

How Did the Sea Split?

The Two Stories of the Splitting of the Red Sea

Based on Rabbi Mordechai Breuer's

Aspect Methodology

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Dealing with Contradictions

EVERY MORNING, in our daily prayers, we express that dealing with contradictions is inherent to studying Torah: “two verses that contradict each other [remain in contradiction] until a third verse is used to and reconciles them.”¹ This is known as the last of the 13 midrashic principles of Rabbi Yishmael. In his 13th principle, R. Yishmael outlines a midrashic method for resolving contradictions between two *pesukim* – a third *pasuk* is used as a guide as to which *pasuk* should be interpreted literally and which should be interpreted figuratively. This existence of this midrashic principle proves what is blatantly obvious – that two contradictory verses cannot both be interpreted literally. When contradictions arise, we are forced into a midrashic or figurative interpretation.²

1. *Sifra, Breita Di-rabi Yishmael.*

2. A few examples of contradictions: Man and woman created together (Bereshit 1:27) then separately (Ibid. 2:7, 22). Two of each animal were on the ark (Ibid. 6:19–20) and seven pairs of pure animals (Ibid. 7:1). Binyamin was born in Canaan (Ibid. 35:18–19) and in Padan Aram (Ibid. 35:24–26). Yosef was sold to Potifar by the Medanim (Ibid. 37:36) and the Yishmaelim (Ibid. 39:1). The plague of blood started when Moshe hit the river with his staff (Shemot 7:17–18) and when Aaron raised his staff (Ibid. 7:19–20). The commandment of Shabbat begins with Zachor (Shemot 20:8) and Shamor (Devarim 5:12). The korban Pesach eaten roasted (Shemot 12:9) and cooked (Devarim 16:7). The Omer is counted for 7 weeks/49 days and 50 days (Vayikra 23:15–16). The spies were sent by Hashem (Bamidbar 13:1–2) and the nation (Devarim 1:22).

This is a small sample and all these issues were dealt with by the *mefarshim*, but they had to resort to *drash* and could not deal with them based on the *pshat*.

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At the same time, Jewish tradition teaches that “*Ein mikra yotzeh midey peshuto* – the text should be understood based on its plain meaning” (Shabbat 63a).³ However, when contradictions arise, the plain meaning of the verse cannot be resolved without resorting to *drash*. Is there any way that the text can be understood based on its plain meaning in these cases?

Throughout our history, there have been various interpretations offered that recognize that the Torah is combining two separate contradictory accounts. The first example is the concept that the two stories of creation are resulting from *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim* – Hashem’s attribute of justice and attribute of mercy. Two separate *middot* (attributes) of Hashem lead to two different accounts of creation, but nevertheless both find expression in a single Torah. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s “The Lonely Man of Faith” is a discussion of the theological implications of these two different accounts.⁴ Another example is Hazal’s statement of “*Zakhor veshamor bedibur ehad*,”⁵ which also references the fact that two contradictory statements are found together in our Torah. The famous phrase from the Talmud: “*Elu ve’elu divrei Elokim hayyim*” (*Eruvin* 13b, *Gittin* 6b) provides a theological framework within which we can recognize that contradictions are inevitable when a single G-d interacts with humanity in different ways. However, until Rabbi Mordechai Breuer developed his *shitat ha-behinot* (aspect methodology) to analyze the Torah, contradictions were dealt with by the *mefarshim* on a case-by-case basis using figurative interpretations. They were never addressed through a consistent methodology, and were often not completely loyal to the *pshat*.

An Introduction to Rabbi Mordechai Breuer and *Shitat Ha-behinot*

Rabbi Mordechai Breuer (1921–2007) was born in Germany and was the great-grandson of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. He made aliyah to Eretz Yisrael in 1934 and studied at Jerusalem’s Chorev School, Yeshivat Kol Torah and Yeshivat Chevron. He then spent his career teaching at Yeshivat Hadarom, Michlalah Yerushalaim and Yeshivat Har Etzion.

R. Breuer has made three major contributions to the Torah world. His first major contribution was standardizing the text of the Tanakh. For this work, he won the Israel Prize in 1999. His authoritative Tanakh is the one currently used by the Mossad Harav Kook Publishing house. His next major contribution was definitively determining the system for the *taamei ha-mikra* – biblical cantillation. Before his work, the general principles were known, but an exact determination of the system by which they were implemented was fully established by him in his book *Taamei Ha-mikra*.⁶

3. See for example Rashbam, Bereshit 37:1 s.v. *Eleh Toldot Yaakov*.

4. See Reuven Ziegler, *Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Urim, 2012), 121–123.

5. *Mekhilta, Masekhta Devachodesh Yitro*, Chapter 7.

