

Parashat Yitro

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THE PURPOSE OF THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS¹

- Is the journey through the wilderness merely a way to get to the Land of Israel, or does it have an intrinsic independent significance?
- Is the encounter at Mount Sinai mentioned in the prophecies regarding the redemption from Egypt? Why?
- Where does the text hint to the encounter at Mount Sinai?
- What is the purpose of the encounter at Mount Sinai and what is its role in the process of the redemption?

A. Is the Wilderness a Journey or a Destination?

The Journey through the Wilderness - a Means of Forming a Nation

In the previous *parasha* (*Beshalach*) we discussed the nation's journey through the wilderness. We saw the nation leave Egypt with the goal of reaching Canaan, although they do not arrive there immediately. Instead they wander in the wilderness. We noted that the purpose of the journey was to free the nation from their mental dependence on Pharaoh and to bolster their faith in their ability to deal with challenges,

¹ This lesson is a continuation of last week's lesson; however it can also be studied as an independent unit.

with God's help.

The journey through the desert is part of the process of forming the nation of Israel. The wilderness itself has no significance; it is merely the way through which the people must pass – both geographically and mentally –to prepare themselves to enter the Land of Israel. Presumably, had the nation been ready to enter the Land of Israel immediately and did not need to free itself of its dependence on Pharaoh, there would have been no need to wander in the wilderness.

The Journey through the Desert: Not Mentioned at the Burning Bush

The journey through the desert is not mentioned during Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush:

And God said, "I have surely seen the misery of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; for I am aware of their sorrows. And I shall descend to save them from the hand of Egypt and bring them up from that land to a land that is good and spacious, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Caananite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. And now, behold, the cry of the Children of Israel comes to Me, and I have also

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' רָאֵה רָאִיתִי אֶת עַנְי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת צַעֲקוֹתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נַגְשָׁיו כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת מַכְאֲבָיו: וְאֵרֵד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלִהְיוֹתָם מִן הָאָרֶץ הַהִיא אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה וְרוּחְבָּהּ אֶל אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ אֶל מְקוֹם הַכְּנָעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי: וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלַי וְגַם רָאִיתִי אֶת הַלַּחֲזָן אֲשֶׁר

seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. And now, go and I shall send you to Pharaoh, and take my nation, the Children of Israel, out of Egypt. (Ex. 3:7-10)

מִצְרַיִם לְחַצִּים אֹתָם: וְעַתָּה לֵךְ וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְהוֹצֵא אֶת עַמִּי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם. (שְׁמוֹת ג', י-ז)

The purpose of taking the nation out of Egypt, according to the verses quoted above, is to save them from slavery and bring them to the Promised Land. The journey through the wilderness is not mentioned because it is a means rather than an end.

The Journey through the Wilderness: Not Mentioned at the Covenant between the Parts

In addition, the Covenant between the Parts mentions only the exodus from Egypt and the return to the Land of Israel:

And He said to Abram, "Know surely that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and tortured, for four hundred years. And the nation under whom they labor I shall judge as well, and afterward they shall leave with great wealth. And you shall come to your forefathers safely; you shall be buried in good old age. And the fourth generation shall return here, for the sins of the Amorites have not yet been completed." (Gen. 15:13-16)

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה וְרַעַךְ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעֹבְדוּם וְעִנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה: וְגַם אֶת הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ דֵן אֲנִי וְאַחֲרַי כִּן יֵצְאוּ בְרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל: וְאַתָּה תָּבוֹא אֶל אֲבֹתֶיךָ בְּשָׁלוֹם תִּקָּבֵר בְּשֵׂיבָה טוֹבָה: וְדוֹר רְבִיעִי יָשׁוּבוּ הֵנָּה כִּי לֹא שָׁלַם עוֹן הָאֱמֹרִי עַד הַנְּהַי. (בְּרֵאשִׁית ט"ו, יג-טז)

However, a closer look at the sections describing the exodus from Egypt reveals that the nation's journey through the desert, besides being a means to reach the Land of Israel, has an independent purpose.

Let us reread the section in which God sends Moses to Pharaoh.

B. "Serve God on this mountain" – Sign or Goal?

MOSES' ARGUMENTS AGAINST GOD'S CHOICE;
GOD'S RESPONSE

Moses' Claim: At the burning bush (Ex. 3:11-12) Moses does not immediately accept the mission that God gives him:
"Who am I?"

And Moses said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and take the Children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11)

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים
מִי אֲנִי כִּי אֵלֶךְ אֶל פַּרְעֹה
וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִמִּצְרָיִם.

God replies:

And He said, "For I will be with you, and this is your sign that I have sent you, when you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain." (Ex. 3:12)

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ,
וְזֶה לְךָ הַאֵימֹת כִּי אֲנִי
שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ, בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ
אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרָיִם
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים
עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה.

The first part of God's response is easily understood: Moses claims that he is not worthy of this mission; God responds that "I will be with you." However, the second part of God's answer – "and this is your sign..." – is less clear:

1. Can the nation's future service of God on Mount Sinai serve as a sign? A sign is ostensibly a supernatural occurrence that can resolve any possible doubts; the future service of God, alternatively, is the nation's own choice!

2. Serving God on the mountain will occur following the nation's liberation from Egypt; how can it counter Moses' present doubts about his worthiness to carry out this very mission?

**Rashi's
Explanation**

Rashi notes these difficulties in his commentary (see Rashi on Ex. 3:11). He divides Moses' speech into two parts and explains that Moses is posing two arguments:

1. "Who am I" – How could I be important enough to speak with kings?
2. "And take the Children of Israel out of Egypt" – And even if I am important, why does the nation of Israel merit a miraculous liberation from Egypt?

