

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about the beginning of *Bnei Yisrael's* travels in the desert. The Torah relates (15:23), "They came to Marah, but they could not drink the waters of Marah because they were bitter; therefore they named it 'Marah' / 'bitter'." The Torah continues: "[Moshe] cried out to *Hashem*, and *Hashem* showed him a tree; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There [*Hashem*] established for [the nation] a *Chok* / decree and a *Mishpat* / ordinance, and there He tested it." Our Sages identify the wood that Moshe was commanded to throw into the water as olive wood or the wood of another bitter tree. That bitter wood miraculously sweetened the water!

R' Aharon Lewin z"l *Hy"d* (the *Reisher Rav*; killed in the Holocaust) writes: Logic would dictate that something sweet should have been thrown into the bitter water, not something bitter! However, *Hashem* took this opportunity to teach that His ways often transcend human logic. Just as a person cannot understand how a bitter substance could turn bitter water sweet, so we cannot comprehend *Hashem's* ways.

R' Lewin continues: In this light, we can understand the connection between this event and the end of the verse, "There He established for it a *Chok* / decree and a *Mishpat* / ordinance." *Mishpatim* are the Torah's laws that make sense to us (e.g., honor your parents, do not murder, etc.), while *Chukim* are laws that are beyond our understanding. This event teaches us to accept *Hashem's* ways and His laws that are beyond our understanding just as we accept those that we think we understand. (*Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun: Shmot* 132 [p.155])

Shabbat

"See that *Hashem* has given you the Sabbath; that is why He gives you on the sixth day a two-day portion of bread." (16:29)

R' Shlomo Yosef Zevin z"l (1888-1978; Russia and Israel; co-founder and editor of the *Encyclopedia Talmudit*) writes: Our verse says, "See that *Hashem* has given you the Sabbath." Since one cannot "see" a negative, the verse must be teaching us that there is more to *Shabbat* than not working. *Shabbat* has a positive aspect--it is a day of *Menuchah* / tranquil rest and *Kedushah* / sanctity.

Midrash Shochoer Tov comments that everything about *Shabbat* is doubled--the double portion of *Mahn* that *Bnei Yisrael* received on *Erev Shabbat*, the two lambs of the *Shabbat Mussaf* offering in the *Bet Hamikdash*, the two candles that are lit in honor of *Shabbat*, and the two commandments regarding *Shabbat*: "*Zachor*" / "remember" and "*Shamor*" / "guard." R' Zevin explains that the *Midrash* is alluding to this double nature of *Shabbat*--on the one hand, a day to refrain from work, and on the other hand, a day of *Menuchah* and *Kedushah*.

We say in the *Shabbat* prayers: "And You did not give it, *Hashem*, our *Elokim*, to the nations of the lands, nor did you make it the inheritance, our King, of the worshipers of graven images . . ." Do not other nations have days of rest? They do, answers R' Zevin, but to them, a day of rest is primarily a day of not working. The positive aspects of the day of rest, the tranquility and the holiness, are unique to our Sabbath.

(*L'Torah U'le'mo'adim*)

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“It happened that when Moshe raised his hand *Yisrael* was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger.” (17:11)

The *Mishnah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 3:8) asks: Did Moshe’s hands make the war when he raised them or break the war when he lowered them? Rather, answers the *Mishnah*, the verse teaches that as long as the Jewish People turned their eyes upward and subjected their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they prevailed. If not, they fell. [Until here from the *Mishnah*]

R’ Chaim of Volozhin z”l (Belarus; 1749-1821) explains: The attack by Amalek caused a *Chillul Hashem* / desecration of G-d’s Name, for it was meant to demonstrate that the G-d of *Bnei Yisrael* was not invincible. The antidote was for *Bnei Yisrael* to turn their thoughts Heavenward--not to pay attention to their own suffering, but only to be concerned with G-d’s honor. When they did that, they were victorious.

