stand on Ceremony!

The obvious lesson from this approach to the narrative of the Jews going into the sea is that in times of crises there is no time to stand on ceremony. True, in times of peace and calm, it is important that there is a protocol. There must be a system of priority, who goes first and who follows. And each tribe is entitled to vie for the responsibility and honor of being first.

When it comes to times of crises, even Benjamin, the youngest of the tribes can override the system and jump into the sea. For this heroic and pioneering gesture on their part, the Talmud declares, the holiest section of the Temple—the place where the Ark and the Tablets were placed—was situated in the territory of Israel that belonged to the tribe of Benjamin.

Individuals are Heroes, not Communities

Rabbi Yehudah, however, disagrees. In his opinion, the heroes are rarely, if ever, tribes as a whole. Communal entities, many will argue, must subscribe to a system, or else chaos will ensue.

Furthermore, a tribe, government, or any bureaucracy is like a massive ship that cannot quickly maneuver itself into

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a new direction. Thus, each tribe insisted that it cannot do anything rash and be the first to jump into the sea without authorization. Committees have to be formed, votes have to be taken and the decision whether to jump or not must be a deliberate and slow process.

In these times of crises, a community depends on a Nachshon the son of Aminadav; a man who overrides the system and acts quickly and unceremoniously. And at that point the sea did split for everyone.

Who are the Nachshons

The lesson for our times is clear. While we should always try to work within the community for the well-being of its constituents, we will always need individuals who cannot rest and cannot wait for the community to take the initiative.

In every community there is a Nachshon who jumps into the sea and thereby saves the Jewish people. In modern as well as classical Hebrew, a pioneer is known as a Nachshon.

We can now appreciate why it was Nachshon who merited to be the ancestor of King David and all subsequent great Jewish leaders, from King David until the Moshiach.

While Judaism believes very strongly in community and

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collective action, it also believes that in every generation there is a great Jewish leader who does not wait for the community to decide, but takes the initiative and, figuratively, causes the sea to split, enabling the Jewish people to forge ahead towards our national and universal goal of bringing Moshiach and Redemption.

The Tenth and Eleventh days of Shevat

The Tenth and Eleventh days of Shevat are the days that mark the passing of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph Schneerson and was the succession to leadership of the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, respectively.

In addition to their scholarship, piety and love for the Jewish people and humanity, they were/are the Nachshon's of our modern age, fighting Communist oppression on one side of the ocean and American indifference on the other side. They single-handedly jumped into the raging waters that threatened to engulf the Jewish people and succeeded in getting these waters to split, reversing the trend that allowed the Jewish people to direct their energies towards the ultimate Messianic Age.

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ESSAY NINETEEN

WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME?

When one receives pleasure or derives a benefit from the one mitzvah, and no benefit from another, the latter mitzvah takes precedence.

The rationale for this is that one of the functions of the mitzvah is to refine us.

The more a mitzvah “imposes” itself on us and demands of us to “bend” (*Iskafia* in the terminology of the *Zohar*), the greater is its effect on ourselves.

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ESSAY NINETEEN

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

The Wise Hearted take Mitzvos

When the Jewish nation left Egypt, the Torah relates how Moses took the coffin containing Joseph's body with him. Our sages commented on this: "'Come and see how dear Mitzvos were to Moses. While all of Israel was engaged in the collection of Egyptian spoils, he was engaged in the performance of Mitzvos, as it is written: 'The wise hearted takes Mitzvos.'"

Commentators are puzzled with this statement. Why were the Jewish nation not considered to be engaged in the performance of a mitzvah? After all, did not G-d request of them to ask the Egyptians for their silver and gold?

Moreover, according to our sages' comment on this, G-d "pleaded" with Moses to convince the Jews to take Egyptian wealth with them. The reason for this was so that Abraham will not say that G-d kept only the first half of His promise to enslave the Jews, but did not keep the second part that

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they will leave with great wealth? If G-d had to plead with the Jews to take the wealth with them, why was it not considered a Mitzvah?

Conflicts

A simple answer that has been provided for this matter will serve as a lesson in the way we assign priorities to conflicting Mitzvos.

Invariably, we are called upon to assume responsibilities in our lives that will conflict with one another. For example, a person may be involved in teaching Torah to a group of students, when called upon to assist a person in need.

Alternatively, one might be performing a service for one individual and they are requested to perform a service for the community. Jewish law provides us with general guidelines as to what we should do when we already commenced the performance of one mitzvah. The general rule is that “one who is engaged in one mitzvah is exempted from other Mitzvos.”