Rashi divides God's response into two corresponding answers, one to each of Moses' questions:

<p>He answered [Moses'] first [question] first and his last [question] last: "As you said, 'Who am I to go to Pharaoh': it is not your [endeavor], but Mine, 'For I will be with you.' 'And this,' the vision you have seen in the bush, 'is your sign that I have sent you' – and I am [sufficient] to save [them]. Just as you have seen the bush do My bidding, and it is not consumed, so too you shall do My bidding, and you shall not be harmed."</p>	<p>השיבו על ראשון ראשון ועל אחרון אחרון: שאמרת "מי אנכי כי אלך אל פרעה" – לא שלך היא, כי אם משלי, "כי אהיה עמך"; "זוה" – המראה אשר ראית בסנה, "לך האות כי אנכי שלחתך" – וכדאי אני להציל. כאשר ראית הסנה עושה שליחותי ואיננו אוכל, כך תלך בשליחותי ואינך ניזוק.</p>
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And regarding your question "By what merit will the nation of Israel leave Egypt" – I have a great matter [which depends] upon this exodus, for they are destined to receive the Torah on this mountain three months after they leave Egypt.² (Rashi on Ex. 3:12)

וששאלת "מה זכות יש לישראל שיצאו ממצרים" – דבר גדול יש לי על הוצאה זו, שהרי עתידים לקבל התורה על ההר הזה לסוף שלושה חדשים שיצאו ממצרים. (רש"י, שמות ג', יב)

**The Bush –
the Sign
of Moses'
Worthiness
for the
Mission**

God's promise that "this is your sign that I have sent you" refers to the first part of the verse: "For I will be with you." The burning bush that is not consumed by fire is a personal sign to Moses that he is worthy of God's mission.

2 Rashi's explanation is based on the following *midrash*:

"מי אנכי כי אלך אל פרעה וגו' וכי אוציא את בני ישראל" – מה זכות יש בידם שאוכל להוציאם? אמר לו הקב"ה: "כי אהיה עמך", אין אומר אהיה עמך אלא למי שהוא מתיירא. "זוה לך האות כי אנכי שלחתך" – ובדבר הזה תהיה ניכר שאתה שלוחי לפי שאהיה עמך וכל מה שתרצה אעשה אני. "בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האל-להים על ההר הזה" – מה שאמרת באיזה זכות אוציאם ממצרים הוי יודע שבזכות התורה שהן עתידים לקבל על ידך בהר הזה הם יוצאים משם.

"Who am I to go to Pharaoh, etc., and take the Children of Israel out" – what merit do they have that would allow me to take them out? God said to him: "For I will be with you" – He says "I will be with you" only to those who are afraid. "And this is your sign that I have sent you" – and by this it will be known that you are My messenger, for I will be with you and anything you desire I shall do. "When you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain" – [regarding] what you said: What merit do they have that would allow me to take them out of Egypt, know that in merit of the Torah that they will receive through you on this mountain they are leaving Egypt. (*Midrash Rabba* 3:4)

Other commentators quote this *midrash* as well, such as Seforno:

אף על פי שאינם ראויים, הם מוכנים לעבוד את האל-להים על ההר הזה בהוציאך אותם מבין הפושעים.

Future Service of God – the Nation’s Merit for Redemption The latter part of the verse – “When you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain” – answers Moses’ second question regarding the nation’s merit to leave Egypt. God responds that the nation deserves to leave because they are destined to serve God on this mountain, not in merit of their current status.

The Purpose of Leaving Egypt – Serving God According to this interpretation, serving God on the mountain is not merely a sign with no further significance. It is a crucial part of the process of redemption – were the nation not fated to serve God at Sinai, they would not have been worthy of redemption from Egypt. Serving God is not only a condition for the redemption; it is the *purpose* of the redemption. Until this point it seemed as though the goal of the exodus was to save the nation from slavery and bring them to Canaan. Now it appears as if there is another, more fundamental purpose: **the nation is redeemed from Egypt to serve God.**

Difficulties with Rashi’s Explanation There are two problems with Rashi’s explanation. First, according to the simple understanding of the verse, Moses’ words, “And take the nation out of Egypt,” do not seem to question whether the nation deserves to leave Egypt; had he wanted to question this he might have said, “And who are the people that You shall take them out of Egypt?” In fact, the second part of the verse seems to be a continuation

Although they are not worthy, they are prepared to serve God on this mountain when you take them out from among the sinners. (Seforno on Ex. 13:12)

of the *self*-doubt Moses expresses in the first part of the verse.³

In addition, Rashi’s interpretation of the second part of God’s answer – “This is your sign” – as the continuation of the first part is not compatible with the simple understanding of the text either. If the first and second parts of the verse were meant to be read as one unit, then the following unit – i.e., the third part of the verse: “When you take the nation out of Egypt...” – should have begun with “And” [the Hebrew prefix *ve*]. Since it does not, the third part of the verse seems to be a continuation of the second part, and the verse should apparently be read thus: “And this is your sign that I have sent you: when you take the nation out... You shall serve God...”⁴

3 According to *Siftei Chachamim* and *Mizrachi*, Rashi is motivated to interpret the verse in this way due to the difficulty that arises in the next verse (see note 4).

4 This issue prompted a number of commentators to explain that the nation’s future service of God at Sinai is the sign mentioned by God in the verse. *Panim Yafot* explains (see also *Or HaChaim* ad loc):

שהשי"ת הניח הרים הגבוהים ונתן התורה על הר נמוך מפני ענותנותו, כשאחז"ל (מגילה כט, א): "למה תרצדון הרים גבנונים" (תהלים ס"ח, יז) – כולם בעלי מומין הם אצל סיני מפני גיאיותם, והוא תשובה למשה שאף לפי דעתו שיש גדול ממנו הרי השם בחר בסיני אף שיש גדולים ממנו, וזהו שכתוב: "זהו לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך" ובחרתי בך שהרי "בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה" שהוא נמוך, ולא בגבוה ממנו.

