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The Meaning of Faith

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm ז"ל (Originally delivered January 31, 1953)

Faith" as a subject for a sermon by a Rabbi seems so appropriate and so to-be-expected, that it is almost an invitation to the congregation to doze off into a gentle Sabbath nap. And yet it is a topic which is rarely discussed from a Traditional Jewish pulpit. It is rarely mentioned because it is taken for granted that those who do come to synagogue already have faith. It is an assumption which is, I believe, most correct. But the fact remains that Faith is a very hazy concept, and that its causes and effects are not always understood. I believe this sufficient reason, therefore, to invite you with me in an exploration of the Jewish meaning of Faith.

The first thing to be said about Faith is that it makes life liveable. Without Faith in G-d, life is neither intelligible nor worth enduring. Even the world's greatest skeptics maintain that you have got to believe in something. Bertrand Russell that famous philosopher and brilliant mathematician whom we might well dub the high-priest of all atheists, writes, "To live a human life, man must have grounding in something, in some sense outside of human life... in some end which is impersonal and above mankind such as G-d or Truth or Beauty." Life without Faith is a dull, mechanical, meaningless routine. With it, life begins to take on meaning.

Our Rabbis seem to make this point in their comments on this week's Bible portion. The children of Israel began their long trek out of Egypt and Pharaoh's legions began to give chase. They arrived at the banks of the Red Sea which G-d, in a miraculous act of deliverance, split in two allowing the Jews to walk across its dry banks. When they finished crossing the Red Sea, the sea rushed back, drowning the Egyptians, who were pursuing them through the divided waters, and the Jews realized that they had been helped on the first leg of their journey to freedom. At that moment, the Bible relates, *vayiru ha'am es Ha'shem va'yaaminu baHashem uve'Moshe avdo*, "they feared the Lord and they believed in the Lord

and in His servant Moses." After this profession of Faith in G-d, *Az Yashir Moshe Uv'nei Yisroel*, Moses and the children of Israel began to sing their famous *shirah*, their famous song of freedom and liberty and gratitude and redemption. Our Rabbis saw some connection between the Faith in G-d and the singing of the Song. *lo zachu Yisroel lomar shirah al ha'yam ela bi'zchus emunah*, Israel was given the privilege of *shirah*, of song, only because of *emunah*, their faith and belief in G-d. Faith, our Rabbis want to say, is that which makes all of life a song, that which gives it cheer and happiness and delight and hope. *Shirah* can come about only as a result of *emunah*. With Faith, life is a song; without it- a dirge. With it, life is a smile; without it-a tear. With Faith there is enough laughter in Life to buoy a man up so that he can ride the waves of adversity; without that faith, he must inevitably sink, pulled down by the dead-weight of drudgery. Without Faith, life is dull and boring and desperate and hopeless; with it, you have cheer and hope and firmness and equanimity. Certainly, *emunah* leads to *shirah*.

But it would be a sad mistake if we were to think this is the only or major reason for Faith. We would not be true to the Jewish meaning of Faith if we said, as so many do, that "Peace of Mind" is the purpose of all religion. And this leads us to our second point which is this: while it is true that Faith leads to Song, that religion gives a man security and peace of mind and peace of soul, yet the real and compelling reason for belief in G-d is Truth. The reason I believe that G-d watches over every living being is not because if I believe it then life is easier to live, but because I think that such is really the case. Religion should not be accepted because it gives a man a sense of security, anesthetizes his complex and bolsters his alter-ego; rather it should be accepted because of a firm belief that its teachings are true and its principles are correct.

As a matter of fact, there are two different Hebrew words

which represent these ideas. The word *emunah* signifies the type of faith which is rooted in conviction and aims at Truth. The word *bitachon*, on the other hand, represents the type of faith which results from a desire for security. We might better call it “trust.” And the two should not be confused. *Emunah* means religious faith, believing for its own sake, not for any selfish desire to pacify my own mind. *Bitachon* is the psychological desire for protection and safety. *emunah*, according to the famous Hebrew grammarian of the 12th century, Radak, is related to the Hebrew word *emes*, which means “Truth,” while *bitachon* is derived from the word *betach*, which means secure, firm, fast, safe.

Our contemporary world has unfortunately discarded *emunah* and substituted, in its stead, *bitachon*. Modern man has stopped believing in G-d because he has been attracted by the shiny new theories of natural science, which he never really understood, because he has become over-proud in considering his accomplishments-machines, skyscrapers, bombs, and has imagined that life can be lived without faith, without *emunah*. But the two world wars, a severe depression and the icy grip of a cold war have succeeded in showing man that he is unsafe, insecure and possibly marked for extinction. And so, after trying out all kinds of belief, man returns to religion. But not to the religion he once knew, not to the genuine belief which sought truth and revered a living G-d. Rather, his religion is one of *bitachon*. He goes all out for the best-sellers like “Peace of Mind,” which offers him a watered-down religion as a quick cure for all his complexes, conflicts and neuroses, a religion which does justice to the Marxist claim that “religion is the opiate of the masses.”

It is that attitude which we must avoid in our Jewish understanding of Faith. For while religion does offer security, that is not its primary goal. We believe not because it is good for us, but because it is right for us. The famed Hassidic Rebbe, Reb Moshe Leib Sossover, in one of his piquant remarks, pointed to this sad confusion of *emunah* and *bitachon* when he observed that, “How easy is it for a poor man to depend upon G-d - what else has he to depend upon? And how hard for a rich man to believe in G-d-all his possessions cry out to him: believe in us.” If Religion is to become only a matter of security and peace of mind, then religion is only for the poor, the insecure and the weak-minded. Our understanding of Faith and Religion, however, is such that it is for all men, for the wealthy and the happy and the well-adjusted as well as for all others.

