

המוסד למען קדושת חיי אדם



TORAH READING:

Beshalach: Exodus 13:17 - 17:16

In this week's Torah portion, Beshalach: Exodus 13:17 - 17:16, Moses follows the pillar of G-d, leading the Hebrews away from Egypt towards the Red Sea. The Egyptian army pursues them, preparing to overtake them at the shore and return them to enslavement. Just recently introduced to the G-d of salvation and liberation through the miracles of the plagues and the exodus, many Jews in the camp feared for their lives. The safe passage to safety through the splitting of the waters and the destruction of the pursuing army became the defining example of G-d's power and reliability in the Jewish religion. Through song, dance, prayer, and celebration this moment in Jewish history provides an everlasting reminder that HaShem exists and is ever present in our lives.

The 40 year journey in the desert continued with HaShem providing daily sustenance of meat, bread, water, and protection from attack from tribal aggressors. This experience of daily reliance on the love and care of HaShem grew the faith of the Jewish people, preparing them for the work of developing a righteous community of faithful Jews in the Promised Land.

Despite G-d's dependability in these years, many of the Jewish wanderers were plagued with doubts, fears, uncertainty, and anxiety. They longed to be back in Egypt, where enslavement guaranteed food and shelter, and required no personal responsibility or the rudiments of faith in a Supreme being.

How much more difficult it is to maintain a reliance on G-d's protection and guidance in the modern age. Generations have passed since the miracle at the Red Sea. Our collective memory of that event slumbers in our sub-consciousness. Our need for water is supplied through modern plumbing instead of a miraculous gushing of water from a rock; our need for food is guaranteed to be met at the grocery store rather than on a heaven sent flock of quail every evening; our bread comes from the bakery rather than the dew. Protection from our enemies comes in the form of high tech weaponry. Money, reputation, professional standing, political affiliation, and social position round out the myriad dependencies that have replaced a simple reliance on the G-d of our ancestors.

Of course, these dependencies turn out to be unreliable and untrustworthy. The human administrators of our modern supply chains lack accountability. The water from our municipal systems is polluted and the food poisoned with cancer causing chemicals; our protectors and friends become our enemies; our money loses value; our reputations and affiliations demand an ever increasing blind allegiance to beliefs and ideas that contradict our tradition of respect for life, our sensitivity to the protection of the vulnerable and innocent, and our uniquely Jewish ability to provide the light of moral example in a darkening world.

Jewish tradition tells us that even the embryos in their mothers' wombs sang for joy after the Jewish deliverance at the Red Sea, a poignant reminder that Jewish tradition acknowledges life in the womb as spiritually vital and a valued member of the community of G-d's children.