

חומש קורן מקראות הדורות  
THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

פרשת בשלח  
PARASHAT BESHALAH



KOREN



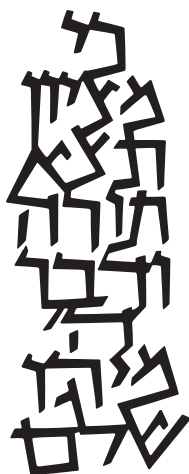
THE ROHR FAMILY EDITION

חומש קורן מקראות הדורות  
THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

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THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS EDITION OF SEFER SHEMOT

פרשת בשלח עם מפרשים  
PARASHAT BESHALAH WITH COMMENTARIES



TORAH TRANSLATION BY  
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COMMENTARIES COLLECTED AND ABRIDGED BY  
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The Rohr Family Edition of  
The Koren Mikraot HaDorot  
pays tribute to the memory of

**Mr. Sami Rohr** ז"ל  
ר' שמואל ב"ר יהושע אליהו ז"ל

who served his Maker with joy  
and whose far-reaching vision, warm open hand, love of Torah,  
and love for every Jew were catalysts for the revival and growth of  
vibrant Jewish life in the former Soviet Union  
and in countless communities the world over

and to the memory of his beloved wife

**Mrs. Charlotte Rohr (née Kastner)** ע"ה  
שרה בת ר' יקותיאל יהודה ע"ה

who survived the fires of the Shoah to become  
the elegant and gracious matriarch,  
first in Colombia and later in the United States,  
of three generations of a family  
nurtured by her love and unstinting devotion.  
She found grace in the eyes of all those whose lives she touched.

Together they merited to see all their children  
build lives enriched by faithful commitment  
to the spreading of Torah and *Ahavat Yisrael*.

Dedicated with love by  
**The Rohr Family**  
NEW YORK, USA



*Dedicated in memory of*

***Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, זצ"ל***

*President of Yeshiva University and Expositor of Centrist Orthodoxy  
Torah Scholar, Philosopher, Leader, Orator and Rabbi  
Beloved Husband, Father, Grandfather and Great Grandfather*

תניא אמר רבי מאיר מניין לתחיית המתים מן התורה  
שנאמר "אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת לה"  
שך לא נאמר אלא ישיר מכאן לתחיית המתים מן התורה  
(Sanhedrin 91b)

*Who made the words of Torah into a shira "that can heal the sick,  
revive weary spirits, [and] elevate downtrodden hearts"  
and taught that "Torah is eternity ensconced in music."*

The Magerman Family

The Sinensky Family





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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

The genius of Jewish commentary on the Torah is one of huge and critical import. Jewish life and law for millennia have been directed by our interpretations of the Torah, and each generation has looked to its rabbinic leadership for a deeper understanding of its teachings, its laws, its stories.

For centuries, *Mikraot Gedolot* have been a core part of understanding the Ḥumash; the words of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Rashbam, Ralbag, and other classic commentators illuminate and help us understand the Torah. But traditional editions of *Mikraot Gedolot* present only a slice in time and a small selection of the corpus of Jewish commentators. Almost every generation has produced rabbinic scholars who speak to their times, from Philo and Onkelos two thousand years ago, to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and Nehama Leibowitz in ours.

***The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*** – Scriptures or Interpretations for the Generations – brings two millennia of Torah commentary into the hands and homes of Jews around the world. Readers will be able not only to encounter the classic commentators, but to gain a much broader sense of the issues that scholars grappled with in their time and the inspiration they drew from the ancient texts. We see, for example, how Philo speaks to an assimilating Greek Jewish audience in first-century Alexandria, and how similar yet different it is from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's approach to an equally assimilating nineteenth-century German readership; how the perspectives of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Kotler differ in a post-Holocaust world; how Rav Se'adya Gaon interpreted the Torah for the Jews of Babylonia. It is an exciting journey through Jewish history via the unchanging words of the Torah.

The text of the Torah features the exceptional new translation of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, together with the celebrated and meticulously accurate Koren Hebrew text. Of course, with the exception of Rashi – for whom we present an entirely new translation in full – the commentaries are selected. We offer this anthology not to limit our reader's exploration but rather as a gateway for further learning of Torah and its commentaries on a broader and deeper level than space here permits. We discuss below how to use this book.

We must thank **Pamela and George Rohr** of New York, who recognized the unique value of *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* and its ability to communicate historical breadth and context to the reader. For my colleagues here at Koren, we thank you; for the many generations of users who will find this a continuing source of new learning, we are forever in your debt.

We also are indebted to **Zahava and Moshael Straus**, true leaders of this Jewish generation in so many fields, who have invested in the entire book of Shemot. Together, we were thus able to launch this innovative and unique project.

We are honored to acknowledge and thank **Debra and David Magerman**, whose support for the Koren H̄umash with Rabbi Sacks's exemplary translation and commentary laid the foundation for the core English text of this work.

Finally, I must personally thank **Rabbi Marvin Hier**, with whom I had a special breakfast some years ago at the King David Hotel. During the meal, he raised the problem that so few people knew the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Aharon Kotler on the Torah; and I, who had just read some of Philo's work, had the same reaction. From that conversation came the seed for this project.

#### HOW TO USE THE KOREN MIKRAOT HADOROT

*The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* will be a fifty-five-volume edition of the H̄umash (one for each *parasha* plus a companion volume). Each of the fifty-four volumes of the *parashot* can be read from right to left (Hebrew opening side), and left to right (English opening side).

Opening from the Hebrew side offers:

- ▶ the full Torah text, the translation of Rabbi Sacks, and the full commentary of Rashi in both Hebrew and the new English translation
- ▶ all *haftarot* associated with the *parasha* of the volume, including Rosh H̄odesh and special readings, both in Hebrew and English

Opening from the English side presents four sections:

- ▶ **THE TIME OF THE SAGES** – includes commentaries from the Second Temple period and the talmudic period
- ▶ **THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS** – quotes selected explanations by Rashi as well as most of the commentators found in traditional *Mikraot Gedolot*
- ▶ **CONFRONTING MODERNITY** – selects commentaries from the eighteenth century to the close of the twentieth century
- ▶ **THE BIBLICAL IMAGINATION** – features essays surveying some of the broader conceptual ideas as a supplement to the linear, text-based commentary

The first three of these sections each feature the relevant verses, in Hebrew and English, on the page alongside their respective commentaries, in chronological order, providing the reader with a single window onto the text without excessive page turning.

In addition to being a valuable resource in a Jewish home or synagogue library, we conceived of these volumes as a weekly accompaniment in the synagogue. There is scope for the reader to study each *parasha* on a weekly basis in preparation for the reading on Shabbat. One may select a particular group of commentators for study that week, or perhaps alternate between ancient and modern viewpoints. Some readers may choose to delve into the text through verse-by-verse interpretation, while others may prefer a conceptual perspective on the *parasha* as a whole. The broad array of options for learning means this is a series which can be returned to year after year, always presenting new insights and new approaches to understanding the text.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The creation of this book was possible only thanks to the small but exceptional team here at Koren Jerusalem. We are grateful to:

- ▶ Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, שליט"א, who conceptualized the structure of the project and provides both moral and halakhic leadership at Koren
- ▶ Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, whose encyclopedic knowledge of Torah and its interpreters is equaled only by his community leadership, formerly in Memphis and today in Jerusalem
- ▶ Rabbi Yedidya Naveh, whose knowledge, organizational skills, and superb leadership brought the disparate elements together
- ▶ Rabbi Jonathan Mishkin, translator of the commentaries, who crafted a fluent, accurate, and eloquent English translation

Our design, editing, typesetting, and proofreading staff, including Tani Bayer, Esther Be'er, Debbie Ismailoff, Estie Dishon, Tomi Mager, and Carolyn Budow Ben David, enabled an attractive, user-friendly, and accurate edition of these works.