The Sages of the Talmud no doubt had this in mind when they ruled that as part of the *Emes Veyatziv* prayer, in which we reaffirm our faith in G-d, we also recite a verse making mention of the *Krias Yam Suf*, the dividing of the Red Sea, because, they explain, *she’kivan she’kara lahem es ha’yam he’eminu bo*, because G-d split the sea for the Israelites, did they believe in Him. The important point in this is the order in which things occurred. Here was a people which had just left the slave labor camps of a strange country where they had been imprisoned for over 400 years. They were weak, tired and spiritless. Behind them were amassed legions of crack troops, brave riders and experienced soldiers, cruel slave-traders who were planning an enjoyable massacre of every last Jew. And there in front of them was the Sea, the forbidding sea which almost certainly sealed their doom. The morale of the people must have been as low as possible. They must have been desperate. What an occasion for missionaries to gain converts to Faith! What an opportune moment to sell Religion with its promise of security. And yet there is no mention of Faith, no hint, no matter how vague, at a sudden recrudescence of religious feeling. But after the crossing of the Sea, after the miraculous escape and victory, when safety has been assured, when things seemed just rosy, when the hordes of Pharaoh were drowned and a Promised Land beckoned on ahead, when the need for security and peace of mind was just nill, at a time when an American Jew would cast off his Tallis and Tefilin and rush to the nearest exclusive golf-club, just then *Va’yaaminu Yisroel Ba’Hashem*, just then did the Israelites reaffirm their Faith in G-d. For a truth had been demonstrated to them—that G-d is all powerful, the Creator of all men and the Lord of History. Their Faith was not blind, it was enlightened. It was not a result of fear, but the result of searching for truth. It was an intelligent, and not a mendicant, faith, a faith of men and not beggars. “The only faith,” writes a biographer of Abraham Lincoln, “that wears well, and holds its color in all weathers, is that which is woven in conviction and set with the sharp mordant of experience.”

The third and last point that must be made is similar to what we have been stressing in most of the other “Meaning” talks. And that is, that we must apply the Jewish test of what it accomplishes. The test of Faith is the behavior that it produces. As long as a man’s faith exists in vacuum it is meaningless; as long as it is not translated into concrete action, it is as valid as the theory of green cheese on the other side of the moon. Judaism, unlike

certain other religions, does not preach the doctrine that “believe and you will be saved.” Faith cannot produce redemption; good behavior and good works can. A man can shout from the roof-tops that honesty is the best policy, but until he practices honesty in his own business relationships until it hurts, all his talk is meaningless. Only this week, at a meeting of the Rabbinic Alumni of Yeshiva University, Dr. Belkin, President of Yeshiva, quoted from an unpublished lecture of that great Christian scholar of Judaica, Harvard’s George Foote Moore, that “The only difference between philosophy and religion is that religion does something about it.” And rightly so! For religion and faith to be meaningful and significant in life, it has got to do something about it.

There is a beautiful Midrash in which this point is dramatically underlined. When Israel first left the land of Egypt, and just before they arrived at the Red Sea, Moses, as the leader of this inspired but frightened group of Hebrew slaves, found himself in difficult straits. There were problems of food, supplies, and morale, and a threatened mutiny. Moses began to pray, and G-d answered: *Mah Tiztak Elai*, “why do you pray to Me?” Our Rabbis elaborate upon that response of G-d, and they say that G-d replied: *Ha’yam so’er, ve’ha’sonei rodef, ve’atah omed umarbeh be’tefillah lefanai?* The seas are storming, Moses, a world is in turmoil, a nation is on the banks of a sea which threatens to engulf it, and a cruel and bitter enemy is pursuing you; at a time of this sort how can you pray? No, says G-d, when a world is unsettled, when waves of hate and enmity and sadism flood entire continents, when storm-clouds gather ominously on the horizons, when the smell of war and the stench of genocide again are felt, when the enemy of all decency and the self-confessed assassin of the Divine in man is in the ascendancy, when three million of your people again face extinction, when persecution and discrimination and bigotry rule the minds of men, then, least of all, is the time for profession of Faith; that is not

the time to piously point to your good heart, it is not the time for silly sentimentalism, not the time for talking in abstract generalities about Religion and Democracy and Freedom and Love and Mother and Home. No, when *yam so’er* and *sonei rodef* then *Mah Tiztak Elai*, then why shout, why pray, why talk of faith? And Moses answers G-d, in all simplicity, *mah li la’assos?* What then, O G-d, should I do? And G-d answers, as the Bible records the answer in today’s portion, *ve’ata harem es matecha unetei es yadecha*, You, Moses, have a great mission. There actually is something you can do. *harem es matcha al ha’yam*, lift up that rod, bravely stand on your own two feet and face the *sonei*, the enemy, strike where it hurts; and *netei es yadcha al ha’yam*, stretch forth your hand on the sea, if the seas of hate and cynicism are flooding your world, then go ahead, stretch out your hand and save all who can be saved; if there is but one man who needs your help, then your task is not to talk of faith, but to lend a helping hand. Now is the time to arise, lead your people to a Promised Land, teach them to fear G-d and respect their fellow humans. Forget the preaching, get down to the practice. Forget sentiments, show realities. Don’t dare talk of how religious you really are until you live a religious life. For only then does Faith become meaningful, only then does Faith lead to Song, *emunah* to *shirah*. In times when the seas storm and the enemy pursues, then forget the *Ani Ma’amin*, and proceed to the *Hineni Muchan Umezuman Le’kayem*.

In summary, then, we have made three points. First, that Faith leads to a happier kind of life. Second, that this is only an effect, not the reason for Faith; the reason is that we are really convinced of the Truths in which we believe. And finally that Faith must be more than a theory, it must be observed in practical life. In the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which he wrote the night before he died, “The only limits to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with a strong and active faith.”

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

Man Boldly (And Uncomfortably) Steps Forward into the Unknown

Rabbi Josh Blass

I have always been fascinated by several pesukim that serve as the apex of Bnei Yisroel’s redemption from Mitzraim. The Jews have arrived onto the banks of the Red Sea. They see that there is nowhere to turn and that proceeding forward is seemingly impossible. They raise

their collective voice to Moshe Rabbeinu with the biting words:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה הַמְבִלִי אֵין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר
מֵה זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם.

Are there not sufficient graves in Mitzraim that you had to

bring us to this dessert to die?

With that Moshe encourages them to be of steadfast faith and to await G-d's salvation.

The very next pesukim find HKB'H telling Moshe the following.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִה תִּצְעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִסְעוּ. וְאָתָּה הָרֵם אֶת מִשְׁפַּח וְנָטָה אֶת יָדְךָ עַל הַיָּם וּבִקְעָהוּ וַיָּבֵאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בְּיַבֻּשָׁה.