Another rule that governs a conflict between learning Torah and the performance of a Mitzvah is that if there is someone else who can perform the Mitzvah one should not interrupt one’s Torah studies. However, where there is no

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one else, one must interrupt Torah study for the performance of the Mitzvah.

What about a situation where the two Mitzvos coincide?

Bending Our Will

There is a third rule that applies: When one receives pleasure or derives a benefit from the one mitzvah, and no benefit from another, the latter mitzvah takes precedence. The rationale for this is that one of the functions of the mitzvah is to refine us. The more a mitzvah “imposes” itself on us and demands of us to “bend” (*Iskafia* in the terminology of the *Zohar*), the greater is its effect on ourselves.

Moreover, the *Zohar* states, that: “When one suppresses the “other side” (i.e. one’s evil impulse) one generates the glory of G-d in all of the worlds.” The Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe (whose anniversary of his passing — coinciding, simultaneously, with the anniversary of the Rebbe’s assumption of leadership — we observed on the Tenth of Shevat) explains (in his classic discourse that was issued for study on the day of *Yud Shevat*), that when one bends his/her will for G-d, thereby doing something to alter his/her nature, s/he generates a G-dly surge of energy that is likewise, of an altered, transcendent nature.

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This surge of divine energy creates an “imbalance” of goodness and holiness in the world that leads inexorably to its total transformation. Whereas, initially, it appears as if G-d has withdrawn His presence from the world, by suppressing our desires and “bending” our will, we reintroduce Him into the world. Then, G-d is pleased to dwell in our world. Indeed, to effect this change is the very purpose for which the entire universe was created and which will be fully realized with the coming of Moshiach.

Moses’ choice of Mitzvah Preferred

This explains why Moses’ choice of a mitzvah was preferred to the choice of the rest of the Jewish people. True, collecting the wealth of Egypt was a Mitzvah, but it cannot compare to a mitzvah that Moses took, to watch the remains of Joseph.

Moses’ Mitzvah did not offer him any physical pleasure or any material gain as did the mitzvah the Jews did to collect the spoils of Egypt. It was thus a mitzvah that possessed the desired quality of refining oneself and the world around, the very purpose of Mitzvos in the first place, and the first step in making the transformation the world needed so desperately.

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The Future

To set the tone for all future efforts at changing the world, Moses demonstrated the power of doing a mitzvah divorced from all forms of self-interest.

Our Sages tell us that even in the Messianic Age we will still remember the Exodus from Egypt.

Although the Redemption will dwarf the miracle of the Exodus we will still remember the Exodus.

One of the explanations given in Chassidic thought is that the Exodus from Egypt represents the idea of suppressing evil.

In the Messianic Age evil will cease to exist. But, since there is an advantage to suppression of evil over transformation, we will be given an opportunity to experience that challenge as well.

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ESSAY TWENTY

THREE JEWS, FOUR OPINIONS

In times of crises, we agonize. What are we to do? How should we view things when there seems to be no meaning to the experiences of life around us?

When we find ourselves situated between the hard place and the rock what is to be our strategy?

The answer is clear and unequivocal.

Whatever we do, must fit into the general direction that leads us inexorably towards the Geulah. Anything that takes our eyes off the road, G-d forbid is a deviation from the G-d given plan.

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ESSAY TWENTY

THREE JEWS, FOUR OPINIONS

Multiple Choice: None of the Above!

The Jewish people were standing between the proverbial “hard place and the rock.” They were stuck at the sea, pursued by the Egyptians and at a complete loss as to their course of action.

Our sages in the Midrash relate that the Jewish people were divide into four camps.

One camp wanted to surrender and return to Egypt.

A second group wanted to fight the Egyptians

A third group wanted to commit suicide by jumping into the sea and drown.

A fourth group wanted to pray to G-d.

Which of the these four groups were right? With whom did G-d agree?

The answer is none of the above.

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Our sages tell us that G-d's response to these four options was: "Why are you crying to me? Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

G-d already told them what to do

While all of the above options have some merit (with the exception perhaps of suicide), they were completely without merit in this particular situation, because G-d had already told them what their purpose was.

They were taken out of Egypt to march towards Sinai, where they would receive the Torah and become a chosen nation. Any thought that turned them in a different direction or that did not push them in the right direction – including the option of prayer – was a deviation from G-d's plan and was therefore wrong in this context, no matter how good in a different situation.