“One silver basin” (Numbers 7:13) was brought as a symbol of the Torah, which has been likened to wine, as the verse states: “And drink of the wine which I have mingled” (Proverbs 9:5). Because it is customary to drink wine in a basin – as we see in the verse “that drink wine in basins” (Amos 6:6) – he therefore brought a basin. “Of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary” (Numbers 7:13). Why? Because just as the numerical value of “wine” [*yayin*] is seventy, so there are seventy modes of expounding the Torah. (Bemidbar Rabba 13:16)

Each generation produces exceptional rabbinic, intellectual leadership. It has been our purpose to enable all Jews to taste the wine of those generations, in the hope of expanding the breadth and depth of their knowledge. Torah is our greatest treasure, and we need the wisdom of those generations to better understand this bountiful gift from God. We hope that we at Koren can deepen that understanding for all who seek it.

Matthew Miller, Publisher  
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Over the course of millennia, the Jewish people have watched while the surrounding society and its values have changed unceasingly. For the Jews, the steadfast response to an evolving world has always been the study of Torah, specifically engagement with the weekly *parasha*. Devotees of Jewish learning have always looked to the weekly Torah portion for spiritual and intellectual guidance through life's challenges. And in every generation, commentaries on the *Ḥumash* have debated the precise interpretation of the verses therein. These scholars have continuously asked what message God is trying to convey to Israel and the world through the Torah's narratives and laws. Their explanations have struggled to identify the correct ways to apply its lessons to our daily lives.

Throughout, all these authors have approached the Torah text from their own unique perspectives, shaped in no small measure by the eras and environments they lived in. Naturally, the pantheon of commentaries present widely different styles in their writings. Occasionally the commentators will subject a particular verse to piercing scrutiny as a self-contained unit. At other times they present interpretations that seem to stray from the straightforward meaning of the text. Ultimately, all commentaries demand that a verse provide readers with theological meaning and direction for communal and social life.

Recognition of the wisdom embedded in the vast literature of commentary on the Torah spanning the various eras of Jewish history planted the seeds of the project whose fruit you now hold. We have called this publication *Mikraot HaDorot* – Readings of the Generations. This window into the world of Torah commentaries is not simply an upgrade of the classical *Mikraot Gedolot* collections, which give readers merely a handful of familiar

interpretations. *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot* instead presents a plethora of exegetical contributions, with more than forty scholars spanning Jewish teachings from the past two thousand years represented on its pages.

Each volume of the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* series can be opened from both the right (Hebrew) side and left (English) side. The Hebrew opening side includes the Hebrew and a new English text of the *parasha*, translated by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, with a full, new translation of Rashi and the *haftarot*. The English opening side contains the bulk of the commentaries, and is divided into four parts: The first, **THE TIME OF THE SAGES**, comprises commentaries from antiquity – ranging from Philo to the Yalkut Shimoni. These figures lived mainly in the land of Israel, Egypt, and Babylonia. The second, **THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS**, contains interpretations from the Middle Ages – starting from Rav Se'adya Gaon and Rashi and continuing through time to the work of Rabbi Shlomo Efrayim of Luntschitz, author of the *Keli Yakar*. The authors included here represent the rich traditions of both Sephardic (Spanish and North African) and Ashkenazic (central and eastern European) schools of exegesis. The third section, **CONFRONTING MODERNITY**, offers the work of both Old World and New World scholars who lived between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Before each of these three sections we include a time line that specifies the chronological relationships between the commentators and the places they lived.

In the final section, **THE BIBLICAL IMAGINATION**, we provide three in-depth investigations of particular ideas through the writings of the various commentaries. There are several goals to these essays. First, we aim to reveal common threads weaving across the generations of Torah scholarship. Second, we hope to illustrate how the various authors were influenced by their lives and times, and that the lessons they transmitted to their communities reflected their environments. Finally, each essay highlights for the reader some central issues that the commentaries have grappled with. We trust that this tool will facilitate the reader's understanding of the words of the commentaries themselves.

Three principles have governed the decision making in our work on *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*:

- ▶ Chronological order: We have striven to sketch out the historical development of Torah exegesis, an enterprise that has occupied innumerable communities of Jews in far-flung lands for centuries.



- Economy of selection: In compiling the excerpts used in this work, we have gone through the authors' works and isolated those sections which most directly address the particular question, issue, or difficulty that confronted the scholar.
- Objectivity of presentation: This book presents ideas of the commentaries authentically, never censoring them or smoothing them over in light of our own positions or perspectives. We always strove to faithfully transmit the legal, conceptual, social, and ethical messages of the commentators.

The modern world constantly challenges us as individuals, as a society, and as communal leaders, teachers, and parents. The values and culture of the society that surrounds us force thinking Jews to seriously consider and reconsider their ideas and priorities on a regular basis as we struggle to find the correct path through life. Furthermore, we constantly must ask ourselves what teachings we wish to transmit to future generations. It is our hope that the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* project will help guide its readers as they grapple with these very real problems. The world of Torah commentary is wide and deep beyond measure. It contains innumerable answers to the questions that face the individual, the family, the generation, and indeed all of humanity.

Rabbi Shai Finkelstein, Editor-in-Chief  
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

## A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

The terse writing style prevalent in Jewish scholarship over most of history can be difficult for the modern reader to decipher. Since our goal in the *Koren Mikraot HaDorot* series is to make thousands of years of Torah commentary accessible to a modern, English-speaking audience, we have opted for a relatively loose translation style that accurately presents the content of the Hebrew commentary while not necessarily mirroring its exact syntax. We have also resorted occasionally to paraphrase in instances where a literal translation would be opaque in English. As any student of Torah exegesis will recognize, draconian insistence on a word-for-word translation would result in an English text that was unreadable and that preserved neither the clarity nor the majesty of the original Hebrew.

Many of the commentaries' discussions focus on the meanings of words and phrases that are ambiguous in the Hebrew text of the *parasha*. The beautiful new translation of the Torah by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks that we include here often dispels these ambiguities in the interest of clarity, necessarily coming down on one side or the other of a disagreement between commentators. The reader of the commentaries should therefore view the Torah translation presented here as one possible reading of the often-cryptic Hebrew original. In a similar vein, the significance of certain interpretations may seem unclear, or their points obvious, until one encounters another commentary with a starkly different read of the same verse. These contrasts, and the realization that themes and meanings we thought to be clear are actually ambiguous and multifaceted, are the essence of *The Koren Mikraot HaDorot*.

We have, as far as possible, allowed each text to speak for itself, and have left editorial comments to a minimum. Nevertheless, the commentaries

often assume the reader's knowledge of other biblical episodes, midrashim, or Hebrew grammar beyond what might be expected from the English-speaking public today. To ensure clarity, we have therefore interpolated brief editor's notes where we deemed it necessary, setting them off from the original text in square brackets.

Throughout Jewish history, the text of the Tanakh has been viewed as the apogee of the Hebrew language. For many commentators, especially those of the Middle Ages, it served as a fountain of language from which they drew numerous idioms and phrases. The result is that the Hebrew text of many commentaries is shot through with snippets of biblical prose or poetry to such an extent that almost every sentence can be viewed as a quote or allusion. Marking and citing all of these would make for a cluttered translation and would hinder rather than enhance the reader's understanding. We have therefore opted to cite only those quotes which are brought by the author as explicit evidence to further the point being made, and not those that supply only a turn of phrase.

The Hebrew side of this volume contains a complete and unabridged translation of Rashi's commentary. For those who wish to follow the *parasha* on the English side of the book, we have also reprinted many of Rashi's explanations alongside those of the other classic commentators. This will allow the reader to compare Rashi's interpretation to those of Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and others, as well as appreciate how Rashi's commentary often serves to define the issues that will be addressed by later exegetes.

The text of the commentaries is of course abridged. We have not included ellipses to mark every point where text has been omitted, to maintain a clutter-free translation. However, we have included ellipses at points where the subject of discussion would otherwise appear to have changed abruptly and inexplicably, to save the reader confusion. We have also not adhered strictly to the original heading, or s.v. (*dibbur hamat-hil*) of every text, changing it in instances where it would help to focus the reader on those words that are the actual subject of discussion, and adding it to texts that did not originally have it.

