



## BESHALACH

PRAYER, A JEWISH LOVE LANGUAGE

*Why Jews pray even when they don't have to*

# PARSHA OVERVIEW

## *Beshalach*

Soon after allowing the Children of Israel to depart from Egypt, Pharaoh chases after them to force their return, and the Israelites find themselves trapped between Pharaoh's armies and the sea. G-d tells Moses to raise his staff over the water; the sea splits to allow the Israelites to pass through and then closes over the pursuing Egyptians. Moses and the Children of Israel sing a song of praise and gratitude to G-d.

In the desert, the people suffer from thirst and hunger.

They repeatedly complain to Moses and Aaron. G-d miraculously sweetens the bitter waters of Marah and later has Moses bring forth water from a rock by striking it with his staff. G-d causes manna to rain down from the heavens before dawn each morning, and causes quails to appear in the Israelite camp each evening.

The Children of Israel are instructed to gather a double portion of manna on Friday, as none will descend on Shabbat, the Divinely decreed

day of rest. Some disobey and go to gather manna on the seventh day but find nothing. Aaron preserves a small quantity of manna in a jar as a testimony for future generations.

In Rephidim, the people are attacked by the Amalekites, who are defeated by Moses's prayers and an army raised by Joshua.

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Do you pray because you have needs, or does prayer itself have value to you?  
What do you enjoy about prayer?



## RASHI RULES

1. Rashi comments only to address potential questions; when the meaning is clear, he remains silent.
2. Rashi rarely cites sources or proof texts, using them only when essential to clarify the passage.
3. Rashi selects proof texts that most clearly support his point.

# TEXT 1A

Exodus 14:5-14

ה. וַיִּגַּד לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָּרַח הָעָם וַיִּהְפֹּךְ  
לִבָּב פַּרְעֹה וַעֲבָדָיו אֶל הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מַה  
זֹאת עָשִׂינוּ כִּי שִׁלַּחְנוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל  
מֵעַבְדֵּנוּ.

ו. וַיֹּאסֶר אֶת רֶכֶבוֹ וְאֶת עָמּוֹ לָקַח עִמּוֹ.

ז. וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בָּחוּר וְכָל רֶכֶב  
מִצְרַיִם וְשָׁלָשׁ עַל כָּלֹ.

ח. וַיְחַזֵּק ה' אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם  
וַיִּרְדֹּף אַחֲרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
יֹצְאִים בִּיד רָמָה.

ט. וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁיגּוּ אוֹתָם  
חֲנִיִּים עַל הַיָּם כָּל סוּס רֶכֶב פַּרְעֹה וּפָרָשָׁיו  
וַחֲמִילוֹ עַל פִּי הַחִירֹת לִפְנֵי בַּעַל זַפּוֹן.

5. It was reported to Pharaoh that the people had fled;  
and Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart  
toward the people, and they said, "What have we  
done, that we have released Israel from serving us?"

6. So Pharaoh harnessed his chariot, and took his  
people with him.

7. He took six hundred select chariots and all the  
chariots of Egypt, with officers over them all.

8. And G-d hardened the heart of Pharaoh, the king of  
Egypt, and he chased after the Children of Israel, and  
the Children of Israel were marching out triumphantly.

9. The Egyptians chased after them and overtook  
them encamped by the sea: every horse of Pharaoh's  
chariots, his horsemen, and his force beside Pi  
Hachiroth, in front of Baal Zephon.

# TEXT 1A

*Exodus 14:5-14*

י. וּפָרַעְהַ הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת  
עֵינֵיהֶם וַהֲגִה מִצְרַיִם נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ  
מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל ה' . . .

יג. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אֵל תִּירָאוּ  
הִתְיַצְּבוּ וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה  
לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם אֶת מִצְרַיִם  
הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסִּיפוּ לִרְאֹתָם עוֹד עַד עוֹלָם.

יד. ה' יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחַרְיִשׁוּן.

10. Pharaoh drew near, and the Children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold! The Egyptians were advancing after them. They were terrified, and the Children of Israel cried out to G-d. . . .

13. Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid! Stand firm and see G-d's salvation that He will bring about for you today! For the way you have seen the Egyptians is [only] today, [but] you shall no longer continue to see them for eternity.

14. "G-d will fight for you, but you shall remain silent."