Our Mission Today

Since the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jews in exile, we were told that this journey, as long and as arduous as it is – has one goal one conclusion. Whatever benefit G-d saw in keeping us in exile, He wanted that we should keep our eyes focused in one direction

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exclusively. We should always be looking towards Moshiach and the redemption.

In times of crises, we agonize. What are we to do? How should we view things when there seems to be no meaning to the experiences of life around us? When we find ourselves situated between the hard place and the rock what is to be our strategy?

The answer is clear and unequivocal. Whatever we do, must fit into the general direction that leads us inexorably towards the Geulah. Anything that takes our eyes off the road, G-d forbid, no matter how positive sounding the idea may be, is a deviation from the G-d given plan and is therefore just as wrong as an inferior plan.

But, marching forward is easier said than done. When the Jews were standing at the sea, marching forward meant entering into the sea.

Looking for Nachshon

And there was one Jew, *Nachshon ben Aminadav* who marched forward, because he knew that this was G-d's will. The sea did not deter him. When the waters reached his nostrils, our sages tell us, the waters split, not a second before.

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Sometimes G-d wants us to start the process forward and he will respond in kind.

Modern Day Nachshons

Today is the tenth of Shvat, the anniversary of passing of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph I. Schneerson and the anniversary of the ascension to the leadership of Chabad of his son-in-law Rabbi Menachem M. Schenerson.

Both of their lives were living embodiments of this message of marching forward towards the Redemption. Nothing, absolutely nothing deterred them, no matter how apparently insurmountable the obstacle.

May we finally see their dream and the dream of generations of Jews be realized imminently with the ultimate Redemption!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

BE SILENT!

There are times when we are preoccupied with lofty matters such as prayer, literally or figuratively.

G-d then says to us, “Be silent, stop praying, get up and help another person split their sea.”

The splitting of the sea also alludes to the things in people’s lives that cover up their inner goodness and spirituality, as the sea covers and conceals all that is in it.

Helping someone else “split their sea” can be a far more G-dly experience than the preoccupation with our own spiritual and material needs..

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ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

BE SILENT!

Two Mindsets of Prayer

As the Jewish people were standing at the sea, pursued by the Egyptian armies they did what Jews are expected to do in such situations. They prayed. Their prayer was more than just a perfunctory response to a bad situation; they actually cried out to G-d. Theirs was a heartfelt prayer of persons who are desperate for G-d's assistance.

There are two mindsets of prayer.

One is where we ask G-d to help us. In our minds, we feel that we are essentially in control of our situation—whether it is good health, sustenance, having children, success in raising them, peace and prosperity—but we want G-d to give our efforts a boost. It's not that we are desperate, but that we recognize that G-d's blessing can be helpful. In a medical situation, for example, we may put our trust primarily in the physician and the medication, but still reach out to G-d for His input as well.

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The other mindset is when the situation seems hopeless and our only recourse is to turn to G-d for His salvation. This approach is truly what prayer is all about. According to Maimonides, prayer is the means by which we demonstrate that we depend on G-d. In truth, in every situation—no matter how good the prognosis may be for the future, G-d is totally in control. And a person with this understanding will always pray with the feeling that they utterly depend on G-d. However, in most situations our prayers do not seem that urgent and are not as powerful and meaningful as those when we are desperate and feel our total dependence on G-d.

In light of this analysis one would have thought that when the Jews were standing between the pursuing Egyptian armies and the sea, with absolutely nowhere to go, their prayer was clearly the most urgent, desperate, heartfelt form of prayer, and an expression of their profound faith in and dependency on G-d. Yet, we are told, incredulously, in this week's parsha, that G-d told Moses to tell the Jewish people: "Be silent!" Desist from prayer. Why?

The Paradox of Prayer

One Kabbalistic answer is based on the paradoxical nature of prayer. On the one hand, for one to pray they must

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generate the feeling that they are standing before G-d whom they petition for the things that they need. On the other hand, if we were truly aware of G-d's awesome presence we could not open our mouths to say anything. When a person reaches that point of total submission to G-d they are speechless, and there is no need for prayer. Their needs are automatically taken care of.

When G-d told them not to pray, He was not shunning their heartfelt prayers, He was just saying to them, that the experience of the splitting of the sea will be of such a magnitude as to preclude the ability and the need to pray.