For God disregarded the high mountains and gave the Torah on a small mountain due to its humility, as the Sages said: “Why do you look with envy, high mountains” (Ps. 68:17) – they are all flawed compared to Sinai due to their arrogance (*Megilla* 29a). And this is the answer to Moses, that although in his view there are greater men than he, did God not choose Sinai although there were greater [mountains]? And

**Ramban's
Interpretation**

Ramban suggests another interpretation of this verse⁵ according to which **Moses only doubts his**

therefore it is written: “And this is your sign that I have sent you” and chosen you, for “when you take the nation out of Egypt they will serve God on this mountain,” which is small, and not on a higher [mountain].

Although his interpretation is consistent with the grammatical structure of the verse, it is still not entirely convincing in terms of explaining the content of the verse. This might be why Rashi prefers to interpret the two parts of the verse separately, explaining that the first part was meant to give Moses confidence, while the second commanded him regarding the nation's future service of God at Sinai. This division of verse 12 inspired Rashi to divide verse 11 in a similar manner.

5 Ramban writes (punctuation and numbering mine):

...והנכון על דרך הפשט, כי הקב"ה אמר למשה שני דברים: (1) שירד להצילו מיד מצרים, והיה אפשר שיצילם מידם בארץ גושן עצמה או קרוב משם. (2) אבל הבטיח עוד להעלותו מן הארץ ההיא כולה אל מקום הכנעני.

ומשה נתירא משתייהן, ואמר: (1) "מי אנכי כי אלך אל פרעה", אני שפל אנשים רועה צאן והוא מלך גדול, ואם אומר אליו לעזוב את העם כלו יהרגני... (2) ואמר עוד "מי אנכי כי אוציא את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים", כמו שאמרת לי להעלותם אל ארץ כנען, כי עם חכם ונבון הגוי הגדול הזה, ולא יחשבוני ללכת אחרי אל ארץ עמים גדולים ועצומים מהם, כאשר אמרת להעלותו אל ארץ טובה ורחבה אל מקום הכנעני...

על שתייהן ענהו ה': (1) אמר לו אל תירא מפרעה כי אני "איהיה עמך להצילך", זוהי לך האות" אל העם כי אנכי שלחתיך אליהם, כי "בהוציאך את העם ממצרים תעבדון את האל-הים על ההר הזה", (2) ומאז יקבלו עבודת השם ללכת אחרי מצותו, וגם כך יאמינו לעולם, ואחריך ירוצו לכל מקום אשר תצום...

...and the correct [interpretation] according to the simple reading of the verse is that God said two things to Moses: (1) That He would come down to save [the nation] from the Egyptians, and [though] it would have been possible to save them in the land of Goshen itself, or nearby, (2) still He promised to bring them up and completely out of that land and into the place of the Canaanites.

And Moses was afraid of both, and said: (1) “Who am I to go to Pharaoh,” I am the lowliest of people, a shepherd, and he is a great king, and if I tell him to free the entire nation he will kill me... (2) And he said further, “Who am I to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt,” as you told me to bring them up into the land of Canaan; for this nation is great and

own personal ability to carry out this mission and does not question whether the nation deserves to be liberated from Egypt. Moses' fear of accepting God's mission is twofold: first, he fears that Pharaoh will not listen to him and will attempt to kill him; second, he is concerned that the nation will not be willing to listen to him.

God's answer accordingly has two parts: in response to Moses' concern regarding Pharaoh, God promises that “I will be with you”; regarding his fear of the nation's reluctance, God gives him a sign to prove to the nation that “I have sent you.”

**The Sign: The
Encounter at
Sinai**

The nation's worship of God at Sinai serves as a sign that establishes Moses as a prophet sent by God. The sign, required to strengthen the nation's faith in God, is unlike the signs Moses presents to Pharaoh. God does not offer Moses any supernatural miracles to prove his status as God's messenger; instead, He promises that “You shall serve God on this mountain.”

perceptive and wise, and they would not consider following me to a land of nations that are greater and stronger than they – as you said [that I shall] bring them up to a good and broad land, to the place of the Canaanites...

God answered both [concerns]: (1) He said to him: Do not fear Pharaoh, for “I will be with you to save you”; “And this is your sign” to the nation that I have sent you to them, for “When you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain.” (2) And from then they shall accept upon themselves the service of God and follow his commandments, and they shall believe in you, too, forever, and they shall swiftly follow you anywhere you command them... (Ramban on Ex. 3:12)

The nation's encounter with God at Sinai proves that Moses is fulfilling a Divine mission. When the people arrive at Sinai, they recognize that Moses is truly God's emissary. The verses describing the encounter at Sinai state this explicitly:

And God said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thickness of the cloud so that the nation will hear Me speak to you **and believe in you, too, forever.**" (Ex. 19:9)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אֲנִי בָּא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעֵבֶר הָעָנָן בְּעֵבֹר יִשְׁמַע הָעָם בְּדַבְרֵי עִמְךָ וְגַם בְּךָ יֵאֱמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם.
(שמות י"ט, ט)

Difficulties with Ramban's Explanation

Ramban's interpretation is more consistent with the grammar of the verse, yet it too is problematic with regard to the content of the verse. Moses raises an immediate concern – how will he persuade the people to believe in him and follow him? God's responds with a guarantee for the future, which will be fulfilled after the exodus: when the nation arrives at Sinai, they will know that Moses is God's messenger. Even though this is an enormously significant promise, without an immediate proof that Moses was sent by God how can Moses convince the nation to believe in him? How will he lead them to redemption?

