

TORAH STUDY FOR CHRISTIANS

Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center, April 20, 2016

INTRODUCTION: Preparing for Passover; Another Passover Torah Reading

The physical preparation: For Jews across the world, Passover (*Pesach* in Hebrew) begins on Friday night - the coming of *Shabbat*, the Sabbath, coincides this year with the coming of the holiday. We've started preparing a while ago (of course, some Jews don't prepare much for the holiday, while others want to do the best they can but don't organize themselves in time; there is a lot to do if you want to observe the holiday traditionally).

First, there is the command to rid our houses of **all** *chametz* (leavened products); that means cleaning the whole house to make sure not a crumb remains undisposed. People generally vacuum out their cars as well. The kitchen and dining room, of course, are particular targets and take much effort, but since we often tend to eat in a lot of different locations, this presents an excellent opportunity for a thorough spring cleaning. Open containers of *chametz* (breakfast cereals, for instance) can be given to non-Jews; unopened containers are generally put away and out of sight and usage in a locked cabinet or closet. Some people, using the rabbi as their agent, sell their *chametz* to a non-Jew for the duration of the holiday so that the Jewish person doesn't own it - this also covers *chametz* that they intended to get rid of but which they forgot or didn't see.

The spiritual preparation: Another important part of the preparation, however, is the mental/spiritual preparation that can be done before the holiday. *Chametz* is that which is puffed up or fermented - this is a time to rid ourselves of that which is puffed up within us as well. What arrogance can we remove, what vanity can we dispose of, what self-importance can we take out and burn? How do we find greater simplicity (and there is no simpler food than *matzah*)? It is interesting to note that *Pesach* comes half a year away from Rosh Hashanah, the new year, when we also undergo a process of self-searching, atonement, and vowing to do better.

ANOTHER PASSOVER TEXT:

Last year before Passover, we read Exodus 12 as a community; while that chapter is one of the most relevant for gaining a Biblical understanding of the holiday, and it is read on the first day of the holiday, it is certainly not the only relevant Torah reading. On the second day, Leviticus, chapter 22, verse 26 through chapter 23, verse 44 is read; on the seventh day of the holiday, Exodus, chapter 13, verse 17 through chapter 15, verse 26 is read; and on the eighth day, Deuteronomy, chapter 14, verse 22 through chapter 16, verse 17 is read.

It is on parts of the seventh day's reading that I would like to concentrate today. The beginning of chapter 13 (verses 1 through 16), which we don't read on Passover, talks about consecrating the first-born sons to G-d; remembering the liberation from Egypt yearly by keeping the Passover - not eating leavened products, rather eating only *matzah* as bread for those seven days; wearing phylacteries (known in Hebrew as *t'fillin*) during (weekday, non-holiday) prayer to remember the exodus, and about separating out the first-born livestock to consecrate to G-d, also in memory of the sparing of the Israelite's first-born. The seventh day of Passover's reading picks up with the beginning of the Torah portion named *Beshallah*, with this passage:

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Exodus 13:17-22

- יז** וַיְהִי, בְּשַׁלַּח פְּרַעֲהַ אֶת-הָעָם, וְלֹא-נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דָּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים, כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא: כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים, פֶּן-יִנְחַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה--וַיָּשִׁבוּ מִצְרָיִמָּה.
- 17** And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not by the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said: 'Lest peradventure the people repent [have a change of heart] when they see war, and they return to Egypt.'
- יח** וַיִּסַּב אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָעָם דָּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר, יַם-סוּף; וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִמִּצְרָיִם.
- 18** But God led the people about, by the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea [Yam Suf - the Sea of Reeds]; and the children of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt.
- יט** וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף, עִמּוֹ: כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הַשָּׁבַע הַשְּׂבִיעַ אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לֵאמֹר, פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם, וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם אֶת-עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אֶתְכֶם.
- 19** And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him; for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying: 'God will surely remember you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.'
- כ** וַיִּסְעוּ, מִסֻּכּוֹת; וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאֶתְם, בְּקִצְהַ הַמִּדְבָּר.
- 20** And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.
- כא** וַיְהִי הַלֶּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן, לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ, וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ, לְהָאִיר לָהֶם--לְלֶכֶת, יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה.
- 21** And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; that they might go by day and by night:
- כב** לֹא-יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן, יוֹמָם, וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ, לַיְלָה--לְפָנָי, הָעָם.
- 22** the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, departed not from before the people.