Helping Another Splitting their Sea

Another dimension of this answer that conveys a practical message to us in our own lives is the realization that there are times when we are preoccupied with lofty matters such as prayer, literally or figuratively. G-d then says to us, "Be silent, stop praying, get up and help another person split their sea."

The splitting of the sea, besides its literal meaning, also alludes to the things in people's lives that cover up their inner goodness and spirituality, as the sea covers and conceals all that is in it. Helping someone else "split their sea" can be a far more G-dly experience than the

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preoccupation with our own spiritual and material needs. Certainly prayer and self-refinement have their place, but it can sometimes be overridden and enhanced by our efforts to help others.

This message is especially poignant in the present pre-Messianic era, as we stand ready to enter into a world in which the sea will always be split. Nothing will truly conceal the treasures that lie within the world and humanity.

As we prepare for that momentous occasion, it would serve us well to reflect on the message of reaching out and helping someone else be prepared for the momentous spiritual reenactment of the splitting of the sea, the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

AHEAD OF THE ANGELS

Angels are spiritual beings that are totally devoted to G-d.

Because they have no free choice they are in a constant state of devotion to Him.

Obviously, humans who have inclinations for evil are spiritually inferior to angels.

However, when G-d shows His love for the Israelites—as He did at the time of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds—G-d removed the angels from their pre-eminent position ahead of the Israelites and put them behind.

By doing so, G-d demonstrated that the Israelites were truly superior to the angels.

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ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

AHEAD OF THE ANGELS

Moving the Angels

Right after Moses was instructed by G-d to strike the Sea of Reeds so that the sea would split, the Torah states:

“The angel of G-d, who has been going in **front** of the Israelite camp, moved and went **behind** them.”

Rashi and other commentators explain that the function of the angels at this point was to serve as a shield for the Israelites, to protect them from the arrows and spears of the pursuing Egyptians.

Several questions come to mind that have been raised by Biblical commentators:

First, why did G-d have to move the angels from their position in front of the Israelites to the back? Couldn't G-d have just simply sent other angels to take up the position behind the Israelite lines?

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Why ELOkim?

Second, there are two names that are used in the Torah for G-d. One is the four letter name, known as the Tetragrammaton, also known as the essential name of G-d, as well as the name of G-d that is associated with His attribute of mercy. The other name is *Elokim*, which connotes G-d's attribute of justice.

In this narrative, when describing the angels that took their position behind the Israelites, they are described as the “angels of *Elokim*.”

Why the use of this name, which usually describes G-d in His mode of judgment, and not the name that expresses G-d's attribute of mercy? Isn't the act of sending angles to protect the Israelites from the assaults of the Egyptian army an act of Divine benevolence rather than an act of Divine judgment?

We are Superior to Angels

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev provides a novel insight into the positioning of angels here that will shed light on the forgoing questions. What follows is an exposition of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's commentary based on his work *Kedushas levi*:

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Angels are spiritual beings that are totally devoted to G-d. Because they have no free choice they are in a constant state of devotion to Him. Obviously, humans who have inclinations for evil are spiritually inferior to angels. However, when G-d shows His love for the Israelites—as He did at the time of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds—G-d removed the angels from their pre-eminent position ahead of the Israelites and put them behind. By doing so, G-d demonstrated that the Israelites were truly superior to the angels.

We must still try to understand the changing of the status of angels. If the angels are indeed superior to the Israelites why did G-d He reverse that by placing them behind the Israelites? What did they do to place them ahead of the angels?

The Anatomy of Angels

To understand this we must preface Maimonides' interpretation of angels. In addition to the simple explanation that angels are spiritual forces, angels are also metaphoric terms to describe the laws of nature. Up until the critical moment when the Egyptians were pursuing the Israelites, the fledging Jewish nation was subject to the laws of nature. True, miracles did happen. The ten plagues that

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devastated Egypt were clearly beyond the realm of nature. However, they were G-d's way of interjecting Himself into nature. It did not mean that the Israelites had the ability to transcend nature.

This, then is the symbolism in the stationing of the angels of G-d-*Elokim* ahead of the Israelites. "Angels of Elokim" means the instruments of the Divine name that is associated with nature. Indeed, the name *Elokim* is numerically equivalent to the word *hateva*, which means nature. By placing these angels before the Israelites, G-d was telling them that they were still subordinate to the laws of nature.

This, however, changed for good once they were ready to cross the Sea and sever their ties with the Egyptian people and way of life. At this point, G-d elevated the Jewish nation to a new status. They were now going to be ahead of the forces of nature.

