

The central theme of this week's Torah portion, *B'Shalakh*, is the Exodus from Egypt. Still, this does not represent a moment of liberation or celebration. There is fear and uncertainty. The Israelites are now trapped between the Sea of Reeds, in front of them, and the powerful Egyptian army coming behind them.

At this point God instructs Moses, "You lift up your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the Israelites may march into the sea on dry ground." A few verses later, when now the Egyptians are the ones on that same dry ground, God, once again, instructs Moses "hold out your arm over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians and upon their chariots and upon their horsemen."

This is it! This is the end of slavery. No one is running after them any longer. No one is behind them; only freedom, wide and abundant freedom is waiting in front of them!

And it is only at this point, that the biblical narrative describes a moment of ecstatic celebration; the Children of Israel sing! This moment is usually recognized as *Shirat Hayam*-the Song of the Sea. For this reason, every year, when we get to this Torah portion, we refer to this Shabbat as *Shabbat Shira* – 'the Song Sabbath.'

During non-pandemic times, it is common to have *Hazzanim* turn this Shabbat into a Shabbat of songs and additional musical celebrations.

This year, I came across some *Midrashic* material, which opened my eyes to an idea that I had never entertained before.

This *Midrash* asks the following question: "How do we know that the sons thrown into the Nile River went up with their parents out of Egypt?"

We can justify this question based on a particular reading of the wording of *Shirat Hayam*. *Az yashir Moshe uB'nai Yisrael*. Instead of reading these words in the more traditional way, 'Then Moses and the Israelites sang...' the *Midrash* is inviting us to read them as 'Then Moses and the **sons** of the Israelites sang...'

This particular reading is the basis for the very unusual response that that same *Midrash* offers: "The Holy Blessed One signaled to the angel appointed over the water (Nile River) and it spit them out into the wilderness. They ate and drank and flourished there."

This is an extremely innovative and daring option! Challenging Pharaoh's decree, Moses was not the only one whose life was spared. Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses from the waters of the Nile and raised him as the 'Palace child.' According to this *Midrash*, all the other little boys did not drown in the Nile either; 'the appointed angel' saved them and brought them into the wilderness, where they ate, drank and flourished.

At the time of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, these boys reunited with their parents, and joined Moses in thanking God through song!

The *Midrash* concludes: ‘and when the people of Israel were on the banks of the [Reed] Sea, their children came in front of them and opened their mouths and said, “These are our fathers!”’

At this time, the same God who rescued their fathers (and mothers) from the waters of the Sea of Reeds is the one Who rescued them from the waters of the Nile. The words of the Song fully support this concept: “YAH is my strength and might; God is my Deliverance. This is my God and I will enshrine Him; The God of my father, and I will exalt Him.”

For the first time after slavery, children and parents are thanking God, thanking the same God!

Only when parents are being reunited with their children, only then, can they celebrate their freedom!

Shabbat Shalom!

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