Most of the commentaries that we quote in this series were originally organized by chapter and verse. Therefore, anyone who wishes to consult the original Hebrew text of a given commentary can simply open to the verse in question. However, not all sources are organized this way. The midrashim in particular are often ordered loosely; an important interpretation of a verse in Exodus might be found in a midrash on Deuteronomy. For the reader's convenience in locating the original Hebrew source, we have

provided citations for those works not organized sequentially, as well as for commentaries originally composed on verses other than the one under discussion. These citations can be found outside of the final punctuation at the end of the excerpt in question.

Our translation has generally relied upon the Hebrew text found in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project and the online compendia Sefaria and AlHatorah.org, as well as the standard printed editions of commentaries not found in any of these. The Responsa Project contains more than one edition of several midrashim (Midrash Tanḥuma, Midrash Rabba, and Avot DeRabbi Natan). For these works, our citations should be understood as referring to the standard editions published in Vilna and Warsaw unless otherwise indicated. Aside from this, please note:

- ▶ Text from Mekhilta DeRabbi Shimon is understood to be from the Epstein-Melamed edition unless otherwise indicated.
- ▶ Excerpts from Ibn Ezra are almost always taken from his Long Commentary on Exodus, and we have marked those instances where we quote from his Short Commentary.
- ▶ Passages from Philo are quoted with permission from *Torah from Alexandria: Philo as a Biblical Commentator*, edited by Rabbi Michael Leo Samuel (New York: Kodesh Press, 2015).
- ▶ Selected commentaries of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik are printed with permission from *Chumash Mesoras HaRav*, edited by Dr. Arnold Lustiger (New York: OU Press and Ohr Publishing Inc., 2017).
- ▶ The commentaries of the Lubavitcher Rebbe are quoted from *The Torah, with an Interpolated Translation and Commentary Based on the Works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*, edited by Rabbi Chaim Nochum Cunin and Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky (New York: Kehot Publication Society, 2017).
- ▶ The commentaries of Nehama Leibowitz are translated, with generous permission, from the Hebrew *Iyyunim Hadashim BeSefer Shemot* (14<sup>th</sup> edition), published by the World Zionist Organization Department for Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora.

While we have thus done our best to aid the reader in finding and consulting the original Hebrew text of the commentaries we have translated, we emphasize that this is not a critical edition, and the scope and readership of the series do not permit us to fully cite every allusion and internal reference

that authors make to midrashim and other commentaries. Still, we have made a supreme effort to provide citations of talmudic passages, and of course biblical verses, quoted or referred to in the material included here.

Yedidya Naveh, Managing Editor  
Jerusalem, 5780 (2019)

1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY BCE

1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CE

2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY

3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY

4<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

7<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

8<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

10<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

PHILO, 25 BCE – 50 CE

HALAKHIC MIDRASHIM, 3<sup>RD</sup> CENTURY  
(MEKHILTA, SIFRA, SIFREI)

TALMUD YERUSHALMI, 3<sup>RD</sup> – 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

TALMUD BAVLI, 3<sup>RD</sup> – 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH TANHUMA, 5<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA,  
5<sup>TH</sup> – 6<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

AVOT DERABBI NATAN, 7<sup>TH</sup> – 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH RABBA, 5<sup>TH</sup> – 12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

PESIKTA RABBATI, 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

AGGADAT BERESHIT, 9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH TEHILLIM, 10<sup>TH</sup> – 11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH LEKAH TOV, 11<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

MIDRASH SEKHEL TOV, 1139

MIDRASH AGGADA, 12<sup>TH</sup> – 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

YALKUT SHIMONI, 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

פרשת בשלח

PARASHAT BESHALAH

---

THE **TIME**  
OF THE **SAGES**

ג' וַיְהִי בִשְׁלַח פְּרַעֲהַ אֶת־הָעַם וְלֹא־נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דַּרְךְ דָּרַן  
 פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרֹב הוּא כִּי וַאֲמַר אֱלֹהִים פְּנֵי־יָנַחַם הָעַם  
 י"ח בְּרַאתֶם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרִימָה: וַיִּסַּב אֱלֹהִים וְאֶת־הָעַם  
 דַּרְךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַס־סוּף וַחֲמֻשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֲרָץ

## CHAPTER 13, VERSE 17

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

heard that Israel was on its way to conquer their land, they immediately burned all of their seeds, cut down their saplings, destroyed their buildings and stopped up their springs. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: Did I promise their ancestors to bring Israel into a wasteland? No, I guaranteed them *houses full of all good things that you did not provide* (Deuteronomy 6:11). Therefore, I will detain the people in the desert and wait while the Canaanites restore what they have wrecked. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: If I lead Israel on a direct route through the land of the Philistines, Israel will seize their fields and vineyards and neglect their Torah study. Instead, I will guide the people through the wilderness for forty years. There they will eat manna and drink water from the [miraculous] well, while the Torah develops their souls. Based on this, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai taught: Torah can only be expounded by those who eat manna or by those to whom priestly tithes are given [that is, by people who need not worry about their sustenance]. Another interpretation for God's decision is as follows: When the Canaanites

heard that Israel was on its way to conquer their land, they immediately burned all of their seeds, cut down their saplings, destroyed their buildings and stopped up their springs. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: Did I promise their ancestors to bring Israel into a wasteland? No, I guaranteed them *houses full of all good things that you did not provide* (Deuteronomy 6:11). Therefore, I will detain the people in the desert and wait while the Canaanites restore what they have wrecked. Said the Holy One, blessed be He: If I lead Israel on a direct route through the land of the Philistines, Israel will seize their fields and vineyards and neglect their Torah study. Instead, I will guide the people through the wilderness for forty years. There they will eat manna and drink water from the [miraculous] well, while the Torah develops their souls. Based on this, Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai taught: Torah can only be expounded by those who eat manna or by those to whom priestly tithes are given [that is, by people who need not worry about their sustenance]. Another interpretation for God's decision is as follows: When the Canaanites

## PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA

when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the floor of Atad, they said, *This is a grievous mourning to Egypt* (Genesis 50:11).

when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the floor of Atad, they said, *This is a grievous mourning to Egypt* (Genesis 50:11).

## BERESHIT RABBA

have great vigor (Psalms 38:20). In the time allotted to Avraham as seven generations, the

have great vigor (Psalms 38:20). In the time allotted to Avraham as seven generations, the

have great vigor (Psalms 38:20). In the time allotted to Avraham as seven generations, the



- 13 17 When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them through the land of the Philistines, though it was the shorter way; “If the people face war,” thought God, “they will change  
18 their minds and go back to Egypt.” So He led them on a roundabout course, by way of the wilderness, to the Sea of Reeds.