Transcending Natural Forces

From that time onward, the Jewish people's very existence dramatizes their transcendence over the natural forces. By all counts, we should not have survived after centuries and millennia of persecution and assimilation, Yet we did, and flourished as well.

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The power of transcendence, that was to become the basic nature of the Jewish nation, was finalized at Sinai, but was initiated right before they were to cross the Sea of Reeds.

Whenever we consider the future of the Jewish people and the Biblical promises of the Redemption, we frequently express skepticism: How can we possibly counter the forces of exile. These angels of G-d, the forces of nature, are too formidable for us to overcome.

According to Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, the message of the angel moving behind the Jews is that we are the masters of our destiny and future and even the angels of G-d, so to speak, will take a back seat. These angels will also separate us from the arrows and spears hurled at us by our adversaries throughout history.

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ESSAY TWENTY-THREE TEN PLAGUE THERAPY (3)

The “eye” represents the way we look at things.

There are two general perspectives to everything.

One is the view that is the natural outgrowth of the “land,”
i.e., the day to day exigencies of life.

And then there is the perspective that comes from wisdom;
specifically Divine wisdom that is embodied in the Torah
that sees things from “above.”.

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ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

TEN PLAGUE THERAPY (3)

Ten Step Therapy

In earlier essays (See “Light from the Future” on the two parshiyos of Vo’eira and Bo) the Ten Plagues were characterized not simply as a harsh punishment for the Egyptian oppression of the Israelites, but also as a ten-step therapy that shatters the obstacles to spiritual growth. We also stated that these ten steps were a preparation for the Ten Commandments that the Israelites received at Sinai seven weeks after their Exodus from Egypt.

The first six plagues were then discussed in light of the therapy aspect they represented.

In this essay we will continue with the next plague of *barad*-hail. However, a brief summary of the last six plagues is in order.

One must first destroy all the icons (first two plagues of blood and frogs). One must then recognize the need to make small and incremental changes (the third plague of lice), while appreciating how special they are, both their

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G-dly soul and even their animal soul (the fourth and fifth plagues of the mixture of animals and pestilence, respectively). At that point we are ready to destroy the Egyptian weltanschauung that has come to define us (the sixth plague of boils).

Twin Forces of Destruction

The seventh plague of *barad*-hail, which consisted on both fire and water, symbolizes the twin forces of destruction: fiery passion and icy indifference. The Torah relates that those people and animals who were outside were all destroyed. Those who went inside and brought their animals with them were spared.

Translated into terms of human growth and development (thereby saving one's G-dly and animal souls) this means that it is crucial that we go "inside." In Talmudic parlance the "outside" is referred to as *reshus harabim*, "the domain of the **many**" while the "inside" is characterized as *reshus hayachid*, "the **exclusive** domain." To rebuild ones personality in the proper mold one must take all of his or her ideas, goals and life's experience and bring them "inside," into a world that is dominated by one overarching, G-dly objective.

This does not mean that we cannot be multifaceted. On the

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contrary, this seventh step for self-improvement and spiritual development urges us to take all of our multifaceted talents, ideas etc. and have them reflect a unified purpose.

This plague thus parallels the Seventh Commandment, “Do not commit adultery.” Committing adultery in the spiritual realm is to be **wed** to more than one ideal. The plague of hail that forces us to take ourselves and our animals inside an exclusive domain prevents us from being wed to different ideologies and ideals that proliferate “outside.”

Locust Therapy

Now that we’ve progressed to the point where we have destroyed the icons, recognize our potential for growth, eliminated the Egyptian Weltanschauung and have taken all of our diversified areas of expression “inside,” there is still a need to apply the eight plague of *arbeh*-locust to our quest for spiritual development.

The plague of locust destroyed the crops and guaranteed a famine. Furthermore, the Torah describes the effects of the plague in terms of how they covered the land to the extent that “they could not see the eye of the land.”

What is meant by the “eye of the land?”

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The “eye” represents the way we look at things. There are two general different perspectives to everything. One is the perspective that is the natural outgrowth of the “land,” i.e., the day to day exigencies of life. And then there is the perspective that comes from wisdom, specifically Divine wisdom that is embodied in the Torah that sees things from “above.”

One might think that it suffices to have the right direction in life (provided for by the seventh plague that directs us to focus inwards, to the domain of one). This plague informs us that one must also be imbued with the knowledge and perspective provided by Torah study. Thus the plague of locust covered up the earthy perspective and created a sense of hunger about which the prophet stated: “They will be hungry not for bread, but for the word of G-d.”