Then G-d said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward. And 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. (Shemos 14:15,16)

I have always found these pesukim troubling for two reasons, the second of which is posed as well by the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh. The Ramban argued earlier in Sefer Shmos that the entire geulah came about because of the sincere tefillah of Bnei Yisroel. While based on the amount of time that the Jews had already been enslaved the redemption should have occurred irregardless, the Ramban said that there was a necessity for tefillah to activate this process. Only then do the pesukim say that G-d fully 'saw' the sufferings of his people.

If the entire geulah was predicated on tefillah why now at this juncture, at the end of the redemption process does HKB'H instruct Moshe that his tefillos are inappropriate- *מה תצעק אלי?*

Secondly, the ordering of the pesukim seems to be incongruous. First the pasuk says to speak to Bnei Yisroel *ויסעו*, and then Moshe is instructed to lift your staff, spread it over the sea and divide it. Logically shouldn't the command first come for Moshe to perform the neis followed by Bnei Yisroel marching onward?

The answer to these questions and many others are resolved by the underlying theme that runs its way throughout the rest of sefer Shemos until this generation perished in the dessert in the middle of sefer Bamidbar. It's a theme made famous by a comment of the Ibn Ezra in this weeks parsha (Shemos 14:13) Namely that with all of the miracles that the Jews had already witnessed. With all of the moments of divine revelation that this generation had already been party to. Even with Moshe Rabbeinu as the unquestioned spiritual giant that the nation rallied around. Even with all of that, Bnei Yisroel were incapable of moving beyond the basic personality of being slaves. They were terrified to fight the Egyptians who had been

their captures and masters. They were unable to envision themselves as masters of their own destinies with the fortitude to seize the moment. They were unable to muster the courage to enter into Eretz Yisroel upon hearing the report of the obstacles that waited them upon their arrival. The gilui shechinah in the form of the ten plagues and the events around the sacrifice of the korban Pesach could not undo the psyche that had come to define Am Yisroel over the course of multiple generations. Various halachos of the Korban Pesach were geared towards cultivating the mindset of the free man but that couldn't happen overnight no matter how dramatic and miraculous the circumstances. It's reminiscent of the stories that one has heard from R' Herschel Schachter when he served as the chaplain in Buchenwald after the liberation. Men and women who were now technically free but who were understandably completely immobilized by the years of extreme trauma.

With that in mind we have a better understanding of the narrative at Yam Suf.

When Bnei Yisroel were in Mitzraim all they had at the beginning of the redemption journey was tefillah. There was really nothing else they could do. It was a moment of complete national surrender. But now at Yam Suf HKB'H is essentially telling Moshe Rabbeinu to march forward. Prayer is effective but to some degree tefillah contains in it an element of passivity - one is waiting for HKB'H to come to the rescue. There was and is a time for that. That time was not now. Standing at the Sea with a feeling of hopelessness, deferential to their previous masters, and enslaved by the psyche of an *עבד*, the only reparative option is *ויסעו* - move forward. Break the invisible shackles that took root over the course of the previous centuries. While Moshe eventually would stretch his hand over the sea and divide it that couldn't happen until Bnei Yisroel took the initiative in this process.

I have always been fascinated by the famous gemarah in Sotah 36b that communicated the feeling of fear and paralyses to which I refer. R' Meir said that each tribe was fighting for the zechus to be the first one in the Sea until finally the tribe of Binyamin took the plunge. R' Yehudah differed sharply with R' Meir and said that:

לֹא כִּךְ הָיָה מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים זֶה אֹמֵר אֵין אֲנִי יוֹרֵד תַּחֲלִילָה לִים זֶה אֹמֵר אֵין אֲנִי יוֹרֵד תַּחֲלִילָה לִים קִפְץ נַחֲשׁוֹן בֶּן עֲמִינַדָב וַיִּרֵד לִים תַּחֲלִילָה

It wasn't just that Nachshon entered the water but it was essentially an act that cut through the paralyses born of generations that had only tasted servitude. At that moment,

tefillos are insufficient and nissim are counterproductive. What's necessary is man fully embracing his destiny and the opportunity to repair wounds.

While this concept is true historically for Klal Yisroel as well as for other nations who have been subject to servitude it's also deeply true on a personal level. Many if not most people have shackles of sorts - addiction, trauma, anxiety, depression, inability to function, crippling feelings of inadequacy - the list is endless as to what man encounters in their own personal journey and in one's

Two Types of Unity

Rabbi Noach Goldstein

The famous Rashi is in next week's parsha, but its dark twin is in this week's parsha. When Bnei Yisrael will reach Har Sinai, and the Torah states "ויחן שם ישראל נגד ההר" (Israel camped there facing the mountain), Rashi cites the celebrated midrash: "כאיש אחד" (as one person with one heart). The Chumash describes Bnei Yisrael camping in the singular form to denote that, on this single occasion, the vast and diverse nation managed to put aside all differences and unite with a single mind and focus. Any dvar torah about unity will inevitably quote this idea.

But there is a related Rashi, which has not been made into a popular upbeat song, but which is also essential. The Egyptians chase Bnei Yisrael to the edge of the Red Sea, and the Chumash states "וישאו בני ישראל את עיניהם" (the Israelites raised their eyes and behold, Egypt was marching after them). Once again, Rashi comments: "בלב אחד כאיש אחד". In a wild frenzy, the Egyptians were completely unified in their bloodthirsty pursuit of Bnei Yisrael.

Taken together, these two Rashis provide us with a

aspirations for personal redemption. Tefillah is a start but in a way it's a passive acceptance of the reality of one's life. Does one have the wherewithal to move forward and to step towards decisions that brings a person closer to their values, closer to the best version of themselves, and ultimately closer to the Ribbono Shel Olam? That was the fundamental question that HKB'H posed to Moshe Rabbeinu thousands of years ago - מה תצעק אלי - and it's one that continues to echo loudly to this day.

powerful reminder. Of course we treasure unity. But unity for what? The harmonious assembly of Bnei Yisrael as they approached Har Sinai, everyone joined together in a sacred cause? Or the savage mob of the Egyptians, waving their swords in their barbaric pursuit?

Digging deeper, the fundamental difference between these two unities was being unified for vs. unified against. There was no enemy facing Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. What united them was a common goal, everyone striving for sanctity and a connection with the Ribbono Shel Olam. On the other hand, the Egyptians were only linked by their common hatred for Bnei Yisrael. Pharaoh whipped that up to rouse his subjects to action: our slaves have escaped, they've taken our money and betrayed us—we have to take revenge!