## BERESHIT RABBA (cont.)

descendants of Avimelekh [king of the Philistines in Genesis 20–21] passed only three. [At this point seven generations had passed in Israel since Avraham’s lifetime.] For why did God not lead them *through the land of the Philistines*? Because Avimelekh’s grandson still

lived. [Avraham had sworn to Avimelekh that he would not harm him, his son, or his grandson; see Genesis 21:23. Therefore the Israelites could not yet fight or conquer the Philistines.] (Albeck, Vayera 54)

## BEMIDBAR RABBA

בְּשַׁלַּח פָּרַעְהוּ אֶת־הָעָם – *When Pharaoh let the people go*: What accrued merit granted the Israelites the freedom to leave Egypt? Rabbi Ḥalfai said: The nation was redeemed due to Yaakov’s merit, as the verse states, *He brings out the prisoners into prosperity [bakosharot]* (Psalms 68:7), while a different text comments [regarding Yaakov]: *And he strove [vayasar] with an angel, and prevailed; [the angel] wept [bakha] and made supplication to him* [Hosea 12:5. Combining the words *bakha* and *vayasar* yields a resemblance to *bakosharot*; therefore the verse in Psalms is understood to be a veiled reference to Yaakov]. Another

interpretation for the term *bakosharot*: The Israelites were redeemed thanks to the merits of noble women [*kesherot*], for the verse uses the feminine form *bakosharot* when it could have employed the masculine *bekisharon*. Another possible interpretation of *bakosharot*: God rescued Israel on the merits of the pious individuals [*keshirim*] among them. And who were these righteous people? The tribe of Levi. For while the rest of the nation was worshipping idols in Egypt, the tribe of Levi worshipped the Holy One, blessed be He, and practiced circumcision. (Bemidbar 3:6)

## VERSE 18

## PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA

וַחֲמוֹשִׁים – *Armed for battle*: The term *hamushim* teaches that the Israelites wielded five [*hamisha*] types of weapons. Another interpretation: Only one in five Israelites actually left Egypt [while the other eighty percent perished there]. Some people put the figure at one in fifty [*hamishim*], while still others claim

it was one in five hundred. Rabbi Nehorai said: I swear by the Temple service that the true number of escapees was even less than one five hundredth. Rabbi Yosei taught: The term *hamushim* implies that Israel left Egypt after five generations. (11)

## LEKAH TOV

וַיֹּסֶב אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָעָם – *So He led them*: God led Israel on a roundabout course to create opportunities to perform miracles and acts

of salvation on their behalf. דַּרְךְ הַמִּדְבָּר – *By way of the wilderness*: In the wilderness Israel would be purified, as the text states: *Who led*

יט מִצָּרִים: וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ בְּיַד הַשִּׁבְעֵי  
 הַשִּׁבְעֵי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאֹמֶר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם  
 כ וְהֵעֲלִיתֶם אֶת־עֲצָמוֹתַי מִזֶּה אֶתְכֶם: וַיִּסְעוּ מִסִּפְתַּי וַיַּחֲנוּ  
 כא בְּאֶתֶם בְּקִצֵּה הַמִּדְבָּר: וַיְהוּה הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד

## LEKAH TOV (cont.)

you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were venomous serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water... that He might afflict you, and that He might prove you, to do you good at your latter end (Deuteronomy 8:15–16). יַם־סוּף – To the Sea of Reeds: God brought Israel to the sea in order to test them,

as the verse states: *Our fathers in Egypt paid no heed to Your wonders... and they rebelled against You at the sea* (Psalms 106:7). וְהִחְמוּשִׁים – Armed for battle: The term *hamushim* suggests that Israel was rushed out of Egypt. Similarly we find the phrase *Hurry to prepare [vehimmesh] the land of Egypt* (Genesis 41:34).

## MIDRASH AGGADA

יַבֵּב – *So He led*: God let Israel recline [*hissivan*] as kings are accustomed to relaxing. This is the scriptural source for the practice of leaning back at the Passover Seder.

## VERSE 19

## MISHNA

יֹסֵף – *The remains of Yosef*: Yosef had had the honor of burying his father, and he had achieved the greatest success among his brothers, as the verse states: *And Yosef went up to bury his father... And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen* (Genesis 50:7, 9). And there was none greater than Yosef in

that Moshe himself tended to his burial, as the verse states: *And Moshe took with him the remains of Yosef*. And there is none greater than Moshe, since God Himself tended to his burial, as the verse states: *And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moav* (Deuteronomy 34:6). (Sota 1:9)

## TALMUD BAVLI

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה – *Moshe took*: Two verses seem to contradict each other: One states: *And Moshe took with him the remains of Yosef*, whereas another reads: *And the bones of Yosef, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, they buried in Shekhem* (Joshua 24:32). [Was it Moshe who took Yosef's bones, or all the Israelites?] Rabbi Hama bar Hanina said:

Whenever a person begins a good deed but does not complete it, and someone else steps in and finishes the work, it is the latter who receives the credit. [Since Moshe never entered the land of Israel, he was unable to bury Yosef's body despite having seen to its transport through the wilderness. This was accomplished by the people as a whole.] (Sota 13b)

## PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ – *Moshe took with him the remains of Yosef*: The verse highlights Moshe's character, for while the entire

nation was busy plundering Egypt, Moshe was making preparations to transport Yosef's bones. Now who helped Moshe locate Yosef's

- 19 The Israelites left Egypt armed for battle. And Moshe took with him the remains of Yosef, who had bound the Israelites by oath: “When God comes to your aid, bring my remains with you out  
20 of here.” They set out from Sukkot and camped at Etam, at the  
21 edge of the desert. The LORD went ahead of them by day in a

PESIKTA DERAV KAHANA (*cont.*)

burial spot in Egypt before the exodus? Serah, the daughter of Asher [mentioned in Genesis 46:17 as one who first descended to Egypt with Yaakov] was still alive at that time. Serah approached Moshe and said: “Yosef’s body has been submerged in the Nile river.” Moshe went to the Nile and called: “Yosef! Yosef! The time has arrived for the Holy One, blessed be He, to redeem His children. The Divine Presence awaits you, Israel awaits you, the clouds

of glory are waiting for you. If you reveal your location, it is well; if you do not, we are hereby absolved of the oath that you made our ancestors swear” [in Genesis 50:25, that they would bring Yosef’s body out with them]. At once, Yosef’s coffin floated to the surface. Other writers claim that Moshe discovered the body by writing the divine name on a piece of parchment and casting it into the river. At once, Yosef’s coffin floated to the surface. (11)

## VERSE 20

## YALKUT SHIMONI

וַיֵּצְאוּ מִסֻּכּוֹת – *They set out from Sukkot*: Rabbi Eliezer taught: Israel actually built booths [*sukkot*] there, as a similar verse states, *And Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot, and built him a house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Sukkot* (Genesis 33:17). However, the Sages teach that Sukkot is merely the name of the place, as the verse states, *They set out from Sukkot and camped at Etam* – just as “Etam” is only the name of a place with no

further implication, so is Sukkot. Rabbi Akiva said: Israel did not build themselves booths but were protected from the elements by clouds of glory, as the verse states: *For upon all the glory shall there be a canopy* (Isaiah 4:5). Now, this verse describes the past; why can we expect such a phenomenon in the future? For the next verse reads: *And there shall be a tabernacle for a shadow in the daytime* (Isaiah 4:6). (Bo 209)

## VERSE 21

## TALMUD BAVLI

וַיֵּצְאוּ מִסֻּכּוֹת – *Went ahead of them*: Rav Yosef taught: A master is permitted to concede his honor. We learn this from God Himself, about whom the verse states: *The LORD went ahead of them by day*. [Normal etiquette would demand that a king be preceded by his retinue.] (Kiddushin 32a) וַיְהוּהוּ הַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עַנָּן – *The LORD went ahead of them by day in a column*

*of cloud*: Rav Yehuda taught in the name of Rav: Whatever favors Avraham performed for the ministering angels were later repeated by the Holy One, blessed be He, for Avraham’s children. For example, the verse states: *And Avraham went with them to bring them on the way* (Genesis 18:16). And later the Torah reports that *the LORD went ahead of them by day*. (Bava Metzia 86b)

עֲנַן לְנַחֲתָם הִדְרֹךְ וְלִילָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהַאֲדִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת  
 יוֹמָם וְלִילָה: לְאֵי־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעֲנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לִילָה  
 לְפָנֵי הָעָם:

וַיִּדְבֹּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: הִבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּשְׁבוּ  
 וַיַּחֲנוּ לְפָנַי פִּי הַחִירֹת בֵּין מַגְדָּל וּבֵין הַיָּם לְפָנַי בְּעַל צִפּוֹן  
 נִכְחוּ תַחְנוּ עַל־הַיָּם: וְאָמַר פְּרֹעֶה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נְבָכִים

## SIFREI ZUTA

בְּעַמּוּד עֲנָן – *A column of cloud*: God surrounded Israel with seven clouds of glory. There was one column in front of them and one behind them; one to the right and one to the left. An additional cloud hovered above them to shield them from the desert sun, while

another formed a carpet to protect the Israelites' bare feet. Superior to all was the cloud of the Divine Presence which journeyed three days ahead of the camp, leveling hills and filling chasms to pave a smooth path for Israel's travels. (10:33)

## VERSE 22

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעֲנָן יוֹמָם – *Neither the column of cloud by day*: The brightness of the sun did not overpower the cloud. וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לִילָה – *Nor that of fire by night*: The light from the moon was negligible in comparison to the column of fire. לֹא־יָמִישׁ – *Neither departed*: The guiding columns maintained their presence even when Israel rebelled against God, even when they angered Him, and even when they blasphemed Him. Now

why did Israel require both the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire? They were put in place to help those with an impure discharge, menstruating women, and new mothers mark the days. [These individuals must follow detailed reckonings of the time of their impurity before being able to immerse in water for purification. The pillars of cloud and of fire identified the precise moments of evening and morning for this purpose.]

