



PARSHAS BESHALACH & T'U SHEVAT

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH

\$1.00 EACH

נתנדב לזכות
הבחור הבר מצוה
יהושע זאב ני"ו לויפער
ע"י משפחתו

יה"ר שיעלה על במתי התורה והיראה עם ברכה והצלחה

To sponsor a month's/week's translation in honor or memory of a loved one, call 718 438 3451

Emunah – A Song of Perfect Harmony

A Parsha Replete with Emunah (Faith)

The parsha begins by recounting the episode of the Exodus, in which over two million men, women and children followed their leader into the barren desert. In Doing so, the Jewish people displayed their innate emunah in Hashem.

Centuries later, the prophet Yirmiyahu, censured his generation for their lack of faith and compared them to their ancestors: זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלֹתַיִךְ לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר "זָכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ אֲהַבַת כְּלוּלֹתַיִךְ לְכַתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בְּמִדְבָּר" "I remember the kindness of your youth [when you were a young nation], the love of your nuptials; you went after me in the wilderness, in a land which was not cultivated."

From the beginning, Parshas Beshalach drills us in Emunah. Don't worry about how you are going to survive. Follow Hashem into the desert, you are in good hands; Hashem will take care of you.

The Beauty of Shirah (Song)

This Shabbos is referred to as Shabbos Shirah because the parsha recounts the shirah the Jewish people recited after their miraculous crossing of the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds).

However, a Shabbos is not named after a mere part of the parsha. If the Shabbos was so named, we may infer that the entire parsha is a song and therefore the whole Shabbos is one of song.

What creates the pleasantness of poetry, the song of words? Each individual word that it is composed of has no beauty to it when it stands alone.

The pleasantness of a poem comes – not from each individual word - but from the correlation of the words to each other.

Each line of a poem ends with a word that rhymes with the next line. If you recite each line by itself, you will not feel the pleasantness; but when you recite them together, ah! Why? Because there is a marriage between the lines, they match; they are suitable for each other.

A cat walking on a piano creates noise, not music. The beauty of music, too, comes from the matching of the notes together; an individual note has nothing to it.

The sounding of the note is not pleasant at all; it is something in between the notes - the matching of the notes to each other - that constitutes the beauty of music. The beauty of music is the harmony, the synchronization of the disparate parts.

The notes in a song are arranged so that they correspond to each other to produce a certain mood, or bring out certain nuances of pleasantness.

All beauty contains this factor. A painting is beautiful not because of any individual color therein. It is the wondrous way in which the colors are combined that creates the magnificence of art.

The Whole World Sings Shirah

There is a set of Beraisos called 'Perek Shirah' which lists the song that each creature sings to its creator. The frog, the tree, the cloud, and the snake, all sing shirah. What does this mean - the snake and the sky sing? When we hear the frog croaking, we are hard-pressed to discern any musical characteristics therein.

Each creature is part of the nature Hashem created. The frog, together with the butterfly, river, stars and birds are all one great harmonious creation. The creatures match each other and fit together wondrously to comprise this most beautiful, magnificent world.

This is true, not just regarding the physical world, but also the history of the world.

We may see a headline here and there and observe no connection. However, events are a chain. They are managed by Hashem and everything has a reason.

You see no connection? Well, the people living through the era of the Megilah also saw no connection between the execution of Vashti, the assassination plot of Bigson and Seresh, and Esther becoming queen. Afterwards it became clear that they were all arranged by the Master Coordinator.

One who studies history sees that there is harmony between events and they are part of one master plan

The Harmony of History

There is harmony - not only in the physical world - but also in the management of the world. Everything that happens is connected to other occurrences. All episodes complement each other, like the blue and gold strokes of a Rembrandt work of art. World history is strikingly beautiful.

We do not see the beauty in current events because we do not see the entire picture. We are like a fly that lands on the black shadow beneath the fruit bowl in a painting and mutters, 'What a gloomy portrait, why does the artist have to paint everything black?!' The poor fly is unaware that the dark shadow highlights the silver bowl and accentuates the beauty of the bright red apple, golden banana and draping purple grapes.

A careful and honest observer of world history will notice that all world events revolve around the Jewish people. The same is true for current events. Israel, a tiny country, with a population of a few million, occupies the headlines constantly.

Only with Emunah Do We Have Shirah

We do not understand the harmony of history with our limited intellect. We can only perceive the song of the world through emunah. When we tune in to the fact that every event is just a part of a larger picture, we are able to hear the strains of the shirah of creation. Then we are able to burst into song along with it and praise Hashem, the Creator of the symphony.