# TEXT 1B

*Rashi, v. 10*

## THE RASHI

"ויצעקו". תפשו אומנות אבותם. באברהם הוא אומר: "אל המקום אשר עמד שם" (בראשית יט, כז). ביצחק: "לשוה בשדה" (שם כד, סג). ביעקב: "ויפגע במקום" (שם כח, יא).

"And the Children of Israel cried out." They seized the occupation of their forefathers: Concerning Abraham, the verse states, "To the place where he stood [before G-d]" (Genesis 19:27). Concerning Isaac, the verse states, "To talk in the field" (Ibid. 24:63). Concerning Jacob, the verse states, "And he encountered the place" (Ibid. 28:11).

## QUESTIONS ON RASHI

1. Why didn't Rashi simply state, "they prayed"?
2. Why does Rashi refer to prayer as an "occupation"? Weren't the patriarchs shepherds by trade?
3. Why does Rashi use indirect verses about the patriarchs praying, when many other passages explicitly state that our patriarchs prayed?



## QUESTIONS ON RASHI CONTINUED

4. What is bothering Rashi? Why does Rashi feel the need to comment at all when it seems obvious that the Jews were praying?

## TEXT 2

*Mechilta, ad loc.*

למה היו ישראל דומים באותה שעה?

ליונה שברחה מפני הנץ, ונכנסה לנקיק הסלע, והיה נחש נושף בה. אם תפנס לפנים, הרי הנחש, ואם תצא לחוץ, הרי הנץ. כך היו ישראל דומים באותה שעה: הים סוגר, ושונא רודף.

מיד נתנו עיניהם בתפלה.

To what were the Jews compared in that moment?

To a pigeon fleeing a hawk and escaping into a cave. However, a snake lurks in the cleft. If she enters, she encounters the snake; if she exits, she is vulnerable to the hawk. So were the Jews at that moment, with the sea blocking their path and the enemy in hot pursuit.

They immediately began to pray.



Isn't it obvious that  
when a Jew needs a  
miracle, they pray?

## THE *KLUTZ KASHYE*

A simple question that only occurs to five-year-olds.

## QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Can you think of the difficult-to-anticipate *klutz kashye* that Rashi addresses in this comment?

A POSSIBLE *KLUTZ KASHYE*

וַיִּתְפַּלְלוּ

*Va-yispal'lu*

—

And they prayed



וַיִּצְעֲקוּ

*Va-yitz-aku*

—

And they **cried** out



Were the Jews complaining to G-d?

## TEXT 3

*Nachmanides, ad loc.*

ואונקלוס תרגם בכאן ויצעקו, וצעיקו. עשאו  
ענין תרעומת, לומר שלא התפללו אבל היו  
מתרעמים לפניו.

Onkelos translated the words, "And they cried out" to purport a complaint. This means they did not pray to G-d; they complained to Him.



## THE *KLUTZ KASHYE*

Why did the Jews  
pray at this time?



## TEXT 4

*Exodus 14:8*

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵצְאוּ בְּיָד רָמָה.

And the Children of Israel left  
[Egypt] triumphantly.





G-d promised to take the Jews out of Egypt and bring them to Israel. As a result, they felt **no fear** at the Red Sea whatsoever.



They prayed at the Red Sea because that is what Jews do. Jews pray all the time. Our forefathers did it, and we do it too.



# TEXT 5

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 11, p. 53*

ולכן מפרש רש"י: "תפשו אומנות  
אבותם", היינו שזה שמצינו תפלות  
אצל האבות הוא לא רק שהתפללו  
בעת צרה, או במצב כיוצא בזה  
המביא לידי תפילה להקדוש ברוך  
הוא, כי אם זו היתה אומנות שלהם  
. . . שכן התנהגו תמיד בכל עת  
להתפלל להקדוש ברוך הוא . . .

ועל דרך זה היה אצל בני ישראל  
(בנים ל"אבותם"), שגם הם  
התפללו להקדוש ברוך הוא אף  
שכבר היתה להם הבטחה מאת  
הקדוש ברוך הוא שיבואו לארץ.

Therefore, Rashi employed the phrase, "They seized the occupation of their forefathers." Our forefathers did not only pray in times of distress or in circumstances that called for prayer to G-d. Prayer was their occupation; they constantly prayed to G-d.

We find that the same is true about the Children of Israel (children [who follow in the path] of their forefathers). They, too, prayed to G-d, though G-d had already promised to bring them to Israel.