## TALMUD BAVLI

לֹא־יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעֲנָן יוֹמָם – *Neither the column of cloud by day*: Rav Huna said: He who regularly lights Hanukka candles will be rewarded with scholarly sons. Rav Yosef's wife used to light her Sabbath candles late in the day [close to nightfall]. Said Rav Yosef to her: The verse states: *Neither the column of cloud by day nor that of fire by night once departed*

*from the people*. What this means is that the pillar of cloud appeared when the fire was still in the sky, and the column of cloud would not depart until the fire had arrived. [Rav Yosef was thereby reminding his wife to light the Sabbath candles while it was still daylight.] (Shabbat 23b)

- column of cloud to guide them, and at night in a column of fire  
 22 to give them light, so that they might travel day and night. Neither the column of cloud by day nor that of fire by night once departed from the people.
- 14 <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> Then the LORD said to Moshe, “Speak to the Israelites and tell them to turn back and camp in front of Pi HaHirof, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal Tzefon. Encamp facing it, by  
 3 the sea. Pharaoh will think that the Israelites are lost across the

## CHAPTER 14, VERSE 2

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

פִּי הַחֵירוֹת – *Pi HaHirof*: Moshe instructed Israel to turn back slightly in the direction of Egypt. When the trumpet sounded to signal that change of course, the faithless began to tear out their hair and rip their clothing, thinking that the nation was returning to Egypt and to slavery. Said Moshe to them: I have heard from the mouth [peh] of God that you are to

remain free people [*horin* – hence the name *Pi HaHirof*]. מִגְדוֹל – *Migdol*: This was the site of Egypt’s greatness [*gedula*] and glory. For it was there that Yosef had once assembled the nation’s wealth, as the verse states: *And Yosef gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt* (Genesis 47:14).

## SHEMOT RABBA

בַּעַל זְפוֹן – *Baal Tzefon*: God had brought judgment against all the gods of Egypt [during the plague of the firstborn; see 12:12], and all idolatry across the world had been destroyed. The only false deity that God spared was the

Egyptians’ Baal Tzefon. He did this in order to deceive the people into thinking their god had outmatched Israel’s. This illustrates the verse *He makes nations great and destroys them* (Job 12:23). (Bo 15:15)

## VERSE 3

## LEKAH TOV

סָגַר עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר – *They are trapped in the desert*: [Literally, “the desert has shut them in.”] When Israel saw the raging sea before them and the approaching enemy behind them, they turned to escape into the wilderness. But the Holy One, blessed be He, summoned wild and vicious beasts to block their way, preventing them from leaving. When Pharaoh observed the situation, he declared: Aha! It is Baal Tzefon who has sent these attack animals to hold them for us, as the verse states: *They*

*are trapped [sagar] in the desert!* And how do we know that the term *sagar* implies a barrier of wild beasts? For the verse states [of Noah’s Ark]: *And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut [vayisgor] him in* (Genesis 7:16). To protect Noah from his neighbors who had surrounded the ark and threatened to destroy it, God placed wild beasts around the craft.

הָם בָּאֵרֶץ סָגְרָה עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר: וְחִזְקֵתִי אֶת־לֵב־פַּרְעֹה  
וְדַרְךְ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבְּדָהּ בַּפַּרְעֹה וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם  
כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן: וַיִּגְדֹּל לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם  
וַיִּהְיֶה לְלֵב פַּרְעֹה וַעֲבָדוּ אֶל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מַה־זֹּאת  
עֲשִׂינוּ כִּי־שָׁלַחְנוּ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַבְדֵּנוּ: וַיֹּאסֶר אֶת־דַּכְבּוֹ

## VERSE 4

## SIFREI BEMIDBAR

בַּפַּרְעֹה וּבְכָל־חֵילוֹ – *Over Pharaoh and all his force:* It is always the one who initiates the sin who is the first to be punished. Hence we read, *I will be glorified over Pharaoh and all his*

*force.* Since Pharaoh introduced the oppression against Israel, the final torment at the sea began with his drowning. (Naso 18)

## SEKHEL TOV

כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה – *That I am the LORD:* At first Pharaoh had claimed: *I do not know the LORD* (5:2). But now the Egyptians will know full well who I am. וַיַּעֲשׂוּ־כֵן – *And so they did:* Israel complied with Moshe’s instruction and their agreement shows how wise they were. For in

order not to panic the women and children, they did not protest: “What? How could we possibly go back?” Instead, they submitted to their leader, saying: Whether we want to or not, we fully trust the word of the son of Amram.

## MIDRASH AGGADA

וְחִזְקֵתִי אֶת־לֵב־פַּרְעֹה – *I will toughen Pharaoh’s heart:* Initially Pharaoh had not planned on pursuing Israel following their departure. But the Holy One, blessed be He, put the idea into his head to chase after them into the wilderness. Because the Egyptians had once

decreed: *Throw every boy that is born into the Nile* (1:22), therefore *the LORD swept them into the sea* (14:27). This illustrates the principle our Sages teach: With the measure that a man uses, so shall it be meted out to him (Mishna Sota 1:7).

## VERSE 5

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיִּגְדֹּל לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם – *When the king of Egypt was told:* From Ramesses the nation traveled to Sukkot [12:37], and from Sukkot they went to Etam [13:20]. After leaving Etam, Israel arrived at Pi HaHirof [14:2]. These journeys took place on the Sabbath eve, on the Sabbath, and on the first day of the week, which were the fifteenth, the sixteenth and the seventeenth of Nisan. On the second day of the week [Monday], which was the fourth day of their travels and the eighteenth of the month, the nation

was saddling up their animals and getting ready to proceed when the army captains Pharaoh had sent to accompany Israel spoke up. “It is time,” they said, “for you to start heading back to Egypt just as you promised: *Send us forth, three days’ journey into the wilderness* (8:23).” But Israel responded: “As soon as we left Egypt we also left Pharaoh’s jurisdiction.” Said the Egyptians: “Willingly or not, you will return to Egypt and obey the king’s command.” This prompted the Israelites to attack

- 4 land, that they are trapped in the desert. I will toughen Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. I will be glorified over Pharaoh and all his force, and the Egyptians will know that I am  
 5 the LORD." And so they did. When the king of Egypt was told that the Israelites had escaped, he and his officials changed their minds about the people: "What have we done, releasing the  
 6 Israelites from serving us?" So the king harnessed his chariot

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 MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON (cont.)
 

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the overseers, injuring some and killing others. The remaining officers fled back to Pharaoh to report what was happening, as the verse states: *when the king of Egypt was told* – it was his own men who related the situation to him. Other interpretations suggest that Pharaoh had spies along the route who relayed the information back to him. A third possibility is that Amalekite agents who were following Israel's progress were Pharaoh's source of information. **כִּי בָרַח הָעָם** – *That the Israelites had escaped: Why does the text describe Israel's*

departure as an "escape," implying that they fled in fear and secrecy? Does the verse not state that the Israelites *were leaving in defiance of them* (14:8), i.e., with their heads held high? Rather, it was the Egyptians themselves who viewed Israel in this light, for they were behaving like runaway convicts. Once Israel started rioting and killing the Egyptian chaperones, the nation appeared like a mob with no ruler. Similarly the verse states: *The locusts have no king, yet they go forth all of them by bands* (Proverbs 30:27).