Parshas Beshalach illustrates faith in and trust of Hashem. Therefore, it is appropriately referred to as Shabbos Shirah. When we believe in the multi-dimensional harmony of creation, we can join its song.

A person who absorbs the message of this parsha will go through life singing.

When the Music Stops

Music is composed not only of the notes but also of the beats of the tempo. These often create pauses and spaces between the sounding of the tune. However, the pounding of the beats and spaces in between the notes do not diminish the beauty of the melody, the opposite is true. A skillful recital of a poem, too, will involve pausing for effect.

In history, especially in Jewish history, we have experienced times of pounding pain. Sometimes there seems to be a space, an era when nothing seems to be happening, or times when we see only empty smoldering expanses of destruction.

These are the pauses and beats of the tune. The difficult times are not notes of discord amidst the harmony; they are part of and enhance the music.

The life of the individual is comprised of times when life seems empty, we may feel that there is no point in continuing, everything is lost. However, with emunah - with a loving, faithful relationship with Hashem - we can sense that the empty pauses of existence have meaning and are part of the beauty of the song of life.

In a Sefer Torah (Torah Scroll), the Shirah must be written in a specific way, according to a particular design:

אשירה לה' כי גאה גאה
סוס
ורכבו רמה בים עזי וזמרת קה
ויהי לי
לישועה זה קלי ואנוהו
אלקי
אבי וארממנהו ה' איש
מלחמה ה'
שמו מרכבת פרעה וחילו ירה בים
ומבחר
שלשיו טבעו בים סוף
וכו'

The Gemara refers to this as a 'line on top of a space.' The shirah consists not only of the words, but also of the empty spaces. If the shirah is written in the ordinary fashion of the rest of the text, the entire Sefer Torah is invalid.

A person infused with emunah who experiences an empty day does not stop singing. He knows that he is merely experiencing a pause in the melody; it will resume again tomorrow.

King David proclaimed: "צרה ויגון אמצא ובשם ה' אקרא"², 'I encountered calamity and grief and I called in the name of Hashem.' He later declared: "כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא"³, 'I raised the cup of salvation and I called in the name of Hashem.' The Gemara⁴ deduces from these two verses that one blesses Hashem upon evil as one does on the good.

If I hold the cup of salvation, I know it is from Hashem. If I face hardship, I know it also comes from Hashem. The space is as much music as is the sound of the notes.

אז ישיר - The Pinnacle of Emunah

After taking the Jewish people to the wilderness, Hashem commanded Moshe Rabbeinu that they turn around and head in the direction of Egypt. The verse states: "and they did so." Rashi comments that these words express the greatness of Jewish people. They did not say, 'how can we move toward the enemy,' rather they said, 'we listen only to the words of Moshe Rabbeinu.'

At the climax of the miracle of the splitting of the sea, the Jewish people attained lofty spiritual heights. The verse summarizes: "וַיֵּאֱמְנוּ בַּה' וּבִמְשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ"⁵, 'they had emunah in Hashem and in Moshe his servant.'

The two ingredients of a Jew are to believe in Hashem and in the shepherds He assigns to lead His people. The Gemara says that having emunah in the shepherds of the Jewish people is compared to having emunah in Hashem. We have to trust the Gedolim and follow their guidance.

"וַיֵּאֱמְנוּ וְכוּ' אִזּוּ יִשְׁרָ" ⁶, 'They believed etc., then, they sang.' Once the Jewish people attained emunah, they saw the world as a symphony and themselves as part of the song.

"וַיֵּאֱמְנוּ בְּדִבְרֵי יְשִׁירָה תְהִלָּתוֹ"⁷, 'They believed his words and they sang his praise.' If you believe in Hashem, you know that everything is a song. You know that both joy and anguish are part of the song.

Every creature sings to Hashem in one cosmic symphony. There is only one creature that has the choice if he wants to sing or not. When he chooses to sing, he is the most beautiful instrument of all.

David Hamelech compiled a hundred fifty songs into the book of Tehilim (psalms). In the last chapter, he praises Hashem with all instruments available: Hallelukah! ... praise him with the sounding of the shofar... and the harp ...with cymbals... The chapter concludes with the most superb and noble instrument: every soul praise Hashem, Hallelukah!

Fortunate is the soul who chooses to join in the song of creation. He becomes not merely part of, but the conductor, of the symphony. The tzaddik (righteous person) leads the world in song.

With the third Hallelukah which we say every day in the morning prayers we lead the world in song. We proclaim: praise the Lord from the heavens, praise Him, O' the angels, his legions, the sun and the moon. Then we silence the upper part of the symphony and proclaim to the earth, now it is your turn to sing. 'Praise Hashem from the Earth, the whales and the depth of the sea, fire and hailstone, snow and smoke...'