We cherish the image of Bnei Yisrael all camped together at the mountain, but Rashi also points out a tragic element: this is the only time in all the years the Jews wandered in the desert that we find them described this way. It is a testament to how difficult achieving such unity can be. But it also reminds us how hard to we must work to achieve it.

With Hashem By Your Side Anything Is Possible

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel on January 25, 2018)

The Chumash, in the beginning of this week's Parsha, says: ויסב אלוקים את העם דרך המדבר ים סוף. Hashem turned the 'Am' sideways, ויסב, via 'Derech Midbar Yam-Suf' and not 'Derech Eretz Plishtim.' The fascinating Midrash Raba here says: ויסב אלהים את העם—מקאן אמרו רבותינו אפלו עני שבין ישראל לא יאכל עד שישב. Everyone has to eat 'b'haseiba' on Seder night because

"vayasev Elokim es ha'am." On the one hand, we have a 'cute' Midrash that the word 'vayasev' is linguistically similar to 'haseiba.' Therefore, we see that we have to eat 'b'haseiba'—reclining, at the Seder. But that's not what the pasuk is expressing. The pasuk describes taking the roundabout route via 'Yam-Suf.' What does that have to do with what position you sit at when you eat on Seder night?

The Ksav Sofer on Chumash says that maybe there is indeed a link to the pshat in this Medrash. He focuses on “*afilu ani sheb’Yisroel*.” The “*ani sheb’Yisroel*” has to eat ‘*b’haseiba*’—reclining like a nobleman. He asks: Why is that? Why did Hashem send them via Yam-Suf? Why not take them straight? One of the reasons that the Chumash itself notes—“*pen yinachem ha’am*”—perhaps the People will reconsider. What did Hashem do instead? ‘He brought them to Yam-Suf.’ There was the sea on one side and the Pharaoh on the other. It looked hopeless. There was nothing they could do! That’s why they said to Moshe—We should have stayed in ‘Mitzrayim.’ Hashem got them into an utterly hopeless situation. And, then, what did they see? That with Hashem, nothing is downright impossible. That as bad as it looks, Hashem can always save you. Look—here’s Pharaoh’s army, here’s the ‘Yam-Suf.’ It’s completely impossible! There is no imaginable way to escape from that. Ok. However, there was an unimaginable

way to escape that—the splitting of the ‘Yam-Suf.’ We know the end of the story. But at that time, no one could conceivably think that such a thing could happen. What did the Jews learn from that? They learned from “*vayasev Elokim es ha’am derech Yam-Suf*”—from the diversion via the ‘Yam Suf’—that no matter how bad it looks, regardless of how negative, and no matter how hopeless the situation is, Hashem is on our side. And, therefore, there is always a possibility of a “*yeshua k’heref ayin*.” From here, we learn that “*afilu ani sheb’Yisroel lo yochal ad she’yesev*”—even if he is the poorest, downtrodden and oppressed person. Someone who has no reason to celebrate, feel free—like he is on top of the world—because his situation is so hopeless. He can say: No! Hashem runs the world. Hashem is on our side. Any moment a yeshua could come. And therefore, no matter how poor, downtrodden and oppressed he is, nevertheless, he should sit like a nobleman realizing that with Hashem by your side, anything is possible.

Reliance Upon Human Medicine

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

As the ferocious waves of the Red Sea parted, the marine floor was paved dry to welcome the passage of the Jews. Suddenly, the raging waters tumbled down upon the Egyptian soldiers as their powerful chariots were mercilessly tossed like matchsticks. Inspired by their rescue by the God of their Fathers, the entire Jewish nation erupted in song and poetic chant.

After calm was restored, God reminded the nation that if they continued to follow His will and adhere to His commandments, He would continue to protect them; God promised that “all the sickness administered to Egypt will not affect you because I will be your healer”. It is striking that God presents himself as national Healer not as a Creator or a Redeemer. This image of “God as Healer” resonated deeply with a nation no doubt traumatized by the terrible diseases they observed in Egypt. Many of the ten plagues directly blighted the Egyptians with disease: “dever” unleashed a pandemic which annihilated the cattle and threatened to spread to humans. Shechin- a contagious epidemiological disease forced widespread quarantine and ultimately, on the night of our liberation, an invisible wave of death visited every Egyptian household. In addition to those plagues, other makkot “indirectly” led to failing health conditions: the combination of “dam”

and tzeferdei’a reduced the great Nile river – previously a source of food and life- into a rotting cesspool of dead fish and putrefying corpses of frogs. Amidst a kinim invasion of rats, bugs and rodents followed by an incursion of wild beasts, Egyptian health and hygiene quickly deteriorated. Having witnessed the collapse of a once mighty Egypt into an ailing and sickly country, the Jews were thrilled to hear that God would be their Healer.

This guarantee – that God is our Healer- raises an interesting question: If God promises to be our Healer, is it appropriate to solicit treatment from human healers and is it religiously justifiable to practice scientific medicine? If God promises healing as a reward for virtuous lifestyles, shouldn’t illness be interpreted solely as punishment for religious underperformance? When facing these medical punishments for our failed religious behavior, shouldn’t our primary response be religious improvement so that God fulfills His promise to heal us? Does reliance upon doctors indicate a lack of faith that God will heal us?

The Rambam, himself the official doctor of the Sultan Saladin of Egypt, certainly believed that rational and scientific medicine were legitimate recourses in the face of illness. Staunchly upholding the value of rational medicine, he strongly derided the claim that reliance upon

human medical intervention reflects diminished faith. Of course, he also authored at least ten medical works. Yet the Ramban – Nachmanides- strongly disagreed, claiming that, in a perfect order, a person of superior spiritual caliber should rely solely upon God and not seek any medical intervention. Afflicted by illness, a patient should primarily inspect their religious behavior, repent their sins, and pray for Divine healing. Accentuating this ideal, the Rambam exclaims “A doctor has no function in the house of a pious man”. Sadly, very few of us, if any, can sustain the level of religious lifestyle which would elicit or “deserve” supernatural healing from God, and we must all rely upon rational medicine while we pray to God for His healing. However, fundamentally, human health is predicated solely upon God’s will and, ideally, human medical practice is both unnecessary and reflective of deficient faith.

