

D'var Torah on Parashat Beshalach

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In this week's *parsha*, we cross the Red Sea, leaving behind the narrow straits of Egyptian slavery. It is the custom to stand when the *shirat hayam*, the song that our ancestors sang when they reached freedom's shores, is chanted from the Torah. In fact, we stand in synagogue every morning when we ourselves sing it.

The text of the song, both in the Torah scroll and in our printed books, is laid out in three columns. The outer two suggest the walls of water which miraculously parted, allowing the People of Israel, represented by the middle column, to pass through.

Leaving Egypt- *Mitzrayim*- the place of narrow straits- is the core story of the Jewish tradition. The passage from slavery to freedom is at the core of human experience, and is repeated perpetually in every moment.

Let me suggest the following practice as you hear the Song chanted tomorrow: Look at the middle column of the text, and find a particular letter that appeals to you- perhaps a letter from your Hebrew name. Imagine that that letter is you, crossing between the parted waters. Notice that you are accompanied by other letters that form words, and that the words accompany each other in order to form a story. In this moment, you are leaving behind whatever narrow places have kept you from being fully free in the past, and you are headed towards a future of uncharted possibilities.

But you are not alone. The story being told is shared by countless others, as they too make their own way towards what lies ahead.

This is what it means to be part of the community that leaves *Mitzrayim*.

Shabbat Shalom!