This might explain why Moses does not mention his fear of Pharaoh again. Rather, he continues to mention his concerns regarding the nation (Ex. 3:13, 4:1). God responds by advising him how to speak to the nation (Ex. 3:14-17) and giving him signs to prove that he was sent by God (Ex. 4:2-9).

What is the Purpose of the Encounter at Sinai?

Still, this does not answer our original question: why does God initially suggest the nation's future encounter at Sinai as a sign to convince the people to believe in Moses? How would this convince the nation to believe in Moses while they are still in Egypt?

In addition, Ramban's position is still unclear. Is the nation's worship of God at Sinai merely a means of convincing them of Moses' status as a Divine messenger, or is it a goal of itself, as Rashi suggests?

Let us return to the exchange between Moses and God.

C. “Three days’ journey” – Pretext or Genuine Goal?

“Please let
us worship
the Lord, our
God”

God sends Moses to Pharaoh to request that the nation be allowed to leave to worship God in the desert:

And you and the elders of Israel shall come to the king of Egypt and say to him, “The Lord, God of the Hebrews, has met with us, and now, please let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness and make sacrifices to the Lord, our God.” (Ex. 3:18)

ובאת אתה וזקני ישראל אל מלך מצרים ואמרתם אליו ה' אלהי העבריים נקרה עלינו ועתה נלכה נא דרך שלשת ימים במדבר ונבחה לה' אלהינו. (שמות ג, יח)

This request is repeated later:

...And you shall say to Pharaoh, “So says God: ‘Israel is my firstborn son; and I say to you, “Release my son so he may worship Me...”” (Ex. 4:22-23)

...ואמרת אל פרעה כה אמר ה' בני בכרי ישראל ואמר אליך שלח את בני ויעבדני... (שמות ד, כב-כג)

God commands Moses to demand that Pharaoh release the nation so that they can serve Him. Moses obeys; during his audience with Pharaoh he demands they be allowed to serve their God, not that they be freed:

And afterward Moses and Aaron came and they said to Pharaoh, “So says the Lord, God

ואחר באו משה ואהרן ויאמרו אל פרעה כה אמר ה'

of Israel, ‘Release My people and they shall worship Me in the wilderness...’ Please let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness and worship the Lord, our God, lest He afflict us by a plague or by the sword. (Ex. 5:1-3)

אלהי ישראל שלח את עמי ויחגו לי במדבר... נלכה נא דרך שלשת ימים במדבר ונבחה לה' אלהינו פן יפגענו בדבר או בקרב. (שמות ה, א-ג)

Later, Pharaoh’s exchange with Moses and Aaron centers on the demand to allow the nation to serve God in the wilderness:

...And you shall say to him, “The Lord, God of the Hebrews, has sent me to you to say, ‘Release my people and they shall worship me in the wilderness.’” (Ex. 7:16)

...ואמרת אליו ה' אלהי העבריים שלחני אליך לאמר שלח את עמי ויעבדני במדבר. (שמות ז, טז)

This demand is repeated seven times in Moses and Aaron’s conversations with Pharaoh⁶. In addition, Pharaoh mentions it in his words to Moses:

And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, “Entreat your God and let Him remove the frogs from me and my people, and I shall release the people and they shall worship God.” (Ex. 8:4)

ויקרא פרעה למשה ולאהרן ויאמר העתירו אל ה' ויסר הצפרדעים ממני ומעמי ואשלחה את העם ויזבחו לה'. (שמות ח, ד)

In addition, a similar exchange between Pharaoh

⁶ Ex. 5:1-3; 7:16, 26; 8:16; 9:1, 3, 13.

and Moses is repeated three times: Pharaoh is “willing” to allow the nation to worship God with certain limitations, to which Moses does not agree.⁷ Ultimately when Pharaoh does release the Israelites, he does so to allow them to worship their God:

And he called for Moses and Aaron at night, and he said, “Get up and leave from among my people, you and the Children of Israel, and serve God as you have said.” (Ex. 12:31)

וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וְלְאַהֲרֹן לַיְלָה וַיֹּאמֶר קוּמוּ צְאוּ מִתּוֹךְ עַמִּי גַם אַתֶּם גַּם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלָכוּ עַבְדוּ אֶת ה' כַּדְבָרְכֶם. (שמות י"ב, לא)

Pharaoh Does Not Release Them Permanently

When Pharaoh is finally convinced to allow the people of Israel to leave, he does not release them from slavery but allows them three days' leave for religious purposes. This is evident from Pharaoh's reaction when he realizes that the Israelites intended to leave permanently:

And it was told to the king of Egypt that the nation had fled, and the heart of Pharaoh⁸ and his people turned against the nation, and they said, “What have we done, for we have released Israel from serving us!” (Ex. 14:5)

וַיִּגְדַּל לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם וַיִּהְיֶה לִבָּב פְּרַעֲהוֹ וְעַבְדָּיו אֶל הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ מַה זֹאת עָשִׂינוּ כִּי שְׁלַחְנוּ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַבְדָּנוּ. (רש"י, שמות י"ד, ה)

Dishonest Negotiations with Pharaoh

Why did Moses only demand that Pharaoh allow the

⁷ Ex. 8:21-24; 10:8-11, 24-29.

⁸ Did Pharaoh reconsider? As mentioned above, from his perspective he only allowed the nation temporary leave; why then did “his heart turn against the nation”? The

commentators grapple with this question and suggest a number of explanations. According to Rashi based on a *midrash*, Pharaoh never regretted allowing the nation to leave for three days. Only after three days had passed, when he discovered that the nation did not intend to return he pursued them. Rashi writes:

“וַיִּגְדַּל לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם כִּי בָרַח הָעָם” – איקטורין שלח עמהם, וכיון שהגיעו לשלשת ימים שקבעו לילך ולשוב וראו שאינן חוזרין למצרים, באו והגידו לפרעה...

