

5782 – Exodus 13-17 - Beshalach (When he let them go)

Exodus 13:17-22

¹⁷When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. **For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."** ¹⁸So **God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.** The Israelites went out of Egypt armed for battle.

YLT—And **it came to pass** in Pharaoh's sending the people away ...

1. 17. וַיְהִי—*It happened.* It is strange that the Torah begins to relate this happy event—the deliverance of the people from bondage—with the word וַיְהִי, *it happened*, a word which normally introduces tragic or sad events (*Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 42). Some commentators explain this as expressing the mood of Pharaoh, who clearly regretted freeing the Jews; others connect it to the Canaanites, who were distressed at the notion of relinquishing their lands to the Jews. Some commentators remark that Moses was anguished when he foresaw that, despite his (role in) delivering the people, he would not enter the Promised Land.

But the Zohar presents another reason why an outburst of joy did not accompany their deliverance. It is a natural condition of man to work and when he is unemployed he becomes dejected and confused. Thus, in a similar sense when the Israelites left Egypt they became depressed for how would they occupy themselves in the future? Only gradually did they truly become aware of their good fortune. This awareness reached its climax at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds [the Red Sea].¹

a. Why Victims Stay²

There are a number of reasons why victims stay with their abuser. It is important to note that **victims do not stay in abusive relationships because they enjoy being abused.** Rather, they have very real, compelling reasons for staying.

1) Fear

Generally, victims stay because **the fear of leaving is greater than the fear of staying. Fear of the unknown can be a powerful reason for "staying put."** Also, victims are often threatened with physical harm if they try to leave. It is well documented that victims are at the most risk of injury when they are leaving. They fear for their safety and the safety of those who help them.

2. וְלֹא-יָנַחֵם אֱלֹהִים—*God did not lead them.* Rambam raises the question as to why God did not simply give them the strength to overcome the Philistines in battle thereby avoiding any need of a detour. He explains that Hashem wanted first to train them in the hardship of the Wilderness in order to increase their gratification and appreciation when they entered the Promised Land, as the Torah declares regarding the manna (*Deu* 8:16). Furthermore, **had Israel not been subjected to this discipline, they would not have been able to conquer the land and wage war with the inhabitants**, as our verse clearly indicates (*Guide to the Perplexed* 3:24).

The Midrash cites several similar reasons why it was essential for Israel to remain in the Wilderness (*Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 20). On the other hand, we find that after the episode of the spies the Israelites were sentenced to forty years of wandering in the desert in punishment for their sinful behavior (*Numbers* 14:33). **Somehow that behavior became a necessary condition for the fulfillment of God's design.** This is another example of the conflict between predestination and free will, a conflict whose resolution will always lie beyond our grasp.

Rambam draws another lesson from this verse. In order to attain His goal of training and educating the people, Hashem caused the people to take a circuitous route. This is symbolic of the fact that in many instances God teaches His people in a roundabout way. Sometimes, for pedagogical reasons, Hashem prefers to limit an undesirable but deeply ingrained behavior pattern instead of forbidding it outright (*Guide to the Perplexed* 3:32).

*Cha(t)am Sofer*³ notes that this verse contains the expression דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ, *by way of the land*, an expression which also has a special meaning as a reference to contemporary or secular culture (*derech erez*). Taking a position against the introduction of new educational systems requiring many hours of study in such a culture, he interprets: Hashem did not lead the people by the *derech erez* of the Philistines, which was similar to that of Egyptians, so that the people would not be tempted to regress into the errors of the Egyptian past. On the contrary, He made them take a long detour to avoid any hold it could have upon them (*Toras Moshe*⁴).

a. Deuteronomy 8:11-20

¹¹Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹²Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you

1 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 162-182.

2 <https://knowmore.fsu.edu/helping-healing/why-victims-stay/>

3 Moses Schreiber (1762-1839), known as Moshe Sofer, and also by his main work *Chatam Sofer (Seal of the Scribe)*, was one of the leading Orthodox rabbis of European Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century.