6. R. Mordechai Breuer, *Taamei Ha-Mikra*, (Chorev, 1990).

His third major contribution was his development of *shitat ha-behinot* – aspect methodology.⁷ While teaching at Yeshivat Hadarom, he began investigating the claims of Bible critics whose analysis of the Torah is based on the documentary hypothesis. Although the hypothesis has been modified over the years, the basic academic claim has remained – that the Torah is comprised of separate documents compiled by a redactor. This hypothesis can explain the duplications, contradictions and language changes throughout the Torah.⁸ It is also used by the academic world to attribute authorship of the Torah to different groups of people at different times with different political motivations. This directly goes against our belief that the Torah is divine. R. Breuer's insight was that secular Bible critics were correctly identifying contradictions and inconsistent narratives, but these are not separate documents compiled by a human. R. Breuer developed a systematic approach which explains that these are actually representations of different ways Hashem manifests in this world. Hashem was the author of these narratives and Hashem combined them into the Torah. This method became known as *shitat ha-behinot* – aspect methodology.⁹

R. Breuer's Works On *Shitat Ha-Behinot*

R. Breuer laid out the application of his theories in two main books: *Pirkei Moadot* (1986) and *Pirkei Bereshit* (1999). His articles about *shitat ha-behinot* including responsa and debate about this method were collected and published in *Shitat Ha-behinot Shel Harav Mordechai Breuer* (2005). Other articles he published using *shitat ha-bechinot* were collected and published posthumously in *Pirkei Mikraot* (2009). All of his works are in Hebrew. Very little is accessible to the English-speaking world. I have personally endeavored to translate his works and make them available.

As previously discussed, there is widespread acceptance that there are two separate accounts of the creation of man, as R. Soloveitchik puts it – Adam I and Adam II. R. Breuer argued that “cracking open this tiny window actually opens the floodgates to biblical criticism of the entire Torah.”¹⁰ If we accept that Adam I was created with *middat ha-din* (attribute of justice) and Adam II was created with *middat ha-rahamim* (attribute of mercy),

7. For a detailed introduction to the documentary hypothesis and *shitat ha-behinot*, see Rabbi Amnon Bazak, *To This Very Day*. (Maggid, 2020), chapter 3. A free version can be found online here: <https://etzion.org.il/en/series/fundamental-issues-study-tanakh-lessons-9-16>.

8. Here are a few examples of alternating words: In the story of the banishment of Hagar in Bereshit chapter 16, she is referred to as a *shifcha* (maidservant). In the story of the banishment of Hagar and Yishmael in Bereshit chapter 21, she is referred to as an *amah* (maidservant). When Moshe is told at the burning bush to throw down his staff, it turns into a *nachash* (Shemot 7:9). When Aharon throws down the staff before Pharaoh, it turns into a *tanin* (Ibid. 7:15). Throughout the stories of the flood and the splitting of the sea, dry land is referred to as *harava* (Bereshit 7:22, Shemot 14:21) or *yabasha* (Bereshit 8:14, Shemot 14:22).

9. Despite the name of his theory, R. Breuer rarely uses the term *behinot* to describe the different aspects or manifestations of Hashem. For most of his analysis, he uses the word *hanhagot* which I translate as manifestations. At the beginning of *Pirkei Bereshit*, R. Breuer uses the terminology from Hazal of *middot* to describe the different narratives in *Sefer Bereishit*. I will use *middot* here to refer to the two different stories as it is a more familiar concept to people who have not previously studied Rav Breuer's work.