“And it was told to the king of Egypt that the nation had fled” – he had sent guards with them, and when they completed three days' journey, at which [point] they had set to return, [the guards] saw that they were not returning to Egypt, and they came and told Pharaoh... (Rashi on Ex. 14:5)

Ramban adds that according to a simple understanding of the verse, it seems that Pharaoh was aware of the deception before three days had passed, as he was told that the Israelites were “confused in the land,” attempting to find their way to an undefined place rather than traveling toward a predetermined location to worship their God. In addition, he was told that the nation had departed “with an upheld hand,” and not as slaves leaving temporarily. Ramban writes:

ועל דרך הפשט הוא אשר דבר ה' ואמר פרעה לבני ישראל, כי כאשר עשו כן בני ישראל ושבּוּ וּחְזְרוּ לִפְנֵי פִי הַחִירוֹת לִפְנֵי בַעַל צִפּוֹן הוּגַד זֶה לְמֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאָמַר כִּי בָרַח הָעָם וְהֵם נְבוּכִים בְּמַדְבַּר וְאֵינֶם הוֹלְכִים אֶל מְקוֹם יְדוּעַ לְבִוּוֹחַ. וְזֶה טַעַם יוֹבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יוֹצְאִים בִּיד רַמָּה, שֶׁעָשׂוּ לָהֶם דְּגַל וְנִסַּם לְהַתְנַסֵּם, וְיוֹצְאִים בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂירִים בְּתוֹף וּבְכִנּוֹר כְּדַמּוֹת הַנְּגָאִלִּים מֵעַבְדוֹת לַחִירוֹת, לֹא כְעַבְדֵי הַעֲתִידִים לָשׁוּב לְעַבְדוֹתָם, וְכֹל זֶה הוּגַד לוֹ.

And according to the simple reading of the text, this is what God spoke of [when He said], “And Pharaoh shall say of the Children of Israel, [‘They are confused in the land’]” (Ex. 14:3). For when the nation of Israel did so and returned to camp by Pi HaHiro, by Ba'al Zafon, this was told to the king of Egypt, and he said: The nation has fled, and they are confused in the wilderness, and they are not going to a predetermined place to worship. And this is what is meant by “And the Children of Israel left with an upheld hand,” that they had made a flag and hoisted a banner, and they left with joy and song, with tambourines and lyres, not as slaves who intended to return to their slavery; all of this was told to him. (Ramban on Ex. 14:5)

Rashbam and Seforno suggested similar interpretations.

nation to leave temporarily to serve God? Why didn't

Likewise the *Tur* writes:

שהיו משחיתים את הארץ בכל מקום שהיו הולכים ובה ניכר שלא היה דעתם לחזור.

For they defaced the land at every place they passed, and by this it was clear that they did not intend to return.

Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor explains that Pharaoh was not given concrete information but rather:

מספרי לשון הרע היו, שהיו אומרים ודאי לא כיוונו כי אם לברוח.

They were speakers of slander, for they said: Surely they have no other intention but to flee.

The commonality between all of these explanations is that Pharaoh never intended to free his slaves permanently and therefore could not have had second thoughts regarding his actions. In this case, what do the words “And Pharaoh’s heart turned” mean? What do the Egyptians regret in saying, “What have we done, for we have released Israel from serving us!”?

In contrast to other opinions cited above, Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor explains that Pharaoh initially drove the nation out entirely (“Get up and leave from among my people”). Only later did his heart turn against them and he regretted doing so. If the other commentators do not share this view, how do they explain Pharaoh’s regret and the Egyptians’ exclamation?

Rashi provides a solution to this problem:

“ויהפך” – נהפך ממה שהיה שהרי אמר להם (שמות יב): “קומו צאו מתוך עמי” ונהפך ל**בב עבדיו** שהרי לשעבר היו אומרים “עד מתי יהיה זה לנו למוקש” ועכשיו נהפכו לרדוף אחריהם בשביל ממונם שהשאלום.

“And it turned” – it turned from what it had been, for he had said to them: “Get up and leave from among my people” (Ex. 12), and **the hearts of his servants turned**, for in the past they had said, “Until when shall this [nation] be a hazard for us?” **and now they turned to pursue them on account of the wealth they had lent them.** (Rashi on Ex. 14:5)

Rashi explains that only Pharaoh’s servants reconsidered; they originally wanted to drive the Israelites out completely to be spared from further plagues. However, their greed ultimately prevailed and they reconsidered. Pharaoh, on the other hand, never intended to free the nation and only agreed to a temporary leave.

he reveal God’s demand to release His nation from bondage?⁹

A Strategic Request

This might have been a strategic decision: Moses posed a request that could reasonably be granted. It would be useless to ask Pharaoh to release all of his slaves; he would never agree to such a demand. Therefore, Moses presented a minimal demand.

The problem with this explanation is that God and Moses both knew that Pharaoh would not agree even

⁹ See our lesson on *Parashat Bo* for an extensive discussion of Moses’ apparent dishonesty during his negotiations with Pharaoh. Here we shall suffice with quoting Abarbanel in his commentary on the Torah. He writes, quoting *Ran*:

כי איך צויה יתברך למשה רבנו עליו השלום שיאמר בשמו דבר כזב ושקר, ויותר טוב היה שיאמר בביאור: שלח את העם מתחת סבלות מצרים. ומה תועלת היה בספור הזה, אחרי שפרעה בעל כרחו ישלחם מארצו ולא מפאת דבריהם. וכבר העיר הר”ן על זה הספק בדרשותיו, והשיב שעשה הקדוש ברוך הוא זה כדי שירדוף פרעה אחרי בני ישראל, באמרו (לקמן יד, ה): “כי ברח העם”.