# TEXT 6

*Rabbi Menachem  
Mendel Schneerson,  
Sichot Kodesh 5735:1,  
p. 377*

שהיה לו מקום מיוחד, ששם היה מנהגו להתפלל. והתפילה היתה לאו דוקא על דבר מסוים, שהיה לו צרה וכו', אלא בכל פעם זה האומנות שלו. על דרך בשולחני שהוא מחליף כסף, אז אם אין לו למי להחליף אז הוא מחליף לעצמו. ועל דרך זה כאן, שזוהי אומנתו. היינו שבזה החיות והגעשמאק שלו . . .

אצל יהודים שאומרים הקול קול יעקב, אז לא הענין רק בלית ברירה, שאז הקול קול יעקב. אלא זהו כל ענינו . . . ועל דרך זה באברהם כתוב אשר עמד שם, דאז איז זיין ארט און יעדער וויילע שטעלט ער זיך דאווענען דארטן.

Abraham had a designated place where it was his custom to pray. His prayer was not necessarily about something specific, a problem, etc. Rather, he prayed because prayer was his occupation. He was like a money changer. When money changers have customers, they change money for their customers; when they have no customers, they change money for themselves. Similarly, prayer was an occupation for our ancestors. It was their life and delight. . . .

It is said about Jews that "the voice [of prayer] is the voice of Jacob" (Genesis 27:22). This doesn't mean that prayer is only our last resort, rather prayer is our entire life. . . . The same was true of Abraham. He had a designated spot where he prayed all the time.





Our forefathers prayed  
when even when they  
were not in distress: it  
was their *occupation*.

# TEXT 7

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Likutei  
Sichot 11, p. 54*

ולכן מביא רש"י דוקא הכתובים "אשר עמד גו'", "ויצא יצחק לשוח בשדה",  
"ויפגע במקום" - שבכל אלו לא היו סיבות מיוחדות שבשבילן באו להתפלל.

ומוכח שענין התפלה היה אצלם בדוגמא של "אומנות", של התעסקות באופן  
תמידי, גם מבלי סיבה מיוחדת שתעורר אותם להתפלל להקדוש ברוך הוא.

Rashi, therefore, deliberately quotes the passages, "Where [Abraham] stood,"  
"And Isaac went to talk in the field, "And [Jacob] had an encounter in the  
place." In each of these instances, nothing in particular caused them to pray.

This proves that prayer was an occupation for our forefathers; it was  
something in which they constantly engaged, even when no particular cause  
inspired them to pray to G-d.

## ANSWERS

1. Rashi's point was that they prayed not for any particular reason but because, like their forefathers, prayer was their occupation.
2. Rashi doesn't mean prayer was how our forefathers earned a living. Rather, they were constantly occupied with prayer.
3. Rashi chose these oblique texts because they are the only texts that demonstrate that our forefathers always prayed. The other texts only show that they prayed when they had reason to.
4. Rashi comments on the fact that they prayed because they had no reason to pray after G-d promised they would be okay.



We don't pray because we have needs. We have needs, so we could pray and connect to G-d.





# TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Ibid.*

ההוראה מזה בעבודת האדם:

ענין התפילה, ועל דרך זה לימוד התורה וכו', צריך להיות בדוגמת ענין של "אומנות". היינו שלימוד התורה שלו צריך להיות לא רק בכדי לידע המעשה אשר יעשו ואת המעשה אשר לא תיעשה וכיוצא בזה, אלא לשם לימוד התורה עצמו.

ועל דרך זה בקיום המצות ועבודת התפילה, שההתעסקות בהן אינה צריכה להיות לשם איזו תכלית ומטרה פרטית וכו', אלא באופן של אומנות, שזהו כל ענינו וכל מציאותו לעבוד הקדוש ברוך הוא בכל הנזכר לעיל.

This teaches us a lesson in how to serve G-d.

Our prayers, Torah study, etc., must resemble an occupation. This means that our goal in Torah study should not be merely to know what we must do and what we must avoid; rather, it should be purely for the sake of Torah study.

The same applies to our *mitzvah* observance and prayers. We don't require a specific reason or purpose to engage in them; they should be our occupation. This means that serving G-d in all the aforementioned ways must be our entire being and purpose.



Don't kill time, **fill time.**

When we have an extra moment, we should use it to pray, study Torah, or do a *mitzvah*.

## TEXT 9A

*III Zohar, p. 73a*

תלת קשרין מתקשרין דא בדא: ישראל, אורייתא,  
וקודשא בריך הוא. ישראל מתקשרין באורייתא,  
ואורייתא בקודשא בריך הוא.