10. *Shitat Ha-behinot Shel Harav Mordechai Breuer*, 188–189.

then ten generations later we should expect to find Noach I with *middat ha-din* and Noach II with *middat ha-rahamim*, followed by Avraham I and Avraham II, Yitzchak I and Yitzchak II and so on. This then continues throughout the entire Torah.¹¹

Building on this approach, R. Breuer argues that many stories in the Torah are composite stories – two intertwined stories resulting from the different *middot* of Hashem told as one story.¹² The differing details of these two stories lead to inconsistencies and contradictions in the pshat. Therefore, to properly understand the larger narrative, first the individual stories need to be separated out and understood individually. Only then can the two stories be recombined and understood in that context.¹³ Some examples of these composite sections are The Flood,¹⁴ The Tower of Bavel,¹⁵ Brit Bein Ha-betarim,¹⁶ The Sale of Yosef,¹⁷ The Plagues of Blood, Frogs, Hail and Locusts,¹⁸ The Splitting of the Red Sea,¹⁹ and The Sin of the Spies.²⁰ Below, I will use R. Breuer's method to explain the three *pesukim* describing the sea splitting and returning based on R. Breuer's analysis in the 12th chapter of his work *Pirkei Moadot*.

Pre-existing Notions for How the Sea Split

The splitting of the sea is one of the most significant events in our people's history, probably second only to *Maamad Har Sinai* – the revelation at Sinai. Bnei Yisrael, the Jewish people, a group of newly freed slaves, are trapped between the sea and the mighty Egyptian army. Moshe extended his hand over the sea and it formed two walls of water. Bnei Yisrael went into the sea and the Egyptians gave pursuit. Bnei Yisrael left the sea and the water crashed down upon the Egyptians. This is the image depicted in the movies *The Ten Commandments* (1956) and *The Prince of Egypt* (1998).

However, a different image occurs elsewhere. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks was fond of discussing the natural means of how the sea split.²¹ He would often cite an academic study explaining

11. Ibid.

12. This is sometimes referred to as a diachronic reading of the text.

13. Many Orthodox Jews in the academic world still reject this analysis. See Joshua Berman's *Inconsistency in the Torah* (Oxford University Press, 2017) and his *Ani Maamin* (Maggid, 2020). See also Umberto Cassuto *The Documentary Hypothesis* (Shalem Press, 2006). However, despite this rejection, both Berman and Cassuto offer alternative original theories explaining how the Torah can be comprised of multiple sources. Their theories are more limited in scope than *shitat ha-behinot* or the documentary hypothesis.

14. *Pirkei Bereshit*, Ch. 8. See also Yonatan Grossman, *Creation: The Story of Beginnings* (Maggid, 2019), 240–241. Grossman uses *shitat ha-behinot* to explain the difficulties with the flood narrative. Alternatively, Joshua Berman in *Ani Maamin*, Ch. 5 and *Inconsistency in the Torah*, Ch. 13 provides many arguments against a diachronic reading of the flood story.

15. Ibid. Ch. 9.

16. Ibid. Ch. 14.

17. Ibid. Ch. 35.

18. *Pirkei Moadot*, Ch. 11.

19. Ibid. Ch. 12.

20. Ibid. Ch. 19. If you are interested in translations of these chapters, please email me at joeyfox85@gmail.com.

21. For example see <https://youtu.be/roFdPHdhgKQ?t=926>.

how sustained 100 km/h winds could cause a significant drop in water levels.²² An Israeli hydrologist named Moshe Dayan (a different person than the former general and minister of defence) published a study describing the extreme differences between high tide and low tide found in the Red Sea and how this could cause the waters to recede.²³ A similar effect can be found today at the Bay of Fundy Hopewell Rocks in New Brunswick where it fills and then drains of water between high tide and low tide. It is this image that is depicted in the more modern movie *Exodus: Gods and Kings* (2014). Bnei Yisrael are trapped at the sea. As the night passes, the sea drains and the seabed becomes exposed due to a combination of wind, tides and currents. Bnei Yisrael cross into the sea and when the Egyptians pursue, the sea in the form of a massive tidal wave comes crashing back upon them.

The image of a natural means by which the sea recedes and then returns is a very different event than the sea splitting and forming into two walls of water. Which of these images are substantiated by the text?

The Text of the Sea Splitting in the Torah

With a basic understanding of *shitat ha-behinot* and identification of different images for the splitting of the sea, we can proceed to examine the text in the Torah. While a proper understanding of this story would require a study of the entire section beginning with *Parshat Beshalah* until *shirat hayam* (the song at the sea), that is beyond the scope of the analysis here.²⁴ We will just focus on the *pasuk* describing how the sea splits and the two *pesukim* describing how it returns in *Shemot* Ch. 14. It begins with Hashem giving Moshe a command in *pasuk* 16:

...וַיִּטְּ אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּבְקַעַהּוּ...

...Extend your hand upon the sea and split it...