For how did the Blessed One command our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, to speak lies and deceit in His name? It would have been preferable for him to state explicitly: Release the nation from the suffering of Egypt. And what purpose did this story have, since Pharaoh would ultimately release them from his land against his will and not because of their words? And the *Ran* has already commented on this difficulty in his discourses, and answered that the Holy One, Blessed be He, did this so that Pharaoh would pursue the Children of Israel, as he said: “For the nation had fled” (Ex. 14:5).

The source of Abarbanel’s quote from *Ran* is the following *midrash*:

למה אמרו “שלישה ימים” ולא אמרו “גלכה נא לעולם”? למה אמרו כן – כדי שיטעו המצריים וירדפו אחריהם.

Why did they say “three days” instead of saying, “Let us leave forever”? Why did they say this – so that the Egyptians would be misled and pursue them. (*Midrash Rabba* 3:8)

to this modest request.¹⁰ Moses could just as well have demanded the Israelites' freedom and forced Pharaoh to agree.

A Modest Request Highlights Pharaoh's Stubbornness

Another explanation is that God intentionally presents Pharaoh with a reduced demand that could be easily granted. Pharaoh's refusal of even this request demonstrates the extent of his stubbornness and that God hardened his heart.¹¹

According to these explanations the request for three days' leave to serve God is interpreted as a practical means to an end.¹² The primary goal is to

10 "And I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go..." (Ex. 3:19)

11 Abarbanel suggests this explanation:

ויותר נכון אצלי לפרש, שעשה הקדוש ברוך הוא כן, כדי להראות לבני אדם חווק לב פרעה וקושי ערפו... יען וביען לא בקשו ממנו ללכת כי אם דרך שלשת ימים לובוח לא-להיהם, ומסתמא יובן מדבריהם שאחר כך ישובו, ולא שמע אל תפלתם ואל תחנתם. וכל שכן אם יאמרו לו לשלחם כלם, שבלי ספק לא יאבה להם ולא ישמע להם. הנה מפני זה צוה למשה רבינו עליו השלום שתהיה בראשונה שאלתו ובקשתו דבר מועט דרך שלשת ימים, להבחין בו ערפו ומצחו הקשה.

And I feel it is more correct to explain that God did so in order to show the people the hardness of Pharaoh's heart and the stiffness of his neck... And especially because they requested of him nothing more than to leave for three days and worship their God, and it was seemingly understood from their words that afterward they would return, and he did not listen to their begging and entreaties. And even more so had they asked him to release them all, for there is no doubt that he would not be amenable nor listen to them. And it was for this reason that He commanded our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, to first ask for a small request, three days' journey, in order to observe his stubbornness.

12 Rabbi Yitzhak ben Asher HaLevi, one of the *Ba'alei HaTosafot*, suggests a similar interpretation (see also the commentary of *Ba'alei HaTosafot* on Ex. 4:24):

"נלכה נא דרך שלשת ימים במדבר ונבחה". לא אמרו שישלחם לגמרי, שאם כן לא

liberate the Israelites from slavery and bring them to Canaan.¹³

Presenting the True Demand - To Serve God

Nevertheless, the repetition of this demand in the exchange between Moses and Pharaoh emphasizes its centrality and importance. It is possible that the demand presented to Pharaoh is truly **the primary goal - allowing the nation of Israel to serve God**. The purpose of leaving Egypt, from God's perspective, is to allow the Israelites to serve Him.

Allowing the Israelites to become an independent nation and return to their ancestors' homeland is an important goal itself. However, this is a natural, ethical and human objective not a unique divine mission. While Pharaoh might be more reluctant to free his slaves than to allow them a temporary vacation, his reluctance does not reflect the true goal of leaving Egypt from God's perspective.

Moses' debate with Pharaoh revolves around the

היו משאלין להם כלום ולא היה מתקיים בהם ושאלה אשה משכנתה ומגרת ביתה כלי כסף וגו'.

"Please let us go three days' journey into the wilderness and worship." They did not ask him to release them completely, for in that case they would not have lent them anything, and the verse "And each woman shall request from her neighbor and from those who dwell in her house, etc." would not have been fulfilled.

13 God states this explicitly:

ואמר אעלה אתכם מערים מצרים אל ארץ הכנעני והחתי והאמורי והפרזי והיבסי אל ארץ נפת חלב ודבש.

"And I said, I shall bring you up from the poverty of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, to a land flowing with milk and honey. (Ex. 3:17)

question: who is the Israelites' true master? Whom do they serve: Pharaoh or God? Hence, the main purpose of leaving Egypt is to allow the Israelites to serve God:¹⁴ "When you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain" – **serving God is an integral part of the exodus from Egypt**, not merely a cover story.¹⁵

14 This is expressed in Leviticus as well:

כִּי לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

For the Children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I took out of the land of Egypt, I am the Lord your God. (Lev. 25:55)

Emek Davar explains: "For the Children of Israel are servants to Me,' as they became My servants when they received the Torah." (*Emek Davar* ad loc.)

The purpose of leaving Egypt is likewise mentioned in a number of places:

וַדַּעוּ כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְשֹׁכְנֵי בְּתוֹכָם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם:

And they will know that I am the Lord their God, Who took them out of the land of Egypt **to dwell amongst them**, I am the Lord their God. (Ex. 29:46)

אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

I am the Lord your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt **to be a God for you**, I am the Lord your God.