The overall Jewish tradition has certainly favored the approach of the Rambam, and Jews have typically relied upon human medical intervention. Essentially, Judaism, debunks the ancient belief that illness is based on magical possession by demons or other supernatural forces, and can only be eliminated through supernatural means. The Torah itself provides rational medical-based guidelines: disease-prevention is already apparent in the treatment of a metzora and of other potentially contagious people; the laws of mikvah and of washing hands before consuming food maintains healthy hygiene. Likewise, comprehensive lists of medicinal treatments in the Talmud reinforce how attentive Chazal were to medical treatments of the day.

Historically, rational medicine traces itself back to the 5th century BCE to the Greek doctor Hippocrates. Since then Jews have generally been at the forefront both of the development of the science of medicine as well as in the provision of medical care. Throughout much of the Middle Ages many medical books were actually written in Hebrew as Jews were often the personal doctors of kings and noblemen.

A modern catalyst for Jewish entry into the medical profession was, ironically, the barring of Jews from careers in law, finance and government. Instead, many Jews entered the more egalitarian medical profession which allowed a private person to “hang his own shingle” and earn a respectable if not wealthy living. Furthermore, Jews gravitated to the medical profession as a “Divine mandate” to heal the world and to shape it in the image of a kind and compassionate God; if God is merciful, He doesn’t desire human suffering and those who relieve human suffering

are performing God’s work. For the past 2500 years Jews have participated enthusiastically in the march of medical science and the delivery of medical treatment.

The Covid-19 crisis has altered our perspective on much of our world and, in particular, has highlighted the limits of modern medicine. Our struggle to contain this viral infection has reminded us that, despite the dramatic advances of medicine over the past 400 years, humans remain vulnerable and reliant upon Divine healing. There is sad irony in the toll of Covid-19 upon the elderly generation. Prior to this pandemic, modern medicine had radically extended human life expectancy. In the hundred years leading to 2018, life expectancy had jumped by over 20 years! Ironically and sadly, so many of the elderly whose lives were extended by modern medicine were most susceptible to the ravages of Covid-19. Valiantly, our society has rallied and adopted drastic measures to protect the lives of this older generation, but, sadly, our efforts have fallen short.

The Covid-19 crisis has also reminded us of the limits of human medicine on a different plane. As humanity has urbanized and populations have become concentrated in large centers, humanity is forced to deal with an entirely new and different challenge- public health management. It is one thing to heal individuals and quite another to plan medical policies for large populations. Large populations demand public health management – policies to determine the allocation of public resources such as money, hospital beds, personnel, medical devices and medicines. Despite our best efforts to plan these policies based on statistical likelihoods, the pandemic has toppled all our predictions and wrought havoc with our health care “systems”.

The challenge of public health is just beginning; at this stage most countries are dealing with the double challenge of containing infection while rolling out vaccines. Vaccine distribution is also a public health challenge and countries which enjoy more organized public health systems are far better equipped to vaccinate efficiently and speedily.

Ideally, even though we participate in human medical treatment we should look to God as our Healer. Humanity equipped itself with extraordinary medical prowess, but may have forgotten the Divine role in the process of human health. Covid-19 has reminded us that both on a personal level as well as in public health management human efforts will always be partial and only a Divine Healer can provide our full medical coverage.

Feed Your Brain

Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman

We are generally aware that what we eat impacts our overall health and eating unhealthily can put us at risk for the development of numerous physical diseases. Yet, there is also mounting research that what we eat also greatly affects our intellectual abilities and our emotional health. Our diets affect the neurotransmitters in our brains which can impact our cognitive functioning and our moods. Diets high in refined sugar impair our thinking abilities and tend to focus us on pursuing even more food with high sugar content. Cognitive decline has also been associated with diets high in cholesterol and saturated fats. In contrast, diets high in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and unsaturated fats, like omega-3, are linked with increased cognitive and emotional health.

When introducing the concept of the manna, G-d frames the miracle as a test for Bnei Yisrael to see if they will follow in his laws (*"le-ma'an anasenu ha-yeileich betorati im lo"*). The commentators differ in their understanding of the nature of this test and which laws are being tested. Rashi suggests that the test is whether they will follow the rules specific to the manna, which includes a restriction against leaving any left over or for going out to collect it on Shabbat. Ramban disagrees and writes that the test is not whether they will follow the laws, but whether they will trust in G-d to follow Him through the wilderness, despite the lack of natural food sources. Chizkuni offers a third interpretation: since G-d is providing free food from the Heaven—which does not require a lot of preparation time before eating—the test is whether Bnei Yisrael will use their free time to study Torah.

Elaborating on this last theme, Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz suggests that the manna served to counteract each of three broad categories of impediments to learning Torah. One, is that we tend to spend lots of time in the pursuit of securing food for consumption. Since Bnei

Yisrael were in the middle of the desert, they would have to spend an inordinate amount of time and energy just to find food, something they did not have to do now that they had the manna. A second impediment is that those who have lots of food (or money) tend to spend a lot of time busying themselves with protecting and growing their savings, which can detract from the amount of time learning. Therefore, there were strict limitations on the amount of manna one could gather, preventing anyone from amassing a distracting amount of food. A third impediment to proper Torah learning is the food itself. Writing in the seventeenth century, Rabbi Luntschitz observed that certain coarse and heavy foods diminished the clarity and effectiveness of people's thinking so that they could not focus properly on intellectual pursuits. The manna did not have any of these detrimental cognitive effects, ensuring Bnei Yisrael's ability to focus on learning Torah. The test, therefore, was whether Bnei Yisrael would use their free time for the pursuit of Torah if all of these impediments were removed.

While we aren't blessed with the miracle of manna now, we would do well to try and incorporate some of the lessons into our own lives. This includes a broad reminder about following G-d's laws and trusting in Him to provide for us. But it also provides for us a moment to reflect on our eating habits and how they affect our general spiritual productivity. Do we spend more time than necessary buying, preparing, and eating various foods that are not necessarily essential to our well-being? Could we cut out some of that time and apply it to learning Torah and doing acts of kindness? Can we prioritize eating foods that help boost our cognitive abilities and stay away from ones that give us brain fog and make us feel sluggish? Perhaps even without the manna we can do our best to replicate the benefits our ancestors were afforded with this powerful, yet challenging, miracle.