(*Nefesh Ha’chaim* II ch. 11)

A related thought:

“And he said, ‘For the hand is on the throne of *Kah--Hashem* maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation.’” (17:15)

Rashi z”l explains: The Divine Name (“Y-K-V-K”) is divided into half (“*Kah*”), as if to say that the Holy One, blessed is He, swears that His Name will not be complete nor His throne complete until the name of Amalek is entirely blotted out. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Chaim Vital z”l (1543-1620; Tzefat and Damascus) writes: One should remember every day what Amalek did to us. The time for this remembrance is when one recites “*Yehei Shmei Rabbah*” / “May His Name become great.”

(*Sha’arei Kedushah* 1:4)

R’ Simcha of Vitry z”l (France; died 1105) writes that “*Yehei Shmei Rabbah*” is a prayer that *Hashem*’s Name become great and be blessed--*i.e.*, that *Hashem*’s name be complete, which will happen when Amalek is destroyed. [That nation was unmoved by the wonders that *Hashem* had performed in Egypt and at the *Yam Suf*. It wished to deny G-d’s power and to teach the world not to fear Him. *Hashem*’s Name--*i.e.*, His revelation--cannot be complete as long as Amalek’s message continues to exist.]

Others disagree with R’ Simcha’s interpretation, however. They translate this prayer: “May *Hashem*’s Name, which is already great, also be blessed.” [According to this interpretation, *Yehei Shmei Rabbah* has no connection to remembering Amalek.]

(*Tosafot: Berachot* 3a)

“*Hashem* strengthened the heart of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and he pursued *Bnei Yisrael* . . .” (14:8)

R’ Meir Halevi Rotenberg z”l (1760-1827; *Apter Rebbe*) writes: A person must believe wholeheartedly that everything in the world, including himself, contains a spark of the Divine; otherwise, it could not exist. When man believes this, he will not be afraid of anything--not even the *Yetzer Ha’ra*--for when he reflects on the fact that the Divine is even within him, he will not be swayed to sin.

He continues: Even Pharaoh had a Divine spark within him, and that is what strengthened Pharaoh’s heart. That Divine spark desired to be revealed and to sanctify G-d’s Name, so it “pursued *Bnei Yisrael*” in order to be elevated through them. Therefore, Moshe told *Bnei Yisrael* (14:13), “Do not fear! Stand fast and see the salvation of *Hashem* that He will perform for you today.” Once the Divine spark--the little bit of holiness--that sustains Pharaoh is drawn out, the evil that remains will collapse on its own.

(*Ohr La’shamayim*)



“He removed the wheels of their chariots and caused them to drive with difficulty. Egypt said, ‘I shall flee before *Yisrael*, for *Hashem* is waging war for them against Egypt (literally, “in Egypt”).’” (14:25)

Usually, the name “*Hashem*” connotes G-d’s Attribute of Mercy. Why, then, would the Egyptians use that Name here?

R’ Yitzchak Arieli z”l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav; author of *Enayim La’mishpat*) answers: The verse is expressing the Egyptians’ realization that the punishment they were about to experience at the *Yam Suf* would make the Plagues in Egypt look merciful.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha’geulah* p.66)



“With Your kindness You guided this people that You redeemed; *Nei’halta* / You led with Your might to Your holy abode.” (15:13)

Why did *Bnei Yisrael* say this in past tense when they had not yet come to *Eretz Yisrael*? R’ Moshe David Valle z”l (Italy; 1697-1777) answers: When *Hashem* promises something, it is as good as done.

In fact, however, the generation that witnessed the Splitting of the Sea would never come to *Eretz Yisrael*; only their children would enter the Land. Thus, writes R’ Valle, *Bnei Yisrael* were Divinely-inspired to use the verb “*Nei’halta*,” the same verb that Yaakov Avinu used to describe a long journey that would not be completed in one generation (see *Bereishit* 33:14 and *Rashi* z”l there). At the same time, our Sages say that even babies in the womb sang this song, and they did enter the Land.

(*Berit Olam*)