Later, in *pasuk* 21, the Torah describes the sea splitting:

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיּוֹלֶךְ ה' אֶת־הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קְדִים עֲזָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־הַיָּם לַחֲרָבָה וַיִּבְקַעוּ הַיָּמִים.

Moshe extended his hand upon the sea, and Hashem moved the sea with a powerful east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters split.

There are multiple difficulties with this *pasuk*. The first difficulty is that the description in the Torah is different than what Hashem told Moshe. From what Hashem told Moshe, it appears that once Moshe would stretch his hand over the waters, he would be splitting the

22. Carl Drews and Weiqing Han, "Dynamics of Wind Setdown at Suez and the Eastern Nile Delta," PLOS ONE 5(8): (2010), e12481. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0012481>.

23. Moshe Dayan, "The Dividing of the Red Sea According to Natural Sciences," [Hebrew] *Beit Mikra* 73 (1978), 162-176.

24. See *Pirkei Moadot*, "The Splitting of the Red Sea" [Hebrew] Chapter 12 for the full analysis. Email me at joeyh fox85@gmail.com for my English translation of this chapter. For a briefer analysis in English of how this entire section divides into two stories, see Rav Yehuda Rock's analysis here: www.etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-beshalach/splitting-red-sea.

sea directly. Instead, between Moshe raising his hand and the sea splitting, Hashem brings an eastern wind all night long and makes the sea a dry land.

This then creates a glaring contradiction which does not allow for this *pasuk* to be read as describing a single account: the plain understanding of “moved the sea” and “made the sea a dry land” is that the entire sea was moved, became dry land and the seabed was exposed. It would be impossible for the waters to split since there was no remaining water there.²⁵ It would also be difficult to imagine how “moved the sea” and “made the sea a dry land” could be referring to a tiny strip of dry land between two walls of water. It is also difficult to understand how a wind blowing all night long would create the walls of water to form slowly overnight.

All these difficulties are easily resolved if we assume that the Torah is not describing a single splitting of the sea with logical inconsistencies and chronological difficulties, but rather two separate ways in which the sea split. Therefore, we can use *shitat ha-behinot* to describe the two methods of the water parting as described in this *pasuk*:

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּבָּקְעוּ הַמַּיִם.

Moshe extended his hand upon the sea and the waters split.

וַיּוֹלֶךְ ה' אֶת־הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קְדִים עֶזְרָה כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־הַיָּם לְחִרְבָּה.

Hashem moved the sea with a powerful east wind all night and made the sea dry land.

By viewing this as two separate accounts we can now explain what happened. R. Breuer argues that Moshe extending his hand upon the sea and it splitting occurs through *middat ha-din* whereas Hashem bringing the eastern wind all night long occurs through *middat ha-rahamim*.²⁶ With *middat ha-din*, Moshe's actions and the result are directly related to Hashem's command and occur exactly as we would expect – an overt miracle occurs, the sea splits into two and Bnei Yisrael go into the sea and “the water was a wall for them on their right and on their left” (14:22). With *middat ha-rahamim*, a hidden miracle occurs, seemingly by natural means and Hashem brings a wind all night long and pushes the water aside making the sea a dry land.

The Text of the Sea Returning

If the Torah described how the sea parted in two ways, we can assume from the outset that it would also describe the sea returning in two ways. Here is how the Torah describes the returning of the sea (*pesukim* 27–28):

25. A typical example of how Rashi deals with these issues is found in this *pasuk*: “**The waters split** – All the waters in the world.” Mesiah Ilmim and Sifte Ha-hamim explain that Rashi sees the two phrases ‘made the sea a dry land’ and ‘the waters split’ as a redundancy, so he believes ‘made the sea a dry land’ is referring to the water of the sea splitting and reinterprets ‘the waters split’ as referring to other waters in the world. Because of the difficulties in this *pasuk*, Rashi interprets both phrases figuratively and against their plain meaning.

26. *Pirkei Moadot*, 248.

וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לְפָנֹת בְּקֹר לְאֵיתָנוּ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסִים לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר ה' אֶת־
מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם.

Moshe extended his hand upon the sea and the sea returned before morning to its original vigor and Egypt fled towards it and Hashem shook up the Egyptians in the sea.

וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת־הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת־הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל חֵיל פְּרִעָה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא־נִשְׁאַר בָּהֶם
עַד־אַחַד.