וְאֶתְכֶם לָקַח ה' וַיּוֹצֵא אֶתְכֶם מִכּוּר הַבַּרְזֶל מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעַם נַחֲלָה בְּיוֹם הַהוּא:

And God took you and brought you out of the iron furnace, from Egypt, **to be for Him a nation** of inheritance until this day. (Deut. 4:20)

15 Ramban equates these two demands:

כִּי מִשָּׁה הַגִּיד לָהֶם מֵה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לוֹ תַעֲבֹדוּן אֶת אֱלֹהֵים עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה (לְעִיל ג' יב), וְגַם לְפָרְעָה אָמַר נִלְכֶה נָא דֶרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבָר וְנִבְחַחַה לָהּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ (שֵׁם ה' ג), וְהוּא הַמְהַלֵּךְ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד הַר סִינַי.

For Moses told them what had been said to him: "You shall serve God on this mountain" (Ex. 3:12), and to Pharaoh,

**Not a
Movement for
Liberation,
but a Divine
Mission**

"And this is your sign that I have sent you, when you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain." In light of the above, this verse is better understood and the questions raised earlier can be answered.

God entrusted Moses with a weighty mission: to liberate the Israelites from Egypt and bring them to the land of Canaan. Moses doubts his ability to carry out this mission and fears both Pharaoh's reaction and the potential doubts of the nation. Moses must convince them all that he was sent by God and did not come of his own initiative. How? If he states that his intention is to free the Israelites from slavery and bring them to another country, this would indicate nothing more than a natural desire to free an enslaved people. Pharaoh would certainly not agree to this. Moreover, even the Israelites might not want to follow Moses. However, if Moses requests that the nation be allowed to leave and serve God, if the stated purpose of leaving Egypt is: "You shall serve God on this mountain," there would be no doubt that the initiative to free the Israelites from Egypt did not originate with Moses. This is no mere human initiative to liberate a people; this is a Divine plan. This approach is more likely to convince both Pharaoh and the Israelites. According to this

too, he said, "Please let us go three days' journey into the wilderness and worship the Lord our God" (Ex. 5:3). And [three days' journey] is the distance from Egypt to Mount Sinai.

interpretation, the verse “And this is your sign that I have sent you” means that **the demand to serve God on this mountain is itself the sign that Moses is God’s messenger.**¹⁶

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16 The fact that Moses did not come of his own initiative but on behalf of a greater ideal, with no thought of personal gain and no intention of increasing his own power, inspires trust in him. God provides signs and miracles at certain points to gain the nation’s trust and prove that Moses is not a false prophet or a liar, and the plagues are necessary to soften Pharaoh’s heart, but the foundation of their belief in Moses is the nature of his mission and leadership.

## D. The Encounter at Sinai as a Stage in the Process of Redemption

**Does the Encounter at Sinai have Inherent Significance?**

The above analysis raises an additional question: why is the nation’s encounter with God at Mount Sinai not mentioned in Moses’ first prophecy at the burning bush or in Abraham’s Covenant between the Parts? Why does God only mention it in response to Moses’ concerns and why does Moses not mention it at all in his speech to the Israelites? Is it possible that the nation of Israel could have been redeemed from Egypt without later coming to Sinai?<sup>17</sup>

The encounter at Sinai seems to be relegated to secondary status at the Covenant between the Parts as well. Abraham is given two promises: the promise for land and the promise for descendants. He is never promised that his descendants will receive the Torah.

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17 This possibility seems to be raised in the song *Dayenu*, sung at the Passover Seder: “If He had taken us out of Egypt...and not brought us before Mount Sinai...and not given us the Torah, *dayenu* [this would have been enough for us].” This poem can be understood in a number of ways, but taken literally it seems to indicate that every stage of the redemption is significant itself and is sufficient to thank God for, even if He had not brought us to the next stage. The redemption from Egypt would have been significant even had we not received the Torah and perhaps even had we not entered the Land of Israel. (However, the text consistently links leaving Egypt to entering the Land of Israel, while receiving the Torah at Sinai is not mentioned as an integral part of this process.)

Serving God – Goal, not Guarantee However, this can be understood differently: from Abraham’s perspective, serving God is not a guarantee but a goal. Man’s role in this world is to serve God. Therefore, Abraham is not promised that his descendants will be given the Torah, not even as part of the Divine plan for them.

The Burning Bush – God’s Part in the Covenant This might be the reason that the future encounter at Sinai is not emphasized during the encounter at the burning bush – for the nation of Israel, like Abraham, serving God on the mountain is not a promise but a primary goal. It is the essence of their part in the covenant between them and God. The promise made at the burning bush represents only God’s side of the mutual covenant, i.e., fulfilling the conditions which would allow the nation of Israel to serve Him: freeing them from slavery, purifying them from forty-nine levels of impurity and bringing them to the Promised Land, the most suitable place to serve God.

Later when God discusses the details of the process with Moses, the nation’s responsibility of the covenant is mentioned as well: they must serve God.¹⁸ This is their role and their goal, and for this purpose they will be taken out of Egypt.¹⁹

18 What is the nature of the “service of God” regarding which the nation was commanded? The Torah has not yet explained this term. It may be understood as bringing sacrifices or as forming a renewed covenant with God that would come to shape the nation’s service of Him.

19 Here we return to the crucial idea expressed by Rashi, quoted above: the nation of Israel was redeemed from Egypt through the virtue of their future acceptance of the Torah.

The encounter at Sinai is a renewal of the covenant between the nation of Israel and God – a covenant which God first made with Abraham. God began fulfilling his side by redeeming the nation from Egypt and later completes it by bringing them to the Land of Israel. The nation fulfills their obligation at Mount Sinai by committing themselves to serve God.²⁰

20 There is, of course, a significant difference between the covenant between God and Abraham and the covenant between God and the entire nation of Israel. Abraham arrived at the encounter and covenant with God independently, through self-preparation and inner harmony. The nation, on the other hand, had only just been released from slavery and purified of forty-nine levels of impurity. It was necessary for the nation to experience the revelation of the Divine Presence and accept the commandments – to encounter something extraordinary – to enable them to serve God afterwards. At Mount Sinai, God’s presence was revealed to the nation beyond a shadow of a doubt and there He gave them the Torah, which would serve as their guide to the service of God.