When we develop our emunah, we see the world as harmonious and we chime in. Then we lead it in song.

The Manna - a Drill in Emunah

When the Jewish people exhausted their supply of food, Hashem began providing them with the manna which would continue falling from heaven for the next forty years.

The entire time the Jewish people subsisted on the manna, they were subject to an intense exercise of emunah. They were permitted to collect only what they needed for that day, not for the next day. The manna of those who gathered for the next day became wormy.

The lesson Hashem wished to impart was: Do not worry about tomorrow! The same Hashem that gave you food today will be around tomorrow, as well! He gave you food today? He will also give you food tomorrow!

However, for Shabbos, they were obligated to prepare manna in advance. This is because Shabbos is a Me'en Olam Habah – a sampling of the world to come (the afterlife). Our entire lives are one great preparation for Olam Habah.

Regarding Olam Habah, one must have no emunah that Hashem will provide for him. One should be very worried that perhaps he does not have enough mitzvos. One should

prepare more and more and indeed, worry for rainy day. You may need more mitzvos than you already have.

Emunah – Each According to His Level

There are two parts to having faith in Hashem. One is Emunah – belief. This entails having intellectual awareness of the omnipotence of Hashem and the truths of the Torah. This is demanded equally of every person.

The second part is bitachon – trust. This involves the practical application of emunah in our daily lives. Bitachon is a tall ladder; there are many rungs – levels upon which people stand.

We need to be aware on which rung in the ladder we stand; overdoing our level is dangerous.

Of the great Generation of the Wilderness, Hashem demanded ultimate faith. As for us, we need not have emunah to that extent. However, throughout the generations, there were tzaddikim who functioned on the exalted spiritual level of the Generation of the Wilderness. They did not go to sleep if they had money in the house for the next day.

The Rebbe R' Melech could not fall asleep one night. He assumed that this must be because he still had some money left over in his house. He searched and found some coins. Only after he distributed them to the poor was he able to fall asleep.

The Gemara discusses a disagreement between Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai was of the opinion that a person should always learn Torah and not work at all. Rabbi Yishmael disagreed based on the verse, "ואספת דגניך"⁸, 'you should gather your produce,' which insinuates that a person should work and set aside time to learn. The Gemara concludes that many did כרבי שמעון, as Rabbi Shimon and did not succeed⁹. The Baal Shem Tov explained that the reason they did not succeed was because they did as Rabbi Shimon, they imitated him. They were not truly on his level in every facet of their personality; they only imitated him in the detail of his level of bitachon. Only one who is truly on the spiritual level of Rabbi Shimon can do as he did. For the rest of us, it is dangerous to do so.

However, there is a basic level of bitachon that we all must be on. Everyone has to utilize his awareness of the fact that Hashem provides sustenance and must therefore set aside time for Torah learning, fulfillment of mitzvos, and must give of his money for tzedakah (charity) according to his means.

The Legacy of the Manna

The manna was a novelty. The Jewish people knew that bread comes from the earth – if you toil, plow, sow and harvest, then you have food to eat. But that bread comes from heaven?! It is solely Hashem who provides? That was a new concept.

When the Jewish people saw the manna the first time they exclaimed, "מַן הוּא?" literally translated as – what is this?! However, the letters of מַן הוּא are the same as of the word אמונה. The manna taught the Jewish people a lesson for all generations - to have faith and to trust in Hashem.

Hashem commanded¹⁰ that Aharon preserve a flask of manna for the generations as a remembrance and place it together with the Luchos (Tablets) in the Aron (Holy Ark). Just as the Luchos have the Ten Commandments written upon them as teachings for us, the manna, too, has something to teach us.

Rashi comments that the Prophet Yirmiyahu used this flask. He asked the people why they do not set aside time to learn Torah. They said, “How will we have money? What will we do if a rainy day comes?” Yirmiyahu showed them the flask of manna and said, “See word of Hashem.” He did not say ‘hear the word of Hashem,’ but ‘see the word of Hashem.’ He presented them with a visual aid of bitachon. Your forefathers survived for forty years in the wilderness without working even one day! Of you it is demanded at least to set aside time for Torah study.

A person should not occupy himself worrying about unlikely scenarios.

A yeshiva student asked R' Elya Lopian for a blessing to leave the yeshiva and occupy himself making a living. R' Elya asked, “Why are you going to stop learning?”

The student replied, “I need money.”

“What do you need money for?”

“I have to make a living!”

“Maybe you won't live?”