QUESTIONS:

1. The reading picks up right after the exodus itself - the Israelites have left their taskmasters and are now on their way to Canaan, the ancestral homeland. Contrast verses 17 and 18; although the Israelites were "armed," as verse 18 says, why could they not chance an encounter with the Philistines on the shorter path ("although that was near")? What does this tell us about G-d at that moment? What does it tell us about the Israelites?
2. While the Israelites were busy despoiling the Egyptians (see Exodus 12:36), Moses was retrieving the sarcophagus of Joseph. Midrash tells us that the Egyptians had sunk it in the Nile, but Divine intuition led Moses to the spot, who then held his arm with his staff over the water elevated the sarcophagus out of the Nile (think Luke Skywalker using the Force to retrieve his X-fighter from the swamp in the first Star Wars movie). Why was this so important a task?

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3. G-d led them by day using a pillar of cloud and by night with a pillar of fire; why was this physical sign necessary, when G-d could have given Moses the mental GPS to navigate his way?

Exodus 14:1-9

- א** וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. **1** And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:
- ב** דַּבֵּר, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיָּשָׁבוּ וַיַּחֲנוּ לִפְנֵי פִי הַחִירֹת, בֵּין מִגְדֹּל וּבֵין הַיָּם: לִפְנֵי בַעַל צְפֹן, נִכְחוּ תַחֲנוּ עַל-הַיָּם. **2** 'Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon, over against it shall ye encamp by the sea.
- ג** וַאֲמַר פַּרְעֹה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ; סָגַר עֲלֵיהֶם, הַמִּדְבָּר. **3** And Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel: They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.
- ד** וַחֲזַקְתִּי אֶת-לֵב-פַּרְעֹה, וַרְדֹּף אַחֲרֵיהֶם, וְאֶכְבְּדָה בְּפַרְעֹה וּבְכָל-חֵילוֹ, וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה; וַיַּעֲשׂוּ-כֵן. **4** And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he shall follow after them; and I will get Me honor upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD.' And they did so.
- ה** וַיִּגַּד לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, כִּי בָרַח הָעָם; וַיִּהְיֶה לְבַב פַּרְעֹה וְעַבְדָּיו, אֶל-הָעָם, וַיֹּאמְרוּ מַה-זֹּאת עָשִׂינוּ, כִּי-שִׁלַּחְנוּ אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַבְדָּנוּ. **5** And it was told the king of Egypt that the people were fled; and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned towards the people, and they said: 'What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?'
- ו** וַיַּאֲסֵר, אֶת-רֶכְבוֹ; וְאֶת-עַמּוֹ, לָקַח עִמּוֹ. **6** And he made ready his chariots, and took his people with him.
- ז** וַיִּקַּח, שֵׁשׁ-מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בָּחוּר, וְכָל, רֶכֶב מִצְרַיִם; וְשָׁלְשָׁם, עַל-כָּלֹ. **7** And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over all of them.
- ח** וַיִּחְזַק יְהוָה, אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, וַיִּרְדֹּף, אַחֲרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, יִצְאִים בְּיַד רַמָּה. **8** And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel; for the children of Israel went out with a high hand.
- ט** וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵיהֶם, וַיִּשְׁיִגּוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִים עַל-הַיָּם, כָּל-סוּס רֶכֶב פַּרְעֹה, וּפָרָשָׁיו וְחֵילוֹ--עַל-פִּי, הַחִירֹת, לִפְנֵי, בַעַל צְפֹן. **9** And the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

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QUESTIONS:

1. Why was this one final hardening of Pharaoh's heart (i.e., strengthening his will) necessary?
2. What could the text mean in saying the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants were turned toward the Israelites (verse 5)?
3. In verse 8, we are told the Israelites had departed Egypt "with a high hand" - why would that have motivated Pharaoh to pursue them?
4. In the start of the next passage, we'll see that the Israelites are afraid (rightfully so) and complaining (not as justifiable), but end up, by the end of the passage, fearing and believing in G-d, and in Moses. Soon after the triumphant Song of the Sea (Chapter 15), which we can study in the future, they are back to whining, this time about not having water (when they could have been patient and waited for G-d's help). Why wouldn't a miracle of this magnitude not have impressed them enough to trust G-d and not complain?

