
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for self study by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT BESHALACH -

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

RAINING 'BREAD'

1. Review 16:4, noting the verb that the Torah uses to describe how the bread fell from heaven. Attempt to relate this to a similar usage of this verb in Breishit 2:5!

Recall as well from Shmot 17:6, where the water came from while they were in the desert.

Then, review Devarim 11:10-17, noting how the Torah describes the manner by which the Land of Israel will receive its 'rain', and from where its produce will grow.

Based on these sources, note the contrast between the sources of rain and bread in the desert in relation to their sources in the Land of Israel. Attempt to explain how this may be significant.

2. Next, review Devarim 8:1-18, and relate that section to your answer to the above question. Finally, recall the blessing that we make before eating bread [i.e. "ha'motzei lechem min ha'aretz"]. Technically speaking, is the statement that we make in that blessing true? Thematically speaking, why is that blessing so meaningful? [See Ramban on 16:4 starting "I'maan anasenu"!]

THE FIRST 'SHABBOS'

1. In your opinion, did Bnei Yisrael in Egypt keep (or know about) Shabbat (and any of its laws)? If so, how did they find out?

Now, carefully review what God first tells Moshe concerning the 'manna' in 16:4-5. Based on 16:5, does it seem that Bnei Yisrael (or at least Moshe) already knows about the concept of 'shabbat'?

Next, carefully review from 16:6-21, noting whether or not Moshe & Aharon ever told Bnei Yisrael concerning what they were supposed to do on 'the sixth day' (as God commanded them in 16:5). [Can you explain why they didn't?]

[Did you understand 16:5 as a 'command' for Moshe to relay to Bnei Yisrael, or simply as information that God wanted Moshe to know?]

Now, carefully review 16:22-27, i.e. the story of happened on the sixth day. In your opinion, did the people take double because they were commanded to; or did they take the normal amount, but it turned out to be double - and hence they were all very surprised! [Relate your answer to the question above!]

If indeed they were taken by surprise by the double amount on the sixth day, and the fact that it didn't spoil - what would be the 'pedagogic advantage' of this sequence of events?

2. For some insight on the above questions, first see Rashi on 16:22 (noting how he claims that Moshe should have told them, but he didn't!). Then, see Rashbam on 16:23, where he explains that Moshe didn't tell them on purpose, for 'pedagogic' reasons - i.e. to make their 'first shabbos' a big surprise!

See also Rashi & Seforno on 16:5.

3. With the story in 16:4-27 in mind, read again the Fourth Commandment ("zchor et Yom ha'shabbat..." / Shmot 20:8-11).

In your opinion, how did these events affect (and enhance) how Bnei Yisrael understood (and appreciated) God's special commandment to keep Shabbat?

[Relate these events as well to Rashi on 15:25.]

4. Finally, review 16:33-36. In your opinion, when did these events take place? If at a later time, why are they recorded at this time? See Rashi & Rashbam on 16:33 (& Ibn Ezra on 16:32)

TO CANAAN or TO THE DESERT?

1. As you read the opening pasuk of Parshat Beshalach (13:17), attempt to explain the phrase 'ki karov hu'.

Did you translate 'ki' as 'because', or as 'even though'? How would this affect how you understand this pasuk?

For a discussion on this topic, see first Ibn Ezra (arocho) and Chizkuni. Note the other examples that they bring. Then see Ramban.

2. In your opinion, when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, did the people know for sure where they were going to?

Did they realize that they were supposed to 'stop on the way' at Har Chorev? If so, for what purpose: to thank God; or to receive the Torah; or both?

If possible, support your answer with psukim.

How would your answer to this question affect the way you understand Bnei Yisrael's behavior in the desert?

3. When Bnei Yisrael first left Egypt, for how long (in your opinion) did they expect to be traveling for in the desert (until reaching the Promised Land)? [How long of a journey is it from Egypt to Canaan? (Relate to Devarim 1:2.)]

See Shmot 16:1-3. Based on these psukim, what conclusion can we reach re: the food supply that Bnei Yisrael took with them for their journey? Can you explain why?