“Rebbe, you are cursing me?!”

“Ok, ok, make believe I did not say anything. Continue.”

“I need money because I have to get married.”

“Maybe you won't marry?”

“Rebbe, again you are cursing me!”

“Ok, ok, make believe I did not say anything. Continue.”

“I need money because I have to support my children.”

“How do you know you will have children?”

“Rebbe, you are cursing me?!”

“Ok, ok, make believe I did not say anything. Continue.”

“I need money in case someone becomes sick, and I'll need to pay for medical expenses.”

“Maybe the person who gets sick will not survive.”

“Rebbe, again you are cursing me!”

“No, I'm not cursing you. I'm just surprised. I see that you know that you will live, get married, have children and they'll get sick and be healed. All these things you know for sure! You have faith that Hashem will do that for you. Just this detail – how you will have money if you learn Torah – you do not trust Hashem to take care of for you.”

The Adversary of Emunah

The Jewish people marched out of Egypt with emunah that Hashem will provide for them. However, now they were thirsty. They fell from their level of faith and asked for water in a disrespectful way. They forgot their faithfulness to Hashem.

Upon the command of Hashem, Moshe hit a dry rock and out came water to supply a population of a few million for forty years!

This episode was referred to as ‘The harassment of the Jewish people’ – they complained inappropriately because they fell from their level of emunah. They experienced

doubts in their relationship to Hashem. They cried, "ה'יש ה' בקרבנו אם אין?!¹¹", 'Is Hashem with us or not?! Will he provide for us?'

These doubts were a product of the first snake of creation who embodied the evil inclination and enticed Adam and Chavah to eat from forbidden fruit. Chavah, responding to Hashem's question of – 'Why did you eat from the forbidden fruit? – responded, "הנחש"¹² "השיאני", 'the snake persuaded me!'

The snake planted doubts in the heart of Chavah. Chavah knew that Hashem had intended only for her benefit in forbidding her to eat from the forbidden fruit because it was damaging for her. The snake convinced her, "Oh no! Hashem just does not want competition! He does not want you to know too much!"

The letters 'היש - אין', is he here – or not' are the same as in השיאני¹³. The doubts of the Jewish people in the desert originated from the poison that the first snake injected into the mother of mankind.

Immediately following this episode, Amalek came to attack the Jewish people. The word עמלק is gematria (has the numerical value of) ספק, doubt (they both equal 240). Just as the tzaddik is a chariot for the Divine Presence, so is Amalek the chariot for the evil inclination. The seat of evil in this world is in the heart of the descendants of Amalek. From there, it travels to the hearts of the rest of mankind.

The primary task of our generation is to ward off the influence of Amalek who is clothed in the atheistic tendencies of the times.

How does one ward off Amalek? The verse relates that as long as Moshe Rabbeinu kept his hands raised on high, the Jewish people defeated Amalek in battle. As soon as his hands became heavy and drooped down, they lost.

"Is it the hands of Moshe that fight the war?" the Gemara asks¹⁴. "No," the Gemara answers. When the Jewish people gazed upwards at Moshe's hands, they were reminded of their Father in heaven and strengthened their faith in him. Thereby, they were victorious.

We fight Amalek with faith. The ammunition that destroys Amalek is emunah. The verse states, "ויהי ידיו אמונה עד בא השמש"¹⁵, 'His [Moshe's] hands [aroused] emunah until the sun came. Until the Jewish sun shines again, with the coming of Mashiach, we have to expect a bitter fight against the powers of Amalek. We can hope to be victorious only by reinforcing our emunah.

Maintaining Emunah Despite Being Plagued by Doubts

On Shabbos Shirah there is a custom to eat kasha (buckwheat) in commemoration of the manna. R' Pinchos of Koritz said that the custom was particularly to eat dark (whole grain) kasha.

The son of the Chasam Sofer once posed a deep philosophical question about something the Torah says. The Chasam Sofer remained silent.

Three days later, he called him over and presented him with a wonderful answer and said, "My child, I knew the answer right away, your question was nothing. However, I wanted to teach you, that it is possible to go around three days with a difficulty on emunah and still remain a believing Jew."

If you have a kasha, a difficulty on emunah, put it on a back burner in your mind until you find an answer. It is possible to have emunah even with a kasha. There never was a kasha on Hashem's management of the world or on the Torah, that was truly a kasha.

On Shabbos Shirah, when we absorb the lessons of emunah we eat black kasha. This is order to teach ourselves that, even with a kasha, or furthermore, with a black kasha, a painful difficulty, it is possible to have complete faith.