Exodus 14:10-31

וּפָרְעָה, הַקָּרִיב; וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת-עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם נֹסְעִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם,
וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד, וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֶל-יְהוָה.

10 And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians were marching after them; and they were sore afraid; and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, הַמִּבְּלִי אֵין-קִבְרִים
בְּמִצְרַיִם, לְקַחְתָּנוּ לָמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר: מִה-זֹּאת
עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ, לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם.

11 And they said unto Moses: 'Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to bring us forth out of Egypt?'

יִבְ הֲלֹא-זֶה הַדָּבָר, אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ
בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר, חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ, וְנַעֲבֹדָה
אֶת-מִצְרַיִם: כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עַבְדָּת אֶת-מִצְרַיִם,
מִמֹּתֵנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר.

12 Is not this the word that we spoke unto thee in Egypt, saying: Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.'

יג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-הָעָם,
אֵל-תִּירְאוּ--הַתִּיַצְבוּ וּרְאוּ אֶת-יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה,
אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם: כִּי, אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם
אֶת-מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם--לֹא תִסְפוּ לְרֹאֲתָם עוֹד,
עַד-עוֹלָם.

13 And Moses said unto the people: 'Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will work for you to-day; for whereas ye have seen the Egyptians to-day, ye shall see them again no more for ever.'

יד יְהוָה, יִלָּחֵם לָכֶם; וְאַתֶּם, תִּחְרְשׁוּן.

14 The LORD will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.'

טו וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, מִה-תִּצְעַק אֵלַי;
דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּסָּעוּ.

15 And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Wherefore criest thou unto Me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.'

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- טז** וְאֶתֶּה הָרֶם אֶת-מִטְּךָ, וַיִּטֵּה אֶת-יָדְךָ
עַל-הַיָּם--וַיִּבְקָעֵהוּ; וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ
הַיָּם, בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה. **16** And lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out
thy hand over the sea, and divide it; and
the children of Israel shall go into the
midst of the sea on dry ground.
- יז** וַאֲנִי, הִנְנִי מְחַזֵּק אֶת-לֵב מִצְרַיִם, וַיָּבֹאוּ,
אֲחֵרֵיהֶם; וְאֶכְבְּדָה בְּפָרְעָה וּבְכָל-חֵילוֹ, בְּרִכְבוֹ
וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו. **17** And I, behold, I will harden the hearts
of the Egyptians, and they shall go in after
them; and I will get Me honor upon
Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his
chariots, and upon his horsemen.
- יח** וַיֵּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם, כִּי-אֲנִי יְהוָה, בְּהַפְכֹּדֵי
בְּפָרְעָה, בְּרִכְבוֹ וּבַפָּרָשָׁיו. **18** And the Egyptians shall know that I am
the LORD, when I have gotten Me honor
upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon
his horsemen.'
- יט** וַיֵּסַע מֶלְאָךְ הָאֱלֹהִים, הַהֲלִיךְ לִפְנֵי מַחֲנֵה
יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּלְךְ, מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם; וַיֵּסַע עֲמוּד הָעָנָן,
מִפְּנֵיהֶם, וַיַּעֲמֹד, מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם. **19** And the angel of God, who went before
the camp of Israel, removed and went
behind them; and the pillar of cloud
removed from before them, and stood
behind them;
- כ** וַיָּבֹא בֵּין מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם, וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וַיְהִי הָעָנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ, וַיִּאָּר אֶת-הַלַּיְלָה; וְלֹא-קָרַב
זֶה אֶל-זֶה, כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה. **20** and it came between the camp of Egypt
and the camp of Israel; and there was the
cloud and the darkness here, yet gave it
light by night there; and the one came not
near the other all the night.
- כא** וַיִּט מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ, עַל-הַיָּם, וַיּוֹלֶךְ יְהוָה
אֶת-הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קָדִים עֲזָה כָּל-הַלַּיְלָה, וַיִּשָּׂם
אֶת-הַיָּם לְחַרְבָּה; וַיִּבְקָעוּ, הַמַּיִם. **21** And Moses stretched out his hand over
the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to
go back by a strong east wind all the
night, and made the sea dry land, and the
waters were divided.
- כב** וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם, בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה;
וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חוֹמָה, מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם. **22** And the children of Israel went into the
midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and
the waters were a wall unto them on their
right hand, and on their left.
- כג** וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם, וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם--כָּל סוּס
פָּרְעָה, רִכְבוֹ וּפָרָשָׁיו: אֶל-תּוֹךְ, הַיָּם. **23** And the Egyptians pursued, and went
in after them into the midst of the sea, all
Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his
horsemen.
- כד** וַיְהִי, בְּאַשְׁמֶרֶת הַבֹּקֶר, וַיִּשְׁקֹף יְהוָה
אֶל-מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם, בְּעֲמוּד אֵשׁ וְעָנָן; וַיַּהֲרֹם, אֶת
מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם. **24** And it came to pass in the morning
watch, that the LORD looked forth upon
the host of the Egyptians through the pillar
of fire and of cloud, and discomfited the
host of the Egyptians.

