

# Don't Wait! Jump into the Sea! – Parshat Beshalach

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*When everything closes in around us, when we are trying to do something and find ourselves bombarded with all kinds of thoughts, should we stop and give up on all that we have achieved? G-d forbid. Keep on doing good. It's hard, and it can seem overwhelming, but in the end all the difficulties will disappear and you will emerge victorious. This is the message of this week's parsha. Everyone has to go through this type of difficulty personally: the experience of the*

## ***Exodus from Egypt and the challenge of standing before the Red Sea just a moment before they crossed it.***

This week's Torah portion is *parshat Beshalach*. The Torah relates that Pharaoh regretted sending the Nation of Israel from his land: "And Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart toward the people, and they said, 'What is this that we have done, that we have released Israel from serving us?' So, he harnessed his chariot, and took his people with him. He took six hundred elite chariot crews...and he chased after the Jews...and overtook them encamped by the sea...and the children of Israel lifted up their eyes and behold! the Egyptians were advancing after them. They were very frightened, and the children of Israel cried out to G-d...G-d said to Moses, 'Why are you crying out to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to move forward'...and the children of Israel walked into the midst of the sea on dry land" (Exodus 14:5-16).

The Nation of Israel stood on the edge of the sea with the Egyptians right behind them and the sea in front of them. What should they do? What would we have done in such a situation? The Midrash describes the difficult situation in which the Jews were in at that time according to the verse: "My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crevices of the cliff, show me your appearance, let me hear your voice (Song of Songs 2:14). The verse describes the situation of the Nation like a dove fleeing from a hawk who is chasing after it and trying to hide from it in the crevices of the rocks. But between the rocks lurks a snake. This was what the situation of the nation looked like when they stood at the sea and the Egyptians pursued them from behind with the sea in front of them. HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to them: "Show me your appearance; let me hear your voice," that is, show me to whom you turn to in a time of need. Then the Nation of Israel did indeed understand the message and screamed out to G-d, as it is said: "And the children of Israel cried out to G-d" (Exodus 14:10).

Anyone who wants to advance spiritually, even just one step, experiences an “Exodus from Egypt,” because the whole reason and purpose for the Exodus was to serve G-d, as it is written: “When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G-d on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). The moment a person wants to serve HaKadosh Baruch Hu and escape from “Egypt”—meaning from his impurity so that he should become holy—immediately Pharaoh and his forces come and pursue him. It must happen to everyone in the same way that it happened to the Nation of Israel when they left Egypt. So first of all, it is important not to panic when you see such a thing happening. What should you do? Cry out—just as Israel cried out to G-d when they were going through their own war from behind and in front of them.

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To apply this on the personal level, when we want to advance in our service of G-d, a spiritual war immediately ensues over the very fact that we dare to “leave Egypt,” that is, to escape the spiritual darkness we are in. Pharaoh and his army represent the negative spiritual forces which are awakened to try to force us to return to Egypt, to the spiritual darkness we were in previously. Moreover, Pharaoh will do anything to show us that what lies ahead of us is: the sea. The sea symbolizes the evil thoughts and base desires that flood us like the waves of the sea. Essentially, Pharaoh was attacking us with psychological warfare by telling us that we had nowhere to go. Our base desires were in front of us and behind us—where did we think we could go to escape. We were likened to that unfortunate dove fleeing from the hawk but heading directly toward the snake’s mouth. What should a person do in such a situation? What advice could there be? The answer is to never give up! Shout out to G-d, over and over again! As the verse instructs us: “Show me your appearance, let me hear your voice.”

Shouting really does help. Look at what happened when the Nation of Israel cried out to G-d. G-d answered Moses: "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Israel and tell them to go ahead" (Exodus 14:15). HaKadosh Baruch Hu commanded Moses that the Nation of Israel should not pay any attention to the problem behind them or the difficulties in front of them—they should not surrender but rather move forward. And as we see, Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the sea, followed by the whole Nation, and when the water reached up to his neck he shouted: "Save me G-d because water has reached my soul." And then the sea split, and the entire Nation of Israel passed through the sea on dry land while the Egyptians drowned in it.



*"My dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the crevices of the cliff, show me your appearance, let me hear your voice"*

Rabbi Natan explains that this shows us that when we are overwhelmed by our thoughts from all sides and they are engulfing our minds—just as when the Jews were surrounded from in front and behind and then also in the sea itself before it split, and G-d commanded them to go forward into the sea—we should not pay any attention and not take into account all the confusion and psychological difficulties that arise like the

depths of the sea, like the waves of the sea. We should not pay any attention to it, and we shouldn't stop because of it, but rather continue forward and do our part: praying, studying, and doing good deeds. In the end, the sea will split. In the end we will succeed.

The idea behind this is simple, when the treacherous waters, "*hamayim hazeidonim*," (a pseudonym for bad thoughts, see Psalms 125:5), threaten to overcome us and we have nowhere to run, we just have to move forward and keep doing what we need to do as if nothing is happening around us. We need to just keep going believing G-d will help us. This is what Nachshon ben Aminadav and all of Israel did after him when they jumped into the water until it reached their necks. That is, they did not pay any attention to the difficulties, to their bad thoughts, and continued doing what they needed to do, learning Torah, praying, and doing good deeds. Certainly, as they fought in order to continue to do what they needed to do, so too did the *Sitra Achra* intensify the battle against them—like two people fighting with one another, each trying to overcome the other. Then when HaKadosh Baruch Hu saw their self-sacrifice and how much they were willing to fight hard to serve him, in a split second everything was nullified and the Nation of Israel walked on land in the sea.

Rabbi Natan adds that this is always the case: when a person strengthens himself very much to serve G-d, he must continue to do his part even though there are all kinds of questions, difficulties and strange ideas going through his head, and if he does not pay any attention to them but he continues to do his part, then suddenly he will see how all obstacles and difficulties are eliminated and he is walking securely on dry land.

(According to *Likutei Halachot*, *Shiluach HaKen* 4:4, 5, 7)