The Greatest Praise

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Beshalach, we read of the famous salvation at the Sea of Reeds. Having just left Egypt, the former Israelite slaves are journeying

through the desert, en route to freedom, when wicked Pharaoh has a change of heart. וַיִּהְיֶה לְבַב פַּרְעֹה וַעֲבָדָיו, אֶל- וַיִּמְרֹד מֵהַיָּם, וַיִּאֱמָרוּ מִה-זֹּאת עָשִׂינוּ, כִּי-שַׁלַּחְנוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעִבְרָנוּ *and the*

(Reb Moshe, Artsroll, p.506).

When we live our lives striving to be mekadesh shem Shomayim in all that we say and do, it is that glory that we bring to G-d's Name (keviyachol) that is the greatest praise there is. Hence, there was no more apropos shevach

(praise) with which to begin the Song of the Sea than relating the exaltedness of G-d's Name that occurred with the great miracle and salvation.

May our strivings each day lead us to live lives that are filled with Kiddush Hashem.

Where Does Music Come From?

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

When asked about how they produce their greatest work, many songwriters describe a process of revelation. The song “emerges” from a subconscious place, often very quickly. The process is powerful and overwhelming. We all recognize the otherworldly power of music and poetry. These art forms move us in deeply emotional ways. The effects are spiritual as well – the Talmud (Pesachim 66b) notes the critical role of music in inducing prophetic experiences. Why does music have these qualities? To answer this, we must seek to understand its nature. Where does music come from?

A midrash (Shemot Rabbah 23:4) tells us that the Song at the Sea is the archetypal shirah, a word that in Tanach means some combination of poetry and instrumental music (e.g. Divrei Hayamim I:6:16-17). The miracles of the sea splitting, as well as the defeat of the Egyptians, prompted a spirited response from the people. The Torah states (Shemot 14:31) that the Jews saw what G-d did to the Egyptians, feared G-d, and had faith in G-d and Moshe, and only then did they begin to sing. A midrash (Mechilta, Beshalach 6) identifies the emotional-spiritual antecedent of the song with the experience which immediately precedes it: “Great is faith before the Almighty, for in the merit of faith the holy spirit rested upon them and they sang a song, as it is written, ‘And they had faith in Hashem and in Moses His servant. After this did Moshe and Bnei Yisrael sing.’” We see that faith can lead to song, but the connection is still unclear. We need to go one level deeper.

The Talmud states that in the Beit HaMikdash, the songs of the Leviyim (called shirah) were recited only over sacrifices that included a wine libation. (Berachot 35a) Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook comments that song is the result of the soul being elevated to loftiest heights, and looking out at the world having been “crowned in the most clarified manifestation of its intellect.” (Ein Ayah, ibid, 2) A person's soul, in its depths, is hard-wired to seek

G-d, yearning for perfection, righteousness, and justice. It always seeks to declare these truths. However, its voice is muffled by the noise of our more physically oriented drives and the intellect. The latter interprets the world in a detached and abstract way, often at odds with the soul's truth. In the best case, one senses some vague, if powerful, feelings, incapable of expression. Wine blurs the distinctions between soul and intellect. It symbolizes the person whose drives and thoughts have integrated with the soul's urges, and has aligned the way the mind sees the world with the way the soul sees it. This person can bring the lofty experiences of the soul to expression in everyday life. The result is music, the song of the soul.

At the sea, the Jews experienced G-d with an unparalleled clarity. A midrash states that they plainly “saw” G-d in a way that even Moshe and the highest angels could never otherwise experience. (Shemot Rabbah 23:15) This means that they understood clearly that

G-d Himself was intervening in history. To understand that the world is a place filled with G-d's immanence and actions is to see the world with the eyes of the soul. This is the definition of faith. Thus, the unparalleled vision of G-d resulted in an unprecedented expression of the soul, the Song of the Sea.

Music, in its most pristine form, is an expression of the deepest and most powerful experiences of the soul. All great music instantiates this, however minimally. This in turn, explains the powerful effects of music on the listener. It touches a place beyond rational thought, reaching the depths of human experience.

The Song of the Sea has been a foundation of Jewish religious life throughout history. We return to it daily, seeking to partake of the powerful spiritual experience it demonstrates. Ever stronger, the notes of another song are heard as well, a shir chadash (new song) which will express the revelations of the final redemption.

Kiddush Hashem: Taking the Plunge

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

In this week's Torah portion, the Torah records the famous story of the Jews fleeing from the Egyptians and reaching the Red Sea. The Talmud focuses on the moments while they were waiting by the shores. There is a discussion as to how Judah sanctified the name of God publicly, known as kiddush Hashem, and two well-known stories are told of what would appear to be acts of courage (Sotah 36b-37a). Rabbi Meir explains that when the Jewish nation came to the Red Sea, a scuffle broke out between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Each wanted to be the first to jump into the water. The people of Benjamin won the battle, leading to them to being stoned by those from Judah. The Talmud explains that each was subsequently rewarded. The tribe of Benjamin received the portion of land where the Kodesh Kodoshim, the Holy of Holies part of the Temple, would be situated. This is the place where the presence of God would be "located". The tribe of Judah received the line of kingship.

Tosfot, in his commentary on this section in the Talmud, cites a Mechilta, offering an analogy with a king and his two sons. He instructs the older one to wake him three hours into the day, while the other is requested to wake him at sunrise. When the younger son attempts to waken his father, his older brother stops him and explains he is supposed to wake him later. The younger son disagrees. In the ensuing argument, the king wakes up and explains he is happy with both his sons. Their intentions were correct, that being the critical part. Like the Talmud, the Mechilta relates this back to the story of Judah and Benjamin at the Red Sea. Judah's stoning of Benjamin was a reference to his jealousy of Benjamin fulfilling the task instead of him.

The Talmud referenced above presents a second, alternate version of the story. In this account, none of the tribes were willing to jump into the sea. Nachshon, future head of the tribe of Judah, takes the lead and jumps in. His action thus served to be the public sanctification of God.

Often, these stories, especially the second, are used to demonstrate a tremendous level of courage and faith. Yet these stories raise many questions.

For one, there is a huge discrepancy between the two versions. In the first, the Jewish people seem to be on a

very high level, fighting it out for jumping in first. In the second, they have the very opposite reaction, refusing to consider the dive of faith. One can also ask the importance of knowing about the supposed stoning. Finally, there are the two rewards. The actions of Binyamin and Judah seem to be identical, and Tosfot certainly equates the two based on the reaction of the king. However, the rewards are completely different. One reward has to do with the placement of a part of the Temple, while the other refers to the future kings of Israel.