Three knots are tied to each other: (a) the Jew,  
(b) the Torah, and (c) G-d. The Jew is tied to the  
Torah, and the Torah is tied to G-d.



**We connect to G-d through studying the Torah.**

## TEXT 9B

*The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson, Sefer  
Hamaamarim  
Melukat 3, p. 73*

דְּזֶה שְׁלֹמֵד תּוֹרָה הוּא מֵצֵד הַתּוֹרָה עֲצָמָהּ. דְּמַכִּינֵן שְׂאוּרֵייתָא וְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא  
כוֹלָא חֵד, וִיתִירָה מְזוּ שְׁהִיא חֵד עִם הָעֲצָמוֹת, כְּמֵאֲמַר רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוֹרָנָם לְבָרְכָה  
שְׂאֲנֹכִי הוּא רָאשִׁי תִיבוֹת אָנָּא נַפְשִׁי כְּתָבִית יְהִיבִית, וְאָנָּא (נַפְשִׁי) הוּא עֲצָמוֹתוֹ  
יְתִבְרֵךְ, וּפִירוּשׁ אָנָּא נַפְשִׁי כְּתָבִית יְהִיבִית הוּא אַז עָר הָאֵט אַרְיִינְגֶעֶשְׁרִיבֵן און  
אַרְיִינְגֶעֶבֶן זײַךְ אַלִּיין, אָנָּא נַפְשִׁי, שְׁעַל יְדֵי הַתּוֹרָה אוֹתִי אֶתָּם לֹקָחִים.

We study the Torah for the sake of the Torah, as G-d and the Torah are connected; moreover, the Torah is like one with G-d. Our sages taught that the [first word of the Ten Commandments], Anochi—I am [G-d], is an acronym for Ana Nafshi Ketavit Yehavit—I placed myself in scripture. G-d placed and scripted His very Self into the Torah. By studying the Torah, we take in G-d.

The primary reason for prayer,  
Torah study, and doing  
*mitzvot* is to connect to G-d.



# TEXT 10

*Rabbi Jacob Immanuel Schochet, Deep Calling Unto Deep: The Dynamics of Prayer in the Perspective of Chassidism (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Kehot Publication Society, 1990), pp. 27–28*

Prayer is the direct, undisturbed communication with G-d, the channel bringing us to the reality of unison with the true Essence of all.

This definition is actually implied in the Hebrew term for prayer: tefilah. The word tefilah is derived from a root-word that means to join together, to unite. Tefilah sets out to join and unite man and G-d, creature and Creator, to permeate the former with the radiance of the Latter. . . . To surrender oneself completely, to dissolve in the unity of the bond with thoughts or desires for nothing else.

In the metaphorical terminology of Kabbalah and Chassidism, therefore, this proper form of prayer is spoken of as a zivug, a figurative state of marital union, the offspring of which is new conceptions, new love and reverence for G-d.





Deep inside, every Jew loves G-d. Therefore, we must reach out and encourage each other.



# TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Likutei  
Sichot 11, p. 54*

לא להתחשב בזה שבחיצוניות אין נראה שה"זולת" יש לו שייכות לתורה ולתפילה כו'.

כי עליו לדעת שבעצם ובפנימיות זוהי ה"אומנות" של כל אחד ואחד מישראל, כי זוהי האומנות דאבות כל אחד ואחד, אלא שהיא בהעלם אצלו, ועליו רק לגלותה מההעלם אל הגילוי.

Pay no heed to your fellow Jew's outer appearance. Even if he or she seems to have no connection to Torah, prayer, etc.

We need to know that deep inside, Torah study and prayer are the natural occupations of every Jew since they were the occupations of every Jew's forefathers. It is just that this truth is concealed; our task is to tease it out of concealment into revelation.

A Jew naturally desires  
to connect to G-d at  
any given opportunity.



## KEY POINTS

1. Our forefathers prayed at every opportunity. This is why prayer is often described as their “occupation.”
2. Our ancestors prayed at the Red Sea not out of fear but with confidence in G-d’s promise to save them, using the waiting time to pray.
3. The lesson is that we, too, must utilize every extra moment to pray, study Torah, or perform a *mitzvah*.
4. This is true of every Jew, even those who don’t seem outwardly connected. Deep inside, every Jew loves G-d. Therefore, we must reach out and encourage each other.