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 SHIR HASHIRIM RABBA
 

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**בַּה־זֹאת עָשִׂינוּ** – *What have we done:* When Israel languished in Egypt they were busy working with mortar and bricks, and the Egyptians found them repulsive. Later though, when the Egyptians observed Israel encamped by the

sea under their glorious banners, arranged like true subjects of a king, they gagged and whined: *Why ever did we expel this people from our land?* (4:12)

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 YALKUT SHIMONI
 

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**וַיִּהְיֶה לְבַב פְּרָעֹה** – *Pharaoh changed his mind:* The Egyptians suddenly realized that their state had thrived with Israel under their control. Rabbi Yosei the Galilean says: To what may this be compared? To a person who inherited a plot of land. Impulsively, the heir went and sold this land for too low a price. Subsequently, the buyer discovered springs of

water in the field enabling him to plant trees and orchards there. Upon discovering this, the seller gagged in despair. Similarly, it was only after the Egyptians expelled the Israelites that they understood what they had given up, as the verse states: *What have we done, releasing the Israelites from serving us?*

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 VERSE 6
 

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 BERESHIT RABBA
 

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**וַיַּאֲסֵר אֶת־רֶכֶבֹּוֹ** – *Harnessed his chariot:* The verse states: *And Yosef made ready his chariot,*

*and went up to meet Yisrael his father* (Genesis 46:29). Now did Yosef not have plenty of

וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לָקַח עִמּוֹ: וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בַּחֹדֶר וְכָל  
 רֶכֶב מִצְרַיִם וְשָׁלִשִׁים עַל־כָּלֹ: וַיַּחֲזֵק יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פְּרָעֹה  
 מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיִּדְדֵף אַחֲרָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִצְאִים  
 בְּיַד רַמְהָ: וַיִּדְדֻפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁיגוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִים  
 עַל־הֵם בְּלִסְוֹם רֶכֶב פְּרָעֹה וּפָרְשָׁיו וַחֲמִלּוֹ עַל־פִּי הַחֲיֹרֶת  
 לִפְנֵי בַעַל צִפּוֹן: וּפְרָעֹה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־

## BERESHIT RABBA (cont.)

servants who could have prepared his chariot for him? Rather, Yosef thereby showed how love causes people to act unusually. We see the opposite with Pharaoh about whom the verse states: *So the king harnessed his chariot.*

Did Pharaoh not have numerous attendants who should have prepared his chariot for him? Rather, Pharaoh thereby showed how hatred can cause us to act abnormally. (Vayera 55:8)

## MIDRASH AGGADA

וְאֶת־עַמּוֹ לָקַח עִמּוֹ – *And brought out his army:* Pharaoh bribed his people to join him in the pursuit of Israel, emptying out his treasury

in the effort. [The word *lakah* can connote “buying.”]

## YALKUT SHIMONI

וַיִּאָסֵר אֶת־רֶכֶבֹ – *The king harnessed his chariot:* Pharaoh harnessed his own chariot himself. It is not customary for kings to do so, for usually the royals stand by and wait while their liverymen saddle their horses for them. But here Pharaoh was eager to embark on

the mission and took the job upon himself. When the Egyptian nobles saw how committed their king was to the task, each of them in turn took charge of his own preparations. (Beshalah 230)

## VERSE 7

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בַּחֹדֶר – *Six hundred elite chariots:* Pharaoh’s vanity was soon humbled. For he took six hundred elite chariots to attack Israel, but not long afterward, *Pharaoh’s chariots*

*and army He hurled into the sea* (15:4). (15:1) וְשָׁלִשִׁים עַל־כָּלֹ – *With officers over them all:* The term *shalishim* connotes champions in combat.

## TANHUMA

וַיִּקַּח שֵׁשׁ־מֵאוֹת רֶכֶב בַּחֹדֶר – *He took six hundred elite chariots:* From where did Pharaoh’s cavalry procure horses for their chariots? Were not all of the country’s animals killed in the cattle plague, as the verse state: *All the livestock of the Egyptians perished* (9:6)? Nonetheless, the text also reports that *those of Pharaoh’s officials*

*who feared the Lord’s word hurried to bring in their slaves and their livestock* [9:20, to escape the plague of hail. According to the Midrash, the same had transpired earlier with respect to the cattle plague; see commentary on Parashat Va’era 9:6]. Hence there were some horses available to pursue the Israelites.



- 7 and brought out his army. He took six hundred elite chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over them all.  
 8 The LORD strengthened the heart of Pharaoh King of Egypt, and he pursued the Israelites, who were leaving in defiance of  
 9 them. The Egyptians, with all the king's horses and chariots, SHENI  
 cavalry and infantry, chased and caught up with them as they were encamped by the sea near Pi HaḤirot, before Baal Tzefon.  
 10 Pharaoh drew near – the Israelites looked up: there were the

LEKAḤ TOV

עַל־כָּלָּהּ – *Over them all:* It was Pharaoh's intention to obliterate "all" of Israel.

VERSE 8

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

יֵצְאוּ בְּיַד רָמָהּ – *Were leaving in defiance of them:* [Literally, "with a high hand."] As the Egyptians chased after Israel they shook their fists skyward and cursed, and swore, and blasphemed. Meanwhile, as the Israelites were being pursued, they spread their hands toward heaven and offered praise, thanks, and blessing. Israel sang songs of glory; they extolled the magnificence of the Creator. Another interpretation: Israel's hands were raised in victory over the Egyptians.

VERSE 9

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

וַיִּדְרֹפֶה – *Chased:* Not one Egyptian stumbled during the chase lest he pause to consider that his misstep might be a bad omen. This would have led the soldier to turn back from the pursuit.

SHIR HASHIRIM RABBA

וַיִּשְׁגְּוּ אֹתָם – *And caught up with them:* Out of fear, the Israelites began to signal to the cavalry: We belong to you, we are all yours. Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to them: Do you really think I am incapable of redeeming you? Wipe your tears and hold your tongues! Thus the verse states: *The LORD will fight for you. You stay silent* (14:14). (1:5)

LEKAḤ TOV

הֶחָיִים עַל־הַיָּם – *Encamped by the sea:* Israel waited for the Egyptians by the water, so that the latter would be drowned in its waves. The term *honim* implies that the Hebrews were engaged in prayer and petitions [*tahanunim*] to God.

VERSE 10

MEKHILTA DERABBI YISHMAEL

וַיִּצְעֵקוּ – *And cried for help:* Rabbi Eliezer taught: The verse that states: *Let me see your countenance* (Song of Songs 2:14) refers to Israel's longing [to see God's wonders] at the sea, for there Moshe proclaimed: *Stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today* (14:13). And the continuation of that verse, which states: *Let me hear your voice*, also reflects Israel's emotions at that time, as the verse states: *They were terrified and cried to the LORD for help.*

עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם | נֹסַע אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ  
 בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יְהוָה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הַמְבַלֵּי אֵינֶךָ  
 קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בַּמִּדְבָּר מֵהַזֹּאת עֲשֵׂיתָ  
 לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם: הֲלֹא־זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ  
 בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חֲדַל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת־מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב  
 לָנוּ עֲבֹד אֶת־מִצְרַיִם מִמָּתְנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־  
 הָעָם אֶל־תִּירָאוּ וְהַתִּיצְבוּ וְדָאוּ אֶת־יְשׁוּעַת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־  
 יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם אֶת־מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא

## TANHUMA

וישאו בני־ישראל את־עֵיניהם – *The Israelites looked up:* [The phrase “look up” is taken to connote prayer.] At that moment Israel adopted the behavior of their ancestors. For the Torah reports that Abraham called on the name of the LORD (Genesis 12:4). Regarding Yitzhak, the text states, *And Yitzhak went out to meditate in the field* (Genesis 24:63). And Yaakov is

said to have *chanced [vayifga] upon a certain place* (Genesis 28:11). The verb *vayifga* implies that he prayed there to God, as seen in the verse *Therefore pray not you for these people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession [tifga] to me; for I will not hear you* (Jeremiah 7:16).