A puny little question will not refute our rock-solid, proven Torah which Hashem presented to us in the presence of millions. If a brilliant scientist were to tell you that according to his experiments water should flow upward, not downward, water would still flow down! This scientist has a kasha and needs to redo his experiments until he finds out where he went wrong.

Amalek is like a cloud. He takes different forms, but is the same thing. In every generation he assumes a different appearance, but he is the power that plants doubts in G-d in the hearts of Jews.

A Jew has to train himself to have faithfulness to Hashem, to his Torah, and to his servants. His reward? *אז ישיר*, he will spend his life singing; his whole life will be music. If he experiences *כוס ישועות אשא* or *צרה ויגון אמצא*, he will *בשם ה' אקרא*, feel the loving kindness of Hashem in every thing.

A Message For T'U Beshvat

On the 15th of Shevat, the sap begins once again to flow through the tree, heralding the New Year for trees. This moisture will bring forth fruit in the spring. It is the day to pray for a beautiful esrog. The custom is to eat fruits in order to be able to say the blessings on the fruits on this day. *פרי עץ הדר*, a fruit of splendor, is gematria *פרי העץ*, [Blessed are you Hashem] who created the fruit of the tree (they both equal 659). Have in mind to ask Hashem for a gorgeous esrog when saying this blessing.

When the world was created, every tree bore fruit. Because of the sin of the forbidden fruit, most trees are today fruitless. With the coming of Mashiach, all trees will, once again, bear fruit. Just as we pray for a good year on Rosh Hashanah, so do the trees on their Rosh Hashanah.

On the 15th of Shevat, we should join the trees in their prayers, and ask that they all bear fruits. We should pray for elms, spruce, oak, fur, pine and all empty, fruitless trees. *ועץ*"¹⁶ "השדה יתן פרי" and the [barren] tree of the field will give forth fruit [when Mashiach will come] is gematria *חמשה עשר בשבט*, the 15th of Shevat (they both equal 1236). On T'U BeShevat it is appropriate to pray that Mashiach should come so that all barren trees should once again give forth fruit.

You will find many species of trees in an encyclopedia. However, there is one species you will not find, and that is man. The verse¹⁷ states, "*כי האדם עץ השדה*", 'A person is like a tree.' In his behavior and constitution, a person resembles an inverted tree – his roots are in heaven and he grows all the way down to earth.

Our roots are exiled to Amalek the original snake. Therefore, there are many fruitless trees among the Jewish people. If we examine ourselves, we may come to the conclusion that we are like a fruitless tree! "Where are my mitzvos, which are the fruits of a person? Even the fruits I do produce are of inferior quality, they are not desirable to Hashem!"

Hashem has a song for the Jewish people. However, they do not have the transistor to pick up the wavelengths, so the Prophet Yeshaya transmitted it to the Jewish people¹⁸.

"I will sing to you the song of my beloved [Hashem] to his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard in a very fertile plot of land. He tended, cultivated, removed the stones, planted the shoots, built a little tower [in order to be able to observe the vineyard], and a cellar for the wine. He hoped it would produce grapes, but, alas! It produced rotten fruits!

And now, you inhabitant of Yerushalayim and man of Yehuda, judge between me and my vineyard! What could I have done to my vineyard which I didn't do? Why did I hope that my vineyard would produce grapes and then it produced rotten fruits? ...The vineyard of Hashem is the Jewish people.

Hashem wanted us to produce good fruits, but we did not. The 15th of Shevat is the day to pray we should merit producing good fruit.

In the Bais HaMikdash there were trees that did not only produce good fruit, they produced fruits of gold.

We are supposed to produce good grapes. However, if our grapes are rotten, we may have a good excuse for ourselves. At the end of Shirah after the splitting of the sea, we sang ותבאימו ותטאמו, bring us and plant the Jewish tree in your Bais HaMikdash. Perhaps what is at fault is the soil, not the tree.

Our prayer on the 15th of Shevat is: We want to return to the soil in which we will flourish.

¹ ירמיהו ב:ב

² תהלים קטז:ד

³ תהלים קטז:יג

⁴ ברכות ס' ע"ב

⁵ שמות יד:לא

⁶ שמות טו:א

⁷ תהלים קו:יב

⁸ דברים יא:יד

⁹ ברכות ל"ה ע"ב

¹⁰ שמות טז:לג

¹¹ שמות יז:ז

¹² בראשית ג:יג

¹³ מגלה עמוקות

¹⁴ ר"ה כ"ט ע"א

¹⁵ שמות טז:יב

¹⁶ ויקרא כו:ז

¹⁷ דברים כ:יט

¹⁸ ישעיה פרק ה'