The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen and all of Pharaoh's soldiers that were coming after them in the sea. Not one of them remained.

*Pesukim 27 and 28 seem to be copies of each other as they both describe the “sea” or the “waters” returning and what happened to the Egyptians as a consequence. Upon closer inspection, many difficulties arise which are similar to the difficulties found with the sea splitting. If we initially assume that there is only one account described, the word “eitano” is very difficult to understand. It is universally translated as returning to its previous strength or vigor. This means that when the sea split, it was in a state of being weakened and through the process of the sea returning, it is now no longer weakened. However, it is difficult to imagine a stronger image of the sea than it splitting and forming two giant walls of water ready to come crashing down on those who dare to enter. It seems it would have been more appropriate for the Torah to describe the sea as returning to its previously weakened state – *vayashov hayam lechulsho*.*

*Pasuk 27 also describes the sea as returning “before morning.” If the sea had returned as a direct result of Moshe extending his hand, then the Torah would have stated that Moshe extended his hand before morning and then the sea returned to its original vigor. By the Torah attributing the timing of the return to the sea, it appears the sea returned at its natural time and had nothing to do with Moshe extending his hand. If this story was supposed to be read chronologically, *pasuk 28* would make no sense as it would be impossible for the water to return and cover the Egyptians after the sea had already returned and shook up the Egyptians.*

*There are multiple inconsistencies in the terminology used in the the *pesukim* as well. *Pasuk 27* describes the sea returning and *pasuk 28* describes the waters returning. Why would there be a difference between the sea and the waters? There is also an inconsistency in the Torah's description of the Egyptians as *Mitzrayim* or *heil Paroah* – Pharaoh's soldiers. Throughout the story, the Torah also alternates between describing the dry land as *yabasha* or *harava*. All these inconsistencies require explanation.*

*Again, all of these difficulties can be easily resolved similar to how we resolved the difficulties associated with the description of the sea splitting above. The Torah here is describing two different ways of the sea returning corresponding to the two different ways of the sea splitting. Combining the *pesukim* of the sea splitting and returning and then arranging them based on *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim*, this is what we find:*

	MIDDAT HA-DIN	MIDDAT HA-RAHAMIM
SEA SPLITTING	<p>וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּבְקָעוּ הַיָּם Moshe extended his hand upon the sea and the waters split.</p>	<p>וַיּוֹלֶה ה' אֶת־הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קְדָיִם עֶזְרָה כָּל־ הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת־הַיָּם לְחֶרֶב Hashem moved the sea with a powerful east wind all night and made the sea dry land</p>
SEA RETURNING	<p>וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת־יָדוֹ עַל־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁבוּ הַיָּמִים וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת־הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת־ הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל חֵיל פְּרֹעֹה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיּוֹם לֹא־נִשְׁאַר בָּהֶם עַד־אֶחָד Moshe extended his hand upon the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horseman and all of Pharaoh's soldiers that were coming after them in the sea. Not one of them remained.</p>	<p>וַיִּשְׁבּ הַיָּם לְפָנוֹת בֹּקֶר לְאִיתָנוּ וּמִצְרַיִם נָסוּם לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַיִּנְעַר ה' אֶת־מִצְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם The sea returned before morning to its original vigor and Egypt fled towards it and Hashem shook up the Egyptians in the sea.</p>

These *pesukim* neatly divide into two complete and separate descriptions without internal contradictions, duplications or changes in terminology. The aforementioned difficulties in the text only arise because they are combined into one single description.

The parallels between the sea splitting and returning utilizing the two different *middot* of Hashem now become clear. From the perspective of Hashem's *middat ha-din*, Moshe extends his hand twice. First the waters split and then the waters return. From the perspective of *middat ha-rahamim*, first a wind blows all night and makes the sea a dry land and then in the morning the sea returns to its original vigor. The word *eitano* is now easily understood as it references how the sea was weakened when it was made a dry land and then returned to its original strength. From the perspective of Hashem's *middat ha-din*, the events occur immediately after Moshe extends his hand. However, from the perspective of *middat ha-rahamim*, the wind blows all night long and the sea returns before morning. We ultimately find that both previous images we had of how the Red Sea split have a basis in the text.²⁷