## BEMIDBAR RABBA

ויפרעה הקריב – *Pharaoh drew near:* The verse that states: *Those who honor will I in turn honor* (1 Samuel 2:30) refers to Pharaoh, who acted respectfully toward the Creator. For the king himself led his army to confront Israel, as the verse states: *Pharaoh drew near.* Pharaoh’s servants protested to him: “Sire, it is bad form for the king to march in front of his soldiers; kings

customarily follow their retinue into battle. Why then do you yourself lead the way?” Said Pharaoh to them: Am I going out to face a king of flesh and blood? Why, I am advancing against the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He! As a reward for this attitude, God dealt with him directly and punished him Himself. (Naso 8:3)

## VERSE 12

## MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

הלא־זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ – *Did we not tell you:* To what were the Israelites alluding when they reminded Moshe that they had previously asked to be left alone? They were remembering the encounter early in the tale, beginning with the verse: *Leaving Pharaoh, they met Moshe and Aharon, who stood awaiting them* (5:20). And now they said to their leaders: It is true that we suffered under the

burden of the Egyptian slavery, but to die in the wilderness is a much worse end. It is true that we lamented our brethren who died during the plague of darkness, but to perish in the desert is a worse fate. For at least those who never left Egypt were buried and eulogized with some dignity. But our bones will be left to be bleached by the fierceness of the sun; our corpses will lie frozen stiff in the desert nights.

Egyptians thundering after them. They were terrified and cried  
 11 to the LORD for help. “Were there no graves in Egypt?” they  
 asked Moshe; “Is that why you brought us here to die in the  
 desert? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?  
 12 Did we not tell you in Egypt: Leave us alone – let us serve the  
 Egyptians. Better a life in servitude to Egypt than death in  
 13 the desert.” But Moshe told the people, “Fear not. Stand firm  
 and see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The

VERSE 13

PHILO

אל־תִּירָאוּ – *Fear not*: Moshe did not criticize his people for expressing their complaints. Even in his own mind, he hedged between

his conversation with the people and with his prayers to God.

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

אל־תִּירָאוּ – *Fear not*: This statement shows how gifted Moshe was. For in the face of his nation’s panic, Moshe stood his ground, calmly working to steady the people’s nerves; singlehandedly allaying the fears of tens of thousands of Israelites. Of him the verse states: *Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers who are in a city* (Ecclesiastes 7:19).  
 הִיטְצֵזְוּ – *Stand firm*: The term *hityatzevu* signifies the presence of divine inspiration, as in the verse: *And the LORD said to Moshe... call Yehoshua and present yourselves [vehityatzevu] in the Tent of Meeting, that I may give him a charge* [Deuteronomy 31:14; this inaugurated Yehoshua’s tenure as a prophet]. To what can Israel be compared at that hour?

To a dove fleeing the talons of a hawk. It flies into a cave and hides in a rock crevice, but straight away a snake uncoils to attack, leaving the bird trapped – it cannot leave its refuge because of the hawk, but within the cave it is equally threatened. In desperation, the dove starts screaming and batting its wings, trying to get the attention of its owner. Now picture the Israelites: In front of them stands the impassable sea, while behind them the Egyptian enemy is closing in. They have no recourse but to lift their eyes in prayer to God. Hence one verse describes the nation: *O my dove, who is in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the cliff, let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice* (Song of Songs 2:14).

TALMUD YERUSHALMI

לֹא תִרְכַּסְפוּ לְרֹאשֵׁי עֵד-עַד עוֹלָם – *You shall never see again*: Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai taught: On three occasions Israel was warned never to return to Egypt. The first was at the sea, when Moshe told the nation: *The Egyptians you see today, you shall never see again*. The second instance appears in Moshe’s later speech to the people wherein he cautions that kings must not amass a large cavalry, as the verse

states: *But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses; since the LORD has said to you: You shall henceforth return no more that way* [Deuteronomy 17:16; the Egyptians were renowned breeders of horses]. And finally, Israel was threatened that their misbehavior would cause God to *bring you back into Egypt with ships, by that*

יִתְחַשְׁבוּ לְרֵאשִׁיתָם עוֹד עַד-עוֹלָם: יְהוָה יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאֵתֶם  
תִּחְרְשׁוּן:

טו וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִה-תִּצְעַק אֵלַי דְּבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלִישִׁי

TALMUD YERUSHALMI (cont.)

road of which I spoke to you: You shall see it no more again (Deuteronomy 28:68). (Sukka 5:1) הִתְיַצְּבוּ – Stand firm: At the moment of truth by the sea, the Israelites divided themselves into four camps. The first group recommended that the people cast themselves into the sea. The second group favored a return to Egypt. A third side took a combative position and advocated fighting the cavalry to the death. And the fourth party suggested that since Israel could not possibly defeat the

soldiers in war, they should stand and shout at them and perhaps scare them off. In response to the first group, Moshe said: *Stand firm and see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today.* To those who demanded they all go back to slavery, Moshe retorted: *The Egyptians you see today, you shall never see again.* As for those who were ready to fight, Moshe argued: *The LORD will fight for you* (14:14). And he calmed those who would scream at the enemy, saying, *You stay silent.* (Taanit 2:5)

LEKAH TOV

כִּי אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתֶם – You see: What exactly did Israel see? The Holy One, blessed be He, opened their eyes and revealed to them myriads of ministering angels [arrayed for battle against the Egyptians]. And so we see later: *And the servant of the man of God rose early, and went*

*out, and behold, an army surrounded the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, Alas, my master! what shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that are with us are more than they that are with them* (II Kings 6:15–16).

VERSE 14

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

יְהוָה יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם – The LORD will fight for you: When the nation of Israel follows God's will, He fights on their behalf, as the verse states: *The LORD will fight for you.* On the other hand, when Israel defies God's will, God wars against them, so to speak, as a contrary verse states: *Therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them* (Isaiah 63:10). Furthermore, God transforms from being merciful to merciless, as the verse states: *The LORD was like an enemy* (Lamentations 2:5). וְאֵתֶם תִּחְרְשׁוּן – You stay silent: Rabbi

Yehuda HaNasi taught: When Moshe assured the nation: *The LORD will fight for you* (14:14), he was telling them: "God is about to perform miracles and wonders for you while you stand by and remain silent." But the people petitioned their leader: "Is there nothing that we can do?" Said he: "Indeed, you should laud, acclaim, praise, extol, and glorify the Victor of this battle." It was at that moment that Israel opened their mouths and *sang this song to the LORD: I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed in glory* (15:1)

LEKAH TOV

יְהוָה יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם – The LORD will fight for you: Said Moshe to Israel: Even were you to be silent,

the LORD would fight for you. How much more so can you rely on His assistance when you

14 Egyptians you see today, you shall never see again. The LORD will fight for you. You stay silent.”

15 The LORD said to Moshe, “Why are you crying out to Me? SHELISHI

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LEKAH TOV (cont.)

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offer extended prayers and sing God’s praises. Indeed, at that hour, Moshe was engaged in prayer while Israel extolled God’s virtues and glory, celebrating the Master of all wars, as the

verse states: *The high praises of God are in their mouths, and a two edged sword in their hand* (Psalms 149:6).