4 Yeshiva Toras Moshe is an English-speaking Orthodox Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

build fine houses and settle down,¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied,¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock.¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, **to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.**¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."¹⁸ **But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.**¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.²⁰ Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

b. Shemot Rabbah 20:15

Another explanation of: THAT GOD LED THEM NOT. It can be compared to a king who had a son to whom he wished to bequeath an inheritance, but he argued: **'If I give it to him now that he is small, he will not know how to take care of it;** I will therefore wait until my son learns how to write and can understand the value [of my property], then I will bequeath it unto him.' This is what God said: 'If I bring Israel into the Land now before they have busied themselves with My Commandments, they will not know the meaning of heave-offerings and tithes; no, I had better give them the Torah first and then bring them into the Land.'²

(2) Since Israel's existence in Eretz Israel depended entirely on their loyalty to the Torah, they could not enter there before Revelation.

c. Romans 12:1-2

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind (i.e., heart).** Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

d. Ephesians 2:1-2 (NJB)

¹And you were dead, through the crimes and the sins ²which used to make up your way of life **when you were living by the principles of this world,** obeying the ruler who dominates the air, the spirit who is at work in those who rebel.

3. בִּי קָרוֹב הוּא—*Because it was near (NIV—though that (way) was shorter).*

Some Midrashim connect the word קָרוֹב, *near*, to its other meaning, *kin* (related by family). Thus, Israel is called עַם־קָרְבוֹ, *a people who are kindred* (or *close or near*) to Him (Psa 148:14). This verse then symbolically indicates that Hashem rerouted His people through the Wilderness, **for Israel was His kin with whom He wanted to be alone**, far from other men and their evil ways. יְהוָה בָּדַד יְנַחֵנּוּ, *Hashem led them alone* (Deu 32:12). Thus, we find in the words of the prophet that Hashem later said, *I remember the devotion of your youth, the love of your espousals, when Israel followed after Me in the Wilderness, in a land that was not sown* (Jer 2:2).

a. Tanhuma, Be-shallah, #1

For forty years the Holy One made Israel go in a roundabout way through the wilderness, saying, "Should I now lead them on a straight route, each one will take possession of a field or a vineyard and regard himself as not obligated to study Torah. I shall therefore lead them by way of the wilderness, where they will eat manna, drink the waters of the well, and so [give themselves to the study of] Torah, **which will then be inculcated in them.**"

- 1) This *parsha* is about a transformation of a nation. They sever their dependence on Pharaoh at the Red Sea and now they begin learning a whole new system of faith and reliance. They undergo an educational process. God initiates them into the realization that Torah is their food and water. **It is these lessons that they will celebrate in and struggle with throughout the course of their history.**⁵
- 2) Staking a tree that does not need it can do more harm than good. Movement of the trunk helps strengthen it by thickening it and giving it taper from bottom to top. Trunk movement also stimulates root growth. **So although staked trees might grow taller faster than their unstaked counterparts, their trunks are weaker and their root systems are less developed.**⁶
- 3) Vines, surprising as it may seem, benefit from some frost and/or snow providing it is during the winter as **it hardens the wood and kill spores and pests that the bark may be harboring.** But, frost can literally kill a vine, esp. at "bud-break" and flowering.
- 4) Jeremiah 31:31-33
³¹"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of

⁵ www.alexisrael.org/#!beshalach---slave-mentality/cqjg

⁶ www.finegardening.com/how-to/articles/to-stake-or-not-to-stake.aspx

Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. ³³"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. **"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.**

b. Proverbs 5:22-23

²²The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. ²³**For lack of discipline they will die,** led astray by their own great folly.

1) Proverbs 10:17

¹⁷**Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life,** but whoever ignores correction leads others astray.