R. Breuer argues that *middat ha-din* describes how this event occurred in a miraculous manner where walls of water formed on their right and left and *Middat ha-rahamim* describes how this event occurred in a seemingly natural manner, with the sea drying out and then returning.²⁸ Therefore, within the perspective of *middat ha-rahamim* the drying out of the sea and the drowning of the Egyptians is directly attributed to Hashem. When the splitting of the sea occurred in a miraculous manner, the Torah ascribes the actions directly to Moshe,

27. Even with Hollywood, *Elu veelu divrei Elokim hayyim!*

28. A complete derivation of this concept is beyond the scope of this work. For a full explanation, see *Pirkei Moadot* pg. 194–196.

but there is no doubt that Hashem is the true source. Conversely, in *middat ha-rahamim*, the drying out of the sea appears natural, so the Torah emphasizes that this was all done by Hashem, even though it could have happened naturally. The returning of the sea occurred in a completely natural manner since Hashem did not need to return the sea Himself, only to stop the eastern wind. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes that the next event – the Egyptians being shook up – is directly attributed to Hashem.

Based on this, the difference between the “waters returned” and the “sea returned” is now apparent. Within *middat ha-din*, the entire sea did not move and much of it might have remained in its natural state. Only adjacent to the strip of dry land within the sea, “the water was a wall for them on their right and on their left” (22) and not the entire sea. Therefore, the Torah describes the return to the natural state as “the waters returned” – the waters adjacent to the dry land that became a wall. Conversely, within *middat ha-rahamim*, the entire sea moved as one when it was made a dry land and it returned as one. Therefore, the Torah describes this as “the sea returned.”

Both through *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim*, through the miraculous and through the natural, Hashem defeated the Egyptians at the Red Sea and saved Bnei Yisrael from the hand of Egypt.

Combining the Two Texts into One Story

When trying to determine what actually happened in the text of the Torah as it is before us, we must be careful. Without the correct approach, we risk falling into the trap of the Sadducees and Karaites which Rabbinic Judaism has fought against for millennia. Reading the text according to the *pshat* is part of our tradition. However, it is fundamentally against the basic tenets of Judaism that the *pshat* is the only ultimate truth. Just like “eye for an eye” is not the ultimate truth, the truth comes through *drash*. Although Hashem manifests in this world through both His *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim*, there is only one G-d. Reflective of this Oneness the fact that both of these two *middot* are intertwined into one narrative in the Torah. Utilizing two underlying stories within the narrative of the splitting and returning of the sea, we can now determine what occurred as described in the Torah.

It is important to note the consistent structure between both the sea splitting and returning. In both accounts, it begins with Moshe extending his hand over the sea. The Torah then describes the natural process by which the sea dries out or returns. It concludes with the direct continuation of Moshe extending his hand over the sea – the waters splitting or returning. Consequently, the natural event of the sea drying and returning interrupts the events of Moshe extending his hand and the waters reacting as a result.

When the sea split, initially Hashem gave Moshe a command with *middat ha-din* to extend his hand over the sea. With *middat ha-din*, Moshe extended his hand over the sea and this began the process of the sea becoming a dry land through *middat ha-rahamim* by a wind blowing all night long. The dry land needs to be understood figuratively as a state of not having the sea fully covered. The entire *pasuk* can be read as a *perat u-klal* – a detailed statement

followed by a general summary: the waters parted – and how did this occur? First Moshe extended his hand upon the sea and then Hashem brought an eastern wind all night long to turn it into a dry land.

A similar method is used to describe how the sea returned. First Moshe extended his hand over the sea with *middat ha-din* and the sea returned with *middat ha-rahamim* before morning and Hashem shook up the Egyptians. The duplication of the description of the Egyptians drowning in *pesukim* 27 and 28 can also be read as a *perat u-klal*. The waters returned and covered the Egyptians (28) – how did this occur? First Moshe extended his hand over the sea, the sea returned to its original vigor before morning and Hashem shook up the Egyptians in the sea (27).

Through the use of *shitat ha-behinot* we have shown how Hashem saved Bnei Yisrael from the Egyptians through both *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim* and how both of these are recorded in the Torah together.

תקותי, שהדברים הכתובים כאן מתקרבים לאמיתה של תורה; תפילתי - שהם יתקבלו על דעת
אוהבי תורה ולומדיה.

*My hope is that what is written here is close to the truth of the Torah. My prayer is that it will be accepted by those who love Torah and learn it.*²⁹

29. Mordechai Breuer, Introduction to Pirkei Moadot.