TORAH STUDY FOR CHRISTIANS

Villa Maria Education and Spirituality Center, April 20, 2016

כה וַיִּסֶר, אֶת אֲפֻן מִרְכָּבֹתָיו, וַיִּנְהֲגֵהוּ, בְּכִבְדָּת; וַיֹּאמֶר מִצְרַיִם, אָנוּסָה מִפְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל--כִּי יְהוָה, נִלְחָם לָהֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם.

25 And He took off their chariot wheels, and made them to drive heavily; so that the Egyptians said: 'Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.'

כו וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, נִטֵּה אֶת-יָדְךָ עַל-הַיָּם; וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַמַּיִם עַל-מִצְרַיִם, עַל-רֶכְבּוֹ וְעַל-פָּרָשָׁיו.

26 And the LORD said unto Moses: 'Stretch out thy hand over the sea, that the waters may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.'

כז וַיִּטֵּ מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-הַיָּם, וַיָּשָׁב הַיָּם לִפְנֹת בִּקְרָ לְאִיתָנוּ, וּמִצְרַיִם, נָסִים לִקְרָאתוֹ; וַיִּנְעַר יְהוָה אֶת-מִצְרַיִם, בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם.

27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

כח וַיָּשָׁבוּ הַמַּיִם, וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת-הָרֶכֶב וְאֶת-הַפָּרָשִׁים, לְכָל חֵיל פְּרָעָה, הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם: לֹא-נִשְׁאַר בָּהֶם, עַד-אֶחָד.

28 And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even all the host of Pharaoh that went in after them into the sea; there remained not so much as one of them.

כט וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בַיַּבֶּשֶׁה, בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם; וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה, מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם.

29 But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

ל וַיֹּשַׁע יְהוָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל--מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם; וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-מִצְרַיִם, מֵת עַל-שַׁפְּת הַיָּם.

30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore.

לא וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה, אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה בְּמִצְרַיִם, וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם, אֶת-יְהוָה; וַיֵּאֱמִינוּ, בַּיהוָה, וּבְמֹשֶׁה, עַבְדּוֹ.

31 And Israel saw the great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared the LORD; and they believed in the LORD, and in His servant Moses.

QUESTIONS:

1. This is the dramatic heart of the reading and a central, foundational myth of the Jewish people. It is also the inspiration for tales of liberation throughout the world. It posits a G-d Who cares deeply enough about one people to kill other people who threaten them. What are the specific elements that make this story so powerful? What moral problems might you find here?
2. Note that in verse 25, the Egyptians, seeing that G-d was fighting for the Israelites, were already turning back when G-d told Moses to turn the water back onto the Egyptians. What more was going on than simply saving the Israelites?