2) Proverbs 22:6 (CJB)

⁶Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.

lit: *according to his way ...*

3) Proverbs 22:15

¹⁵Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but **the rod of discipline will drive it far away.**

4) Hebrews 12:7-11

⁷**Endure hardship as discipline;** God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but **God disciplines us for our good,** in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

5) Ephesians 6:4

⁴Fathers, **do not exasperate (or frustrate) your children;** instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

c. Ezekiel 16:1-14

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices ³and say, "This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your moth-

er a Hittite. ⁴On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. ⁵No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

⁶"Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" ⁷I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed and entered puberty. Your breasts had formed and your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked.

⁸"Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, **I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.** ⁹"I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. ¹⁰I clothed you with **an embroidered dress** and put sandals of fine leather on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. ¹¹**I adorned you with jewelry:** I put **bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck,** ¹² and I put a ring on your nose, **earrings on your ears** and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³So **you were adorned with gold and silver;** your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was honey, olive oil and the finest flour. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. ¹⁴And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign LORD.

²⁰After leaving Succoth they camped ... on the edge of the desert. ²¹By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. ²²Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

1. 21. וַיֵּהָרֶה הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם.—*HASHEM went before them.* The Sages explain that the terms employed here indicate God's reluctance to relinquish the leadership of the people **to any intermediary.** God wanted to remain near them and so He surrounded Israel with His pillars of cloud and fire as a sign of affection and care (Num 14:14, Deu 32:10- 11; see Rashi). The clouds of glory made the arduous and crushing existence of the Wilderness much more endurable. They were perfumed with **myrrh and frankincense,** and with all the powders of the spice-merchants (Song 3:6).

However, the phrase, Hashem went before them, **is not to be taken literally**. As the Midrash Tanchuma points out, Hashem's presence fills the heavens and the earth. Thus, the Torah further on speaks of **the angel of God** who had been going in front of the Children of Israel (14:19).

There are various degrees of Hashem's revelation to mankind.

Ramban notes that during the day God appears in His dazzling brightness, radiating light and goodness as the sun which is one of His servants. But at night He makes His appearance with His hosts of surrounding angels. God appears more distant and less accessible to man's wishes at night. He seems to Conceal Himself with His royal court. These differences, though, will cease to exist with the final redemption, as the prophet states: **Then God will always be close to us** (Isa 52:21).

a. Deuteronomy 5:1-8

¹Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. ²The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.

³It was not with our ancestors that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. ⁴The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. ⁵(At that time **I stood between the LORD and you** to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

⁶"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

⁷"You shall have no other gods before me.

⁸"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁹You shall not bow down to them or worship them ...

1) Deuteronomy 5:27

²⁷Go near and listen to all that the LORD our God says. Then **tell us whatever the LORD our God tells you. We will listen and obey** (וְשָׁמְעוּ וְנִשְׁמָעוּ [v'sha-manu v'a-sinu—we will hear and do])."

2) 1 Timothy 2:5-6

⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, **the man Messiah Yeshua**, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

2. *The clouds of glory ... were perfumed with **myrrh and frankincense**, and with all the powders of the spice-merchants (Song 3:6).*

a. Song 3:6-7

⁶Who is this coming up from the wilderness like a column of smoke, **perfumed with myrrh and incense** made from all the spic-

es of the merchant? ⁷Look! It is Solomon's carriage, escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel ...

b. Matthew 2:11

¹¹On coming **to the house**, the (Magi) saw **the child** with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, **frankincense and myrrh**.

3. Exodus 14:19-20

¹⁹Then the **angel of God**, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, ²⁰coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

a. Genesis 21:15-21

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, (Hagar) put (Ishmael) under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went off and sat down about a bow-shot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob. ¹⁷God heard the boy crying, and the **angel of God called to Hagar from heaven** and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." ¹⁹Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. ²⁰God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

b. Judges 13:8-14

⁸Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "Pardon your servant, Lord. I beg you to let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." ⁹God heard Manoah, and the **angel of God** came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her. ¹⁰The woman hurried to tell her husband, "He's here! The man who appeared to me the other day!" ¹¹Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the man who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said. ¹²So Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule that governs the boy's life and work?" ¹³The **angel of the LORD** answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her. ¹⁴She must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, nor drink any wine or other fermented drink nor eat anything unclean. She must do everything I have commanded her" ...