In Biblical parlance, bread and food are metaphors for Torah knowledge that must be studied and digested. One must always strive to learn more just as if he had not eaten anything. To grow, one must have a philosophy of life not just a general direction towards life.

Thirst and Hunger for Knowledge

We are living in unique times. Countless numbers of Jews

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are demonstrating a tremendous thirst for the knowledge of Torah making the foregoing Biblical prophecy a reality. It is high time that we see the fulfillment of the other prophecies that announce the coming of Moshiach and the complete Redemption that will usher in an age when the “world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the waters cover the sea.”

At that time the prophet predicts we will all see “eye to eye” with G-d. Indeed, “All flesh will see,” even the earthly level of flesh shall be endowed with the G-d’s unique perspective.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

SEA AND LAND

(Copied and slightly adapted from an essay by Yanky
Tauber based on a talk of the Rebbe.)

The Exodus set them free from the paganism of Egypt.

It removed the shackles of "landism" from their souls,
exposing them to the all-consuming spiritual truth of the
sea.

The Exodus liberated them from the prison of self, allowing
them to merge with the infinite essence of all.

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE – PARSHAS BESHALLACH

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

SEA AND LAND*

**(*Copied and slightly adapted from an essay by Yanky
Tauber based on a talk of the Rebbe.)**

Splitting of the Sea and Sinai: Twin Events

The Torah portion of Beshallach features the miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds. Next week's Torah portion of Yisro highlights the revelation of G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. Superficially, these two unprecedented events had nothing in common, but, a deeper reflection on these two events will demonstrate that the crossing of the sea was a prelude for the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the subsequent drying up of the water where the Israelites were able to "walk on dry land within the sea" epitomized the very objective of the giving of the Torah.

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"Land" and "Sea": Two Modes of Being.

"Land" and "sea" represent parallel worlds- mirror realities, if you will. "Every creature which exists on land," says the Talmud, "has its equivalent in the sea." The defining difference between land and sea creatures is their relationship with their respective environments. The land animal is utterly dependent on the terrain he inhabits: the land either nourishes him directly, or nourishes the creatures that nourish him etc. The same is true of the sea creature's dependence on the sea.

Nevertheless, there is a marked difference between the manifest nature of this dependence. There is nothing to prevent the land animal from severing all direct contact with the land for extended periods of time. Conceivably a land creature can live an entire lifetime without acknowledging, or in any way demonstrating, from where his sustenance is derived. Sea creatures on the other hand, live submerged within their source of nourishment.

Thus, "land" and "sea" represent two modes of being. A "land creature" is one who lives his life on the material surface of reality, with little mind to the underlying forces that sustain it. A spiritual essence, source and purpose to life, of which the material is but an embodiment and expression, seems to him a fantasy or, at best irrelevant.

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In contrast, the "sea creature" is a being wholly submerged and demonstratively dependent upon, his source of sustenance. To him, life is inseparable from its root and aim, and he lives and breathes this truth his every living moment. He is one who has drowned his ego in the sea of divine truth, who has merged his self with the spiritual essence of reality.

Removed the Shackles of "Landism"

But seven days after their liberation from Egypt, the Jewish people experienced a splitting of the sea.

The Exodus had set them free from the paganism of Egypt. It had removed the shackles of "landism" from their souls, exposing them to the all-consuming spiritual truth of the sea. It had liberated them from the prison of self, allowing them to merge with the infinite essence of all. But until the sea was split before them and they were to "walk on dry land within the sea" -until they were to learn to transcend their sea-identity as well- their redemption was not complete.

For just as the material is but an iceberg-tip of the spiritual reality that underlies it, so too, the spiritual world of the "sea creature" is but a face, an expression of a more quintessential reality. G-d created both matter and spirit,

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each to express a facet of His truth; He created both the human ego and man's capacity for self-effacement, each to its distinct end. The purpose of life is not to divorce the self from its divine source, but neither is it to drown it in the identity-obliterating waters of unfettered spirit.

After freeing them from the constraints of self, G-d freed the Jewish people from the constraints of selflessness as well. He split the sea before them, showing it to be but another tool and medium to access His truth, a truth transcending matter and spirit alike. he showed them that man can walk on dry land within the sea - that he can live a life that is aware of, and servant to, its divine source and, at the same time retain and constructively apply his identity and individuality.

He then brought them to Sinai to await detailed instructions.