

B'Shallach

The children of Israel, Moses and Gd are on their way and out of Egypt. Pharaoh had let the people go, and Gd would lead them by a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day. The Parsha begins by noting that their route was “the longer” route and the wording indicates that Gd did not want the people to change their minds and hearts and turn around out of fear. Gd was to take them by the way of the wilderness and the Sea of Reeds (also referred to the Red Sea). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z'l states in his book, Judaism's Life Changing Ideas, that the circuitous route was not even an option for the Israelites. Gd had taken them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, crossed the splitting of the sea, and so far from anywhere recognizable so they could not turn back. This was not because he thought that they would change their minds and want to go home, but because forcing them to be away with no option in return would give them the experience, discipline, understanding, and ability to take their past experiences, and walk into the future with appreciation. Rabbi Sacks concludes that Gd led the Israelites by the longer route was not to prevent their wanting to return, but rather, to prevent their being able to return. The Israelites had to continue onward, which this meant that almost from the beginning of our history as a nation, Jews were forced to learn that a lasting achievement takes time. That the shortest road to anything does not achieve that same lasting effect as the longer journey. Quick schemes and riches usually lead to disappointments and certainly lack the education and foundation needed to sustain a well-rounded circumstance. The Israelites were now beginning their new education, that of the leaders instead of the slaves. (Notes from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Life Changing Ideas, Parsha B'Shallach)

In Chapter 14, the Israelites cried to Moshe, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness: What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying leave us and we will serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?” (14:10-12) Here again, Moshe seems the troublemaker by getting involved in their mundane lives, just like he did when he started with them in Egypt about leaving. Yet, Moshe will exclaim, as the Torah put emphasis on “Have no fear! Stand by and witness the deliverance which the Lord will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again! The Lord will battle for you; you hold your peace!” (14:13-14) (By using the word Lord, Yud, Hay, Vav, Hay: this is denoting the Gd of Mercy, the compassionate Gd, which you find throughout the Book of Shemot.)

The waters rose and made two walls and the Israelites walk through the sea on dry ground. (14:16) Again, the wording gets personal, between Gd and the Egyptians, and Gd claims he will make sure that the Egyptians know that He is the one Gd, and through His might and power, not Pharaoh's, that the war will be won by Gd, and He will eventually gain their admiration. The Egyptians followed the Israelites and all the water covered them and they drowned. (14:26-30)

Then there are the praises, the Song of Moshe and the Song of Miriam. These were the first songs of praise recorded in the Torah. (15:1-21) There was jubilation, freedom and blessing.

After the trepidation, the chase, the fear, and then the triumph, the Israelites found themselves in the middle of the wilderness without water. Their grumbles to Moshe were heard and the bitter waters of Marah were sweetened by another act of Gd giving Moshe instructions. "I am here for you." Gd demonstrates, "I am here to listen to you, in the middle of the wilderness, no one around, it is just me and you." And Gd states for the first time of many, many throughout the Torah, in many different circumstances; *"If you will heed the Lord your Gd diligently, doing what is upright in his sight, giving ear to His commandments and keeping all His laws,"* (25-26) Then more grumbling, then finally Aaron gets involved and says, "Look, you are not really grumbling to Moshe and me, even though we feel it and are disheartened by your doubt, because we told you it was going to be okay, and you saw all the miracles thus far, and you still grumble? You are really grumbling to Gd. You are doubting and complaining to Gd, because we are only the messengers!" Gd heard it all, and probably felt very badly for Moshe and Aaron that they had to deal with all the pressure and negativity, and said, *"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites, you can tell them to stop their whining, I am going to give them yet another miracle, I will feed them meat in the evening (quail) and manna in the morning."* (17:12-15) The whole stipulation was they needed to respect the laws of gathering, six days they would gather, but on the seventh day there would be no gathering and the amount on the sixth day would cover the seventh. Throughout the Torah, Shabbat, from the first Parsha in Genesis until we close our eyes and go up to heaven, Shabbat is the rest and peace we have inherited from Gd. From our time in the wilderness until now. The grumbling of the week's pressures and negativity stops with the Shabbat miracle given to us by Gd. This is yet one of the many tangible miracles we see daily.

There is a Gd and there is proof.