4. 22. לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הַעָנָן—*He did not remove the pillar of cloud.* The pillar of cloud remained even after the sin of the Golden Calf, as the prophet exclaims: *Moreover, in a pillar of cloud You did lead them by day, and a pillar of fire by night ... But they, our forefathers, refused to obey, and stiffened their neck ... Yes, they made a molten calf, and said, "This is My God that brought you out of Egypt." Yet You in Your many mercies did not forsake them in the Wilderness; the pillar of cloud did not depart from them by day to lead them in the way; neither did the pillar of fire by night, to show them light and the way in which they should go* (Neh 9:12-19).

Although the sin disturbed the intimacy between God and Israel, the pillars remained, and demonstrated God's steadfast love for Israel. The proselyte Onkelos even mentioned this as proof in convincing pagans to convert to Judaism (*Avodah Zarah* 11a). The reappearance of the Ineffable Name of Hashem in this context likewise indicates that the protective pillar of cloud **a manifestation of Divine love** (see the commentary to 6:3). Rashi quotes the tradition that the pillar disappeared when Aaron died (Num 33:40), but returned in honor of Moses and continued to protect Israel until his death (*Ta'anit* 9a).

1) 2Chronicles 7:11-16

¹¹When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace, ¹²**the LORD appeared to him at night** and said: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. ¹³"When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴**if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.** ¹⁵Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. ¹⁶I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that **my Name may be there forever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.**

^{14:10}As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. ¹¹They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? ... ¹²Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" ¹³Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. **Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today ...**

1. ^{13b}*the deliverance of the LORD (יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה) ...*

a. יִשָּׁע —*save, help, preserve, rescue, defend, deliver.*

1) 1Samuel 10:19—to the people of Israel

But you have now rejected your God, **who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses.** And you have said, 'No, set a king over us' ..."

2) Judges 6:14—to Gideon

The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and **save Israel out of Midian's hand.** Am I not sending you?"

3) Judges 7:2

The LORD said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength **has saved her** ...

4) **He saves** the meek (Ps 76:9), the needy (Ps 72:4,13), the contrite (Ps 34:18), the righteous (Prov 28:18), but not the wicked (Ps 18:41).

5) Isaiah 45:22

Turn to me, and **be saved all the ends of the earth:** for I am God, and there is none else."

b. σωζω —*to save; i.e. deliver, protect, heal, preserve, save, be whole.*

1) Matthew 1:21

²¹She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Yeshua, because **he will save his people from their sins.**"

2) Matthew 8:25

²⁵The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, **save us! We're going to drown!**"

3) Matthew 9:21-22 (NJB)

²¹for (the woman subject to bleeding) was thinking, 'If only I can touch his cloak **I shall be saved.**' ²²Yeshua turned round and saw her; and he said to her, 'Courage, my daughter, **your faith has saved you.**' And from that moment **the woman was saved.**

4) Matthew 14:29-30

²⁹"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Yeshua. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, **save me!**"

5) Matthew 19:23-25

²³Then Yeshua said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

²⁴Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom

of God." ²⁵When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "**Who then can be saved?**"

6) Mark 5:22-23 (NJB)

²²And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet ²³and begged him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her that **she may be saved and may live.**'

7) Mark 15:30 (NJB)

³⁰Then **save yourself**; come down from the cross!

8) Luke 17:19

Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made **you well** (lit., 'has **saved** you')."

9) John 12:27

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, **save me from this hour**'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

10) Acts 27:20

When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, **we finally gave up all hope of being saved.**

11) Romans 5:9

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be **saved from God's wrath** through him!

12) Ephesians 2:8

For it is **by grace you have been saved**, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God ...