ETHICS & THE EXODUS

4. Review 14:1-4, noting how God instructs Bnei Yisrael to do a maneuver. Does this appear to be a trick? In your opinion, does there appear to be a 'moral' problem with this?

See Ibn Ezra (arocho) on 14:1 and Ibn Ezra (katzar) or 14:8 for an interesting perspective!

See also Ramban on Shmot 10:10!

THE 'LAST STANZA'

5. As you review 'shirat ha-yam' (15:1-19), note how just about all of the psukim describe the events of how the sea split and how Egyptians were killed and Bnei Yisrael were saved. However, towards the end of the 'shira' [song] we find a slightly different topic.

With this in mind, attempt to explain 15:17. How does this pasuk relate to the rest of the shira?

In a similar manner, attempt to explain 15:18!

Finally, see 15:19. In your opinion, is this pasuk part of the shira? If not, what is it doing here? For an interesting discussion re: this question, see Ramban on 15:19. [See also Chizkuni on 15:19 for a very novel approach.]

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PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for the shiur)

1. In your opinion, what was the purpose of God's miracles at 'kriyat Yam Suf'?

- a) for Bnei Yisrael to recognize God;
- b) for the Egyptians to recognize God;
- c) for both (a) & (b) ;
- d) for a different (or additional) reason?

[Support your answer with psukim.]

According to your answer, can you explain why the 'Ten Plagues' were not sufficient to accomplish this same purpose?

2. After crossing the Red Sea, Bnei Yisrael finally began their travel into the desert. Based on their original request (from Pharaoh) for a three day journey to worship their God, where 'should' Bnei Yisrael now travel to, and what should they do when they arrive there?

[Relate to 3:12; 3:18; & 5:1-3.]

Where **do** Bnei Yisrael arrive at after their first three days of travel? What happens there? How (and why) is this significant?

[Compare what happens at Mara to the First Plague, relating to Shmot 4:9, 5:3 & 15:26!]

When do Bnei Yisrael finally arrive at Har Chorev, and what happens there? [i.e. did they actually bring korbanot?

See 24:5-8, noting which korbanot were offered, and why.]

3. List the various situations of peril arise in Parshat Beshalach whereupon Bnei Yisrael complain to God (noting how and why they complain); after which God provides a solution (noting how the problem is solved).

In your opinion, does God expect Bnei Yisrael **not** to complain when these situations arise (e.g. when there is a lack of water or food)?

Similarly, in your opinion - did these situations arise by 'chance', or do they appear to be 'orchestrated' by God?

If the latter, what was their purpose?

4. Review once again the list of events that transpire in Parshat Beshalach (as Bnei Yisrael travel towards Har Sinai). Can you identify a pattern or common purpose?

See if you can find the word 'nisayon' (or similar) in any or all of these events. If so, explain its meaning, and how it relates to the purpose of these events. [Relate to Breishit 22:1!]

5. The famous story of Moshe hitting the rock begins when Bnei Yisrael are encamped in Refidim (17:1).

To the best of your recollection (don't look at the psukim yet), was the rock that Moshe hit also in Refidim? If not, where was it? Does the entire nation gather when he hits the rock? If not, who is with him at that time?

Now, read 17:5-7, and answer the above questions (once again). Can you explain why Moshe is instructed to hit a rock in Chorev instead of a rock in Refidim?

In your opinion, how did the water get from the rock to the camp in Refidim?

6. If you were in Refidim and thirsty, would you have waited for the water to come to you? What do you think most of the people did, as soon as they heard about the water at Chorev? [Relate to Shmot 19:1-2. See also Ibn Ezra on 17:9 & Devarim 9:21!]

Based on your answer, what appears to be the 'original' reason for Bnei Yisrael's arrival at Har Sinai? [Relate your answer to the famous 'analogy' of 'ein mayim ela Torah' [the only true 'water' is Torah]]

AMALEK ATTACKS

7. Based on your answer to the above question, attempt to understand the setting for when Amalek attacks, as described in 17:8. Note the details of this attack as described in 17:8-16 as the parallel account in Devarim 25:17-19.