The conventional interpretation focuses solely on the pure faith exhibited by these people. However, it could also be there is an important insight into the idea of sanctifying God and the traits of leadership. Let's take the story of Nachshon first. The line of Judah is known for the idea of leadership, traced back to the story of Judah and Tamar. When Tamar was being brought forward to be killed, Judah faced a pivotal moment. It was clear the public sentiment was to kill her, and most leaders, driven by popularity, would succumb and move forward with the capital punishment. Judah, though, acted in line with what was true and correct. He made the unpopular decision, going as far as acknowledging he was wrong. The paradigm of leadership is to decide the correct path no matter what the public perception is. Not only does this impact the leader, but it can create a tidal shift in perspective on the part of those witnessing the action.

Nachshon displayed this same trait. The Jews felt they were trapped. They saw no hope, they began to question the entire plan of God and Moshe, and their faith in God began to wane. Nachshon sensed this and acted in a manner that was completely contradictory to their frame of thinking. This was a true act of sanctifying God, this being a critical trait of any future king.

The first story highlights an important insight into the idea of kiddush Hashem. The opportunity to engage publicly in kiddush Hashem is uncommon. When the opportunity presents itself, an individual is involved in a tremendous internal battle. The natural action would be not to perform such an action. Factors such as social peer pressure and survival instinct have a serious impact on the ability to act against the grain. To overcome such

internal obstacles reveals the character of the individual in a profound manner.

The battle between the two tribes reflects the high level they were on, not remotely perturbed by the normative anchors holding back the average person. When the people of Benjamin were “victorious”, the people of Judah understood they missed out on a special moment, one they may never have another chance to be a part of. The intense regret felt, the desire to be in that moment when one’s entire existence is in line with the true path of action, explains the idea of “stoning”.

The rewards reflect this idea of kiddush Hashem in two different ways. For the tribe of Benjamin, the location of the Divine presence is the natural result of their actions. The presence of God is the ultimate revelation of kiddush

Hashem. It means the Jewish people are adhering to the Torah properly, the Temple running accordingly, demonstrating to the world the reality of God. For the tribe of Judah, being king meant many future opportunities to engage in kiddush Hashem. The kings of Israel would face many moments like at the Red Sea, and the chance to take advantage of them would be present.

The lessons here are obvious. Leaders today are driven by polls and the allure of popularity. The Jewish leader must be driven by what is correct. As well, the opportunity to act in a manner of sanctification of God is momentous and powerful. For many, the external and internal pressures serve as obstacles to this performance. To overcome them is to raise oneself to the highest possible plane of existence.

Where is Nachshon the Son of Aminadov When We Need Him?

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat B’shalach, describes G-d’s miraculous salvation of the Jewish People by splitting the Red (Reed) Sea.

Scripture dramatically describes the Egyptian forces as they close in on the Israelites. The people, consumed with dread and fear, cry out to Moses and say (Exodus 14:11): “הֲמִבְּלִי אִין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם, לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר? וְעַתָּה מָה עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ? אֵין עֲלֵינוּ מִצְרַיִם, לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר?” “Were there not enough graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the wilderness? What is this you have done to us?... It is better that we should serve Egypt, than perish in the wilderness!”

G-d tells Moses to do what he must do. The Torah, Exodus 14:21 reports, וַיִּשָׂא מֹשֶׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַיָּם, that Moses stretched his hand out over the sea. G-d made the sea move with a strong East wind all that night... and the water split. The Children of Israel enter the sea on dry land, the water serving as a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians persist in chasing the Israelites into the sea, and there G-d confounds the Egyptians. G-d tells Moses to stretch his hand out once again over the sea, and the water returns to the sea, covering the chariots and the horsemen of the entire army of Pharaoh who were chasing after the Israelites. Scripture, Exodus 14:28 records, that not one of the Egyptians remained alive.

When the people of Israel see the great hand of G-d, they express reverence for G-d, and declare their faith in G-d and Moses, his servant. In joy and ecstasy, the people begin to sing the great song, אָז וַיִּשְׁרַח, the song of Israel crossing the Red Sea.

The Talmud, in Sotah 36b and 37a, recounts an interesting dispute between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Judah. Rabbi Meir maintains that when the 12 tribes stood at the edge of the sea, they strove with one another, each vying to be the first tribe to enter the sea. Rabbi Judah disagrees, and says that that’s not the way it was at all. Rather, each tribe was unwilling to go in first. As they were standing disputing who would not go first, Nachshon the son of Aminadav, the Prince of the tribe of Judah, entered the water. He continued to walk forth with great faith, and only when the water reached his neck, did the sea begin to split.

One of the most remarkable things about the physical world in which we live and its nature is its orderliness. From the structure of the tiniest atomic particle, to the behavior of the raging sea, even the winds in the sky, there is always logic, constancy and orderliness. This orderliness allows the experts to predict the weather and to reckon the half-life of a radioactive element. Nature implies predictability. Obviously, G-d purposefully created the world in this predictable manner. Today, scientists maintain that even those things that appear to be unpredictable will eventually be shown to be entirely predictable, as we gain a deeper understanding of the incredible variety of factors that impact on the behavior of these seemingly unpredictable elements and processes.

A “miracle” then may be defined as an instance in which nature ceases to be predictable, departs from its natural order and behaves in an unexpected manner. The splitting

of the Red Sea is certainly a prime example of such behavior.

The controversial scientist, Immanuel Velikovsky in his *Worlds in Collision* argues that the Ten Plagues were basically predictable natural occurrences. He theorizes that, at the time of the Hebrew enslavement in Egypt, a great comet broke off from the planet Venus. The comet's tail, containing red dust, caused the waters of the Nile River to turn red. Hence, the plague of blood. As the planet Earth went deeper in to the comet's tail, the dust turned into small stones, and a hail of gravel pelted the earth. Each one of the plagues, Velikovsky argues, was predictable. However unlikely Velikovsky's theories may be, they do not really controvert the possibility of a Divine miracle. After all, even if the event was not a miracle, the timing was certainly miraculous! The fact that it happened at the particular time that Moses had predicted that it would happen, renders the event a miracle. Velikovsky also argues that the so-called splitting of the Red Sea was caused by a great hurricane and unusual tides that caused the seabed to dry up and the waters to suddenly return. Thus, according to Velikovsky, the poor Egyptians had the great misfortune of being in the wrong place, at the wrong time.