VERSE 15

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MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

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מִדֵּי תִצְעַק אֵלַי – *Why are you crying out to Me:* Rabbi Yehoshua taught: Said God to Moshe: Israel’s prayers have already been accepted, all the nation has to do is move forward. Rabbi Eliezer said: Said the Holy One, blessed be He, to Moshe: My children are panicking on the beach, the sea is surrounding them, the enemy is bearing down, and you stand there praying? *Why are you crying out to Me? Speak to the Israelites; have them move forward.* Know Moshe, that there is a time to be brief and a time to be loquacious. And Moshe learned the lesson well: On one occasion he spoke appropriately

tersely to God, as the verse states: *Heal her now, O God, I pray You* (Numbers 12:13). At another time He prayed extensively, as the verse states: *Then I abode in the mountain forty days and forty nights* (Deuteronomy 9:9). Rabbi Meir said: God reasoned: Since I was prepared to divide the waters for a single person [Adam, who required land to live on] – as the verse states: *And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear* (Genesis 1:9) – surely I am prepared to transform the sea into land for a whole community of the righteous. (Psalms 16:3).

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TALMUD BAVLI

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מִדֵּי תִצְעַק אֵלַי – *Why are you crying out to Me:* At that time, Moshe was engaged in lengthy prayers. But the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked him, saying: My beloved creations are drowning in the sea and you stand there singing My praises? Responded Moshe:

Master of the universe, what should I be doing instead? Said He: *Speak to the Israelites; have them move forward. Raise your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it* (14:15–16). (Sota 37a)

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BEMIDBAR RABBA

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וַיִּסְעוּ – *Have them move forward:* Rabbi Yehuda bar Ilai taught: While Israel stood on the seashore, the different tribes quarreled for the right to enter the water first – each tribe wanted the honor for itself. Suddenly, Nahshon son of Aminadav [chief of the tribe of Yehuda] plunged into the sea, declaring: “I will go first!” Evoking Nahshon his ancestor, King David wrote: *Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my soul. I sink in deep*

*mire, where there is no standing* (Psalms 69:2). Thus does the verse state, *In Yehuda is God known; His name is great in Israel* (Psalms 76:2). To reward Nahshon for his zeal, the Holy One, blessed be He, invited him to be the first to bring his dedicatory gifts to the Tabernacle, as the verse states: *And he that offered his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehuda* (Numbers 7:12). (Naso 13:4)

יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ: וְאֵתָהּ הָרִם אֶת־מִטְּךָ וְנִטְהַ אֶת־יָדְךָ עַל־  
 הַיָּם וּבִקְעָהּ וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה: וְאֲנִי  
 הִנְנִי מַחְזִק אֶת־לֵב מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבְּדָהּ  
 בַּפְּרֻעָה וּבְכָל־חִילוֹ בִּרְכָבוֹ וּבַפְּרָשָׁיו: וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי־  
 אֲנִי יְהוָה בְּהַכְבִּדִי בַּפְּרֻעָה בִּרְכָבוֹ וּבַפְּרָשָׁיו: וַיִּסַּע מֶלֶאֲךָ  
 הָאֱלֹהִים הַהֹלֵךְ לִפְנֵי מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּלֶךְ מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם  
 וַיִּסַּע עִמּוֹד הָעֲנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲמֵד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם: וַיָּבֹא בֵּין א  
 מַחֲנֵה מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין מַחֲנֵה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִי הָעֲנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיֹּאדָר

## VERSE 16

## SHEMOT RABBA

וּבִקְעָהּ – *And divide it:* Rabbi Elazar HaKap-  
 par taught: Moshe protested to God: Have  
 You not declared that the sea would never  
 become dry land, as the verse states: *God has  
 placed the sand to bound the sea by a perpetual  
 decree, that it cannot pass it*, while another  
 verse claims, *Who shut up the sea with doors  
 (Job 38:8)?* But the Holy One, blessed be He,  
 answered him: Moshe, you would do well to  
 read the Torah from the beginning. There the

text reads: *Let the waters under the heaven be  
 gathered together to one place, and let the dry  
 land appear (Genesis 1:9).* When I fashioned  
 the seas, I did so on condition that I would  
 later divide them in two. Hence the subse-  
 quent verse states: *And at daybreak the water  
 came back in full force [le'aitano] (14:27) – the  
 water thereby respected its condition [litnao]  
 that I stipulated at its creation. (Beshalah  
 21:7)*

## VAYIKRA RABBA

וּבִקְעָהּ – *And divide it:* Said God to Moshe: You are the only one who can divide the sea; if you  
 do not do it, nobody will. (Vayikra 1:5)

## VERSE 17

## LEKAH TOV

הַפְּרֻעָה וְאֶכְבְּדָהּ בַּפְּרֻעָה – *Then will My glory bear  
 down hard upon Pharaoh:* [The word  
*ve'ikkaveda* can be understood as related to  
*kavod*, "glory," or *kaved* "heavy." According to  
 the midrash, God is saying:] My name will  
 become glorified [*yitkabbed*] throughout the  
 world after what I do to Pharaoh and to his  
 entire army. Now Israel did not enter the sea

to advance their journey; they did not enter  
 the water on one side of the sea and then  
 emerge on the other side. The entire purpose  
 of the miracle was to drown the Egyptian cav-  
 alry. Once that was achieved, Israel swung  
 back and climbed ashore where they had  
 entered, forming a sort of arc through the  
 sea.

## VERSE 19

## MEKHILTA DERABBI YISHMAEL

מֶלֶאֲךָ הָאֱלֹהִים – *The angel of God:* The Divine  
 Presence accompanied Israel when they first

descended to Egypt, as the verse states: *I will  
 go down with you into Egypt (Genesis 46:4)*, and

- 16 Speak to the Israelites; have them move forward. Raise your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, and the  
 17 Israelites will walk through the sea on dry land. I will strengthen the Egyptians' hearts and they will go after them. Then will My glory bear down hard upon Pharaoh and his entire army,  
 18 his chariots and cavalry. And when My glory bears down upon Pharaoh, his chariots and cavalry, the Egyptians will know that  
 19 I am the LORD." Then the angel of God who had been traveling ahead of the Israelite camp moved and went behind them, and the column of cloud moved from in front of them to their rear.  
 20 It came between the Egyptian and Israelite camps, as cloud and

MEKHILTA DERABBI YISHMAEL (cont.)

God left the country with them as well, as that verse continues: *And I will surely bring you up again.* The Divine Presence accompanied them when Israel entered the sea, as the verse states: *Then the angel of God who had been traveling*

*ahead of the Israelite camp moved and went behind them, and God went into the desert with them as well, as the verse states: The LORD went ahead of them by day in a column of cloud to guide them (13:21).* (Massekhta DeShira 3)

MEKHILTA DERABBI SHIMON

מִלְאָךְ הָאֵלֹהִים – *The angel of God:* God would later say to Israel: *I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to Me (19:4).* When other birds transport their young, they carry them by their claws, protecting them from any eagle which might swoop down from above. But an eagle fears no other bird and is therefore content to position its chicks on its shoulders. You might ask why the eagle should bother with such a habit and not simply grip the eaglets in its

talons. This is because it is nevertheless wary of people who might cast stones or shoot arrows in its direction. The bird thus places itself as a barrier between its young and the dangers threatening from below. So too did God situate His ministering angels as a barricade between Israel and the encroaching Egyptians, as the verse states: *Then the angel of God who had been traveling ahead of the Israelite camp moved and went behind them.* (14:19)

SEKHEL TOV

מִלְאָךְ הָאֵלֹהִים – *The angel of God:* The divine attribute of Justice had been standing in front of them, intent on preventing the nation's passage and destroying them as punishment for

Mikha's idolatrous statue [see Judges 17–18], which was crossing the sea with the people, as the verse states: *And he shall pass through the sea with affliction (Zechariah 10:11).*

VERSE 20

SHEMOT RABBA

וַיֹּאֲרֶה אֶת־הַלַּיְלָה – *But lighting the night:* [The words of the translation, "for one... for the other" are absent from the original Hebrew phrase, which literally reads: "as cloud and darkness, and lighting the night." The midrash explains the apparent contradiction:] During

the splitting of the sea, the Holy One, blessed be He, sent a cloud of darkness to obscure the Egyptians' sight, while Israel's vision was unimpaired, just as happened in Egypt during the plague of darkness. (Shinan, Bo 14:3)