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NEWS & VIEWS

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Blog Edition

70 FACES OF TORAH

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Less Talking, More Walking. Deliberation and Exodus

Parashat Beshallach (Exodus 13:17-17:16)

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Oh, deliberation. It might look like that word contains “liberation” within it. But no, a quick etymology search reveals that “deliberation” and “liberation” come from two different Latin roots. The latter has to do with freedom and the former has to do with weighing things (just like Libra whose symbol is the Scales).

Deliberation, weighing our options, is certainly important -- whether in picking a brand of shampoo or in deciding whether to follow this Moses guy from the cozy sameness of stuckness and slavery into the complete unknown of freedom and the wilderness.

This is where we find the People of Israel in this week’s Torah portion, Beshallach (Exodus 13:17-17:16). Finally, after generations of enslavement, after Pharaoh’s heart being hardened against them through ten terrible plagues, the People are finally leaving the Narrow Places (as the Hebrew word for Egypt, “*mitzrayim*,” is creatively understood). They arrive at the shores of the Sea of Reeds and look back to see Pharaoh’s army in hot pursuit (Pharaoh too has deliberation issues and once again changes his mind at the last minute). And suddenly the People are struck by a wave of fear and doubt about their own liberation. They attack Moses for bringing them out of slavery. They tell him that slavery would be “*tov*” (genuinely good) compared to dying in the desert. “Weren’t there enough graves in Egypt? Why did you bring us out here to die in the desert?,” they complain, “Didn’t we tell you in Egypt to leave us alone and let us work for the Egyptians? It would be better to be slaves in Egypt than to die in the desert!” (Exodus 14:11-12).

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