How would this help you understand the meaning of the phrase "ve-lo yare Elokim" in Devarim 25:18? [Relate to its similar usage in Breishit 20:11 & 42:18 and Shmot 1:21.]

How would this help you understand the deeper meaning of God's eternal war against 'Amalek' (and those who continue in their ways)?

PART III - PARSHANUT

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A MITZVA or A PROMISE

1. In 14:9-12, Bnei Yisrael - with their 'backs to the sea' and Egypt attacking - cry out to God for help. Moshe responds to Bnei Yisrael as follows (14:13):

"Do not fear, stand strong and witness God's deliverance today - **for** in the way which you see Mitzrayim today - **lo tosifu lir'otam ad olam** - you will **never see them again...**

As you read this pasuk (noting its context), attempt to determine whether it is a **promise** or a **commandment**? If it is a promise, is it a promise for only this generation, or for all generations (read the pasuk carefully)?

How did you explain the word 'derech' in this pasuk?

Then, see Rashi on 14:13 - how does he explain this pasuk?

Next, see Ramban (on 14:13), quoting Chazal. Note that he claims that this pasuk is indeed to be understood as a **commandment**!

Can you explain, according to Chazal, precisely what this commandment entails? Does it apply only to Egypt?

Would you consider this interpretation as 'pshat'?

Explain why yes and why not.

Next, read Parshat Ha-melech in Sefer Devarim (17:14-20), noting especially 17:16:

"He (the king) must not gather too many horses (i.e. for chariots & calvary to strengthen his army), and he must not return the people to **Mitzrayim** in order to add horses, **for** God has already warned you - **lo tosifu lashuv ba-derech ha-zeh od** - you must not go back this way again.

How does this statement relate textually and thematically to the psukim above at kriyat Yam Suf (Shmot 14:13)?

Attempt to explain how Chazal's interpretation of 14:13 as a **commandment** may be based on this pasuk in Devarim.

Next, read Devarim 28:68 (noting its context, it's the final pasuk of the tochacha in Ki Tavo). How do you understand the phrase "ba-derech asher amarti - **lo tosif od lir'otah...**" -

What is the meaning of 'ba-derech' in this phrase?

[Will those who will be 'deported' to Egypt **want** someone to buy them? / read 26:68 carefully]

Does this pasuk support Chazal's peirush in Shmot 14:13?

[See also Yeshayahu 31:1-3 & Yerushalmi Sukka V.1. (23a)]

[See also Ibn Ezra on 14:13 for an interesting perspective on why Bnei Yisrael didn't 'fight back'.

WHAT BOOK ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

2. In 17:14, God instructs Moshe to write down the story of what Amalek did in a **sefer**. In your opinion, what 'sefer' is this, and what was the purpose in writing it down?

Also, why must he 'put it' in Yehoshua's ears? [See Rashi!]

First, see Ibn Ezra (aroch & katzar) re: which book this is. [See also Chizkuni.]

Then see Ramban, noting how and why he disagrees.

Finally, see Seforno for a very interesting explanation!

THE LAWS AT MARA

3. Review 15:25 in the context of 15:23-26.

Based on the simplest reading of this pasuk (and its context), what laws does the phrase 'chok u-misphat' refer to?

Similarly, what nisayon does the Torah refer to?

In your opinion, does 15:25 summarize what took place in 15:23-24, or is it something additional that takes place?

Similarly, does 15:26 explain 15:25, or does it describe something additional that takes place?

Is there any logical reason for laws to be taught at this time?

If so, what type of laws would you expect to find?

Now see Rashi. How does he explain each word in 15:25? Why does he relate to laws that are found only later on in Chumash? [How does his peirush relate to what transpires in the next chapter?]

Next see Ramban. Why are his reasons for not accepting Rashi's interpretation? How does he explain this phrase?

Would you consider Ramban's peirush closer to pshat than Rashi's?

Finally see Rashbam. How does he solve the problem of what specific laws these refer to?

How is his interpretation totally different than Rashi and Ramban's? [Can you explain what leads Rashbam to his conclusion?]

See also Ibn Ezra. Is his peirush the same as Rashbam's?

be-hatzlacha,
menachem