In light of this, the Midrash of Nachshon the son of Aminadav is revealing. The Midrash implies that Nachshon was able to affect G-d's hand, and make the sea split at a particular point in time.

I have previously argued (Bereshith 5762-2001) that the Torah maintains that G-d created the world entirely good, and that it was the human who, by defying G-d, introduced evil into the world, by eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of good and evil. By defying G-d, Adam and Eve introduce death, sickness, and pain into the world. But, G-d has given humankind the antidotes to cure all illness. In fact, all that is necessary to find these cures to end all

sickness, illness, pain and travail is for the human species to resolve to do so.

I would argue even further, that even those things that seem most unpredictable, those occurrences that insurance companies often call "Acts of G-d," are indeed predictable, and are, in fact, controllable.

It is already well known and widely accepted that it is folly to build homes on geologic faults where the likelihood of earthquakes is well established, or, to erect mansions on edges of cliffs that are prone to erosion and mudslides. And yet, scientific knowledge is unable to convince our human emotions to act responsibly. And so, we continue today to build homes in dangerous locations.

Eventually, science will most likely gain a much fuller understanding of the geothermal and seismic factors that cause volcanoes to erupt and earthquakes to occur. Not only will inhabitants be entirely forewarned, but, it may very well be possible for Earth dwellers to actually change the course of nature by developing technologies that will release the explosive pressures in a safe and secure manner before eruptions and prior to quakes. None of this is really that farfetched.

But, for all this to happen, we need a Nachshon the son of Aminadav, who is prepared to jump into the water up to his neck and declare, "I am going to cause the water to split. My profound faith will change the course of nature. My profound faith will inspire scientists to find the factors that cause nature to change. My profound faith will convince G-d that He must be my partner to help me find the answers to these seemingly impenetrable questions."

This Shabbat when you listen to the Song of the People of Israel crossing the Red Sea sung in your synagogues, think of Nachshon. He may very well be sitting next to you, perhaps he is already inside of you, waiting, for a little encouragement to emerge and do his thing.

Timing the Redemption and Ascending in Holiness

Rabbi Dr. David Shabtai

Mere days after ordering Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt, Pharaoh has a change of heart. Rashi explains that Pharaoh, remembering that Moshe only asked for a three day reprieve from slavery, sent enforcers or officers along with Bnei Yisrael as they left. Once three days passed and Bnei Yisrael didn't show any interest in returning to Egypt, these officers quickly turned back to Egypt to report to Pharaoh. While Bnei

Yisrael numbered in the millions, from young to old, the distance that they managed to cover in three days was traversed by these officers in one. On the fourth day the officers travelled back to Egypt and Pharaoh rallied his troops to give chase.

Travelling with military efficiency, Pharaoh and his armies charge forward on days five and six, and finally catch up to Bnei Yisrael on the night prior to the seventh

day. It's on that fateful night during which the Yam Suf split and Bnei Yisrael travelled through. On that night, the Egyptians chased Bnei Yisrael into and through the Yam Suf and Hashem prevented them from approaching each other. On the seventh day, Bnei Yisrael finally made it through and the Egyptians drowned, prompting Bnei Yisrael to sing the Shirat Ha-Yam.

Rashi explains that it's for this reason that the holiday of Pesach has bookends of Yom Tov at its beginning and end. The first Yom Tov, on the first day of Pesach, celebrates the actual Exodus while the second Yom Tov, on the seventh day, celebrates the salvation at Yam Suf and the ensuing Shirah.

The problem is that later in the Torah, Rashi calculates the dates somewhat differently. In quoting Rabbi Moshe Ha-Darshan's expositions on the mitzvah of tzitzit, he explains that we are to wear eight strings on each corner to correspond to the number of days from when we left Egypt until we said Shirat Ha-Yam. And even while Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi (the most prominent and foremost among Rashi super-commentators) assumes that these reflect two contradictory approaches to the chronology, almost all others try to resolve the discrepancy.

The Taz (in his Divrei David supercommentary to Rashi) takes Rabbi Moshe Ha-Darshan's explanation as controlling. Meaning, that the Yam Suf split and Bnei Yisrael sang the Shirah a full eight days after they left Egypt. He does some linguistic acrobatics to reread the narrative in Parshat BeShalah to conform to this reckoning. But even while this understanding adds significant meaning to Diaspora Jewry's celebration of the eighth day of Pesach, it does not provide for a very convincing read of the story.

Hizkuni suggests that Rabbi Moshe Ha-Darshan wasn't counting from when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, but from the day prior, when they gathered from Goshen and arrived

in Raamses. But even while accurately explaining the numerical discrepancy, it doesn't provide much in the way of meaning.

Maharal takes this idea a step further and explains that indeed, the count should start from the day prior to the actual Exodus—the 14th of Nisan. Even while Bnei Yisrael physically left Egypt on the morning of the 15th, it was on the 14th, that the Torah consistently refers to as Hag Ha-Pesach (the next seven days are consistently referred to as Hag Ha-Matzot). Different that any other holiday, it's on the afternoon of the 14th—prior to the onset of Yom Tov—that the Korban Pesach was brought. But Maharal explains that this was more than simply a preparatory stage—it was the onset of the Exodus itself. It's for this reason that the Torah forbids hametz from noon of the 14th, to represent that it's then that our redemption truly began.

We often find it easier to relate to the spiritual significance of positive actions. When we eat matzah, we bring to mind notions of redemptions and gratitude for our salvation. But when we refrain from eating hametz, we aren't doing anything at all. We are specifically doing nothing. And yet, it's this holding ourselves back from hametz on the afternoon of the 14th that represents the redemption. Elsewhere, Maharal explains that it's specifically through refraining from those things that the Torah demands that we achieve kedushah. Holiness is predicated upon controlling our physical desires and instincts. It allows us to focus on our spiritual core and in so doing, draw ourselves closer to Hashem and grow spiritually. It's for that reason that Maharal argues that it's specifically the time that hametz is prohibited—the middle of the day of the 14th of Nisan—that marks the beginning of the redemption.