E. “Found Favor in the Wilderness”

THE WILDERNESS: WHERE THE TORAH WAS GIVEN

The Dual Purpose of Leaving Egypt

The purpose of leaving Egypt was so that the Israelites would serve God. Moses’ request that the nation be allowed to leave to worship God proves that he is a Divine messenger. Presenting this demand to Pharaoh is not merely a cover story, but a genuine presentation of the nation’s primary goal. The entire exchange between Moses and Pharaoh revolves around one question: Whom do the people serve?

The encounter at Mount Sinai begins with this point:

I am the Lord your God, Who
took you out of the land of
Egypt, from the house of slaves.
(Ex. 20:2)

אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.
(שמות כ', ב)

Therefore, when the Israelites leave Egypt they must travel through the wilderness to serve God on “this mountain,” which is “the mountain of God, Horeb” (Ex. 3:1). The journey through the wilderness was not only from fear that “the nation would regret [their decision] and return to Egypt” (Ex. 13:17) – it was planned in advance so that the nation would come to the mountain of God in the wilderness and serve Him there.

In summary, there were two goals in leaving Egypt: the first goal was to reach the Promised Land; the second was to serve God.

Traveling through the Wilderness – An Imperfect Situation

For the purposes of reaching the Land of Israel, the journey through the wilderness has no inherent significance. Therefore, it is not mentioned in the first verses that describe Moses’ mission, which focus on the entry into the Land of Israel. Similarly, the beginning of *Parashat Beshalach* relates to the journey through the wilderness not as an ideal situation, but as a journey which prepares the nation for their eventual entry into the land (Ex. 13:17)

Journey through the Wilderness – the Ideal

In contrast, the second purpose of leaving Egypt – serving God – entails traveling through the wilderness and coming to the mountain of God.²¹ From this perspective, the journey through the wilderness is an end unto itself, the optimal situation: “When you take the nation out of Egypt you shall serve God on this mountain.”

Synthesis – The Five Expressions of Redemption

These two aspects of the exodus from Egypt and the journey through the wilderness are not two separate; they are linked to one another as demonstrated by the expressions of redemption at the beginning of *Parashat Va’era*:

The first three expressions relate to the salvation from Egypt:


²¹ We shall explain why below.

And I shall take you out from the suffering of Egypt, והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים

And I shall save you from their slavery, והצילתי אתכם מעבדתם

And I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. (Ex. 6:6) וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים. שמות ו,ו

The fourth expression appears in the next verse:

And I shall take you as a nation for Me, and I shall be a God for you, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God. (Ex. 6:7) ולקחתני אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלהים וידעתם כי אני ה' אלהיכם. (שם, ז)

Finally, the final expression of redemption appears in the following verse:

And I shall bring you to the Land [of Israel]. (Ex. 6:8) והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ. (שם, ח)

A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation

According to these verses, the Israelites' becoming God's nation by receiving the Torah precedes their entering the Land of Israel. Therefore, the journey to the land has an independent significance: during this journey, they will serve God and become His chosen people.

Thus God explains the purpose of the awesome encounter at Sinai:

You have seen that which I have done to the Egyptians, and I אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא

shall carry you on the wings of eagles and bring you to Me. And now, if you surely listen to My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be a treasure for Me out of all of the nations, for all of the earth is Mine; and you shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex. 19:4-6) אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ: ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש. (שמות י"ט, ד-ו)

THE WILDERNESS AS A PLACE OF FAITH

Thus the journey through the wilderness, which led to the encounter at the mountain of God, was not an imperfect situation nor was it the result of the nation's weakness. In taking the Israelites out of Egypt, God wanted them to serve Him; He chose this particular mountain, specifically in the wilderness, for this purpose. There must be some deeper significance to the choice of this particular place.

What is the significance of God's choice? Why does he choose specifically the wilderness?

The Journey in the Desert Emphasizes Dependence on God

The wilderness is the most appropriate place to renew the service of God. It is, therefore, the most fitting place to transform the people leaving Egypt into God's nation.

The people of Israel do not become God's nation only at Mount Sinai. Rather, the process continues for years, facilitated by the nation's travels in the desert. The wilderness is not a comfortable place to live;

remaining there for a long period of time requires a near-total reliance on God. God supplied the nation with their needs in the wilderness – the water, the manna, the quail – in a miraculous fashion. God ensured that “your clothing did not wear and your feet did not swell” (Deut. 8:4). God walked before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, to guide their way through the wilderness. God saved them from the snakes, scorpions and other dangerous creatures which were abundant there. It was particularly in the inhospitable wilderness that the nation was given a chance to experience their immense dependence on God, as well as God’s love for them in providing them with everything they needed.

Therefore, the deeper purpose of the journey through the wilderness was to form the unique connection between God and the nation of Israel, as described by Jeremiah:

<p>So said God, “I have remembered the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, how you followed Me in the wilderness through an unsown land.” (Jer. 2:2)</p>	<p>כֹּה אָמַר ה' זְכוֹרְתִי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבְתִּי כְּלוּלְתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אֲחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה. (יִרְמִיָּהוּ ב', 2)</p>
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F. Summary

Parashat Beshalach details the various aspects of the journey through the wilderness, which ultimately transformed the people into the nation of God, free from the yoke of Pharaoh’s slavery.

Parashat Yitro describes the main component of the change that the people must undergo: they arrive at Sinai, where they are meant to “serve God,” fully experience the revelation of God’s presence and become His nation, as Moses is told in *Parashat Va’era*: “And I shall take you as a nation for Me, and I shall be a God for you” (Ex. 6:7).