

2023-02-04 Beshalach Parshah by Nehama E. Wosk

In this week's parsha, Beshalach, Pharaoh pursues the Israelites into the desert. The Red (or Reed) Sea splits, the Israelites cross the sea while the Egyptian army is drowned. Moses and the men sing a special song thanking G-d for this miracle, and the women take out their drums and tambourines and sing and dance their thanks and joy for the miracle as well. The Israelites continue their journey, but when their stores run out, they soon complain about a lack of food and water. G-d sends Manna and quail for them to eat, and miraculously produces water from a rock. Amalak attacks the Israelites and is soundly defeated.

I love the story of the Exodus from Egypt and look forward to telling the story of Nachshom every Peshah.

As you remember, When the Children of Israel saw Pharaoh pursuing them into the wilderness, they formed a number of plans of action. One group favored a battle with the Egyptians, another group advised leaping into the sea, a third said to surrender and return to Egypt, and a fourth advocated crying to Hashem for help. Nobody dreamt of the possibility that the sea would split and that they would march through valiantly on dry land (see *Mechilta* 14:13).

According to the Midrash,²⁹ the sea had not yet split when God told the Jews to enter it. The people hesitated, until the prince of the tribe of Judah, Nachshon ben Aminadav (Aaron's brother-in-law) stepped in. While his family called to him to come back, they watched him continue with the water first covering his legs, his trunk, his shoulders and finally reaching his nostrils. Only then did God tell Moses to raise his hand and split the sea. To me, that was a supreme act of faith.

Afterwards, when the Israelites had all crossed to the other side and the Egyptian's were drown, the men sang the Song of the Sea, expressing their thanks for salvation.

The women, too, said their thanks, but in a different way. They drew out their drums and tambourines and sang and danced with a joy that exceeded even the men's. What was striking about their song was the fact that it was succinct and to the point: "Sing to G-d for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse and rider into the sea", Rashi quotes the Midrash that says that the Jewish women were so confident that G-d

2

would perform miracles and save them from their Egyptian captors, that they actually brought musical instruments with them as they were packing up to leave Egypt!! What faith Miriam and the rest of the Jewish women showed during a time of crisis, when no one could have known what would be the outcome of the great escape from Egypt. The women just knew that G-d would come through for them, and took musical instruments for just for such an occasion! Rabbi Sneerson said that the bitterness of Galut (exile and persecution) was felt more intensely by the women, and their faith was stronger and more enduring than the men's. Thus their joy at redemption as much more poignant. In fact, he says our redemption at the age of the moshiach will be due to the merit of righteous women.

While I can express this now, especially at the 30th anniversary of the Women's Bat Mitzvah, I choose to stop here.

Instead I want to point out the numerous time that the Israelites complained, even after seeing the great miracle of the splitting of the sea. When I was younger, I didn't understand how the Israelites could complain so much. What happened to their faith? Sure they had major obstacles like facing thirst and hunger...but ...

Now that I'm older, I can see how that happened.

How many of us would not be frightened if we had to travel through the desert and could not see where our water was? Or where we would get our food after our stores ran out? Particularly if we had children and we thought they would die?

So today, I wanted to ask two big questions. The first is question is in 2 parts: Would you have complained when facing thirst and starvation, like the Israelites thought? Do you complain now when you are faced with the fears we face today—Fear of not having enough money to buy food? Or things like fear of angry men and women who want to kill all the Jews? Do we have the everyday faith we need to survive and even prosper?