

Seventh Day of Pesach 5779, 2019:

Dare to Be Like Nachshon!

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The *Yom Tov of Shevi'i shel Pesach* (Seventh Day of Pesach) is a continuation of Pesach, rather than a *Chag* (Festival Day) in its own right. Both the Midrash and Rashi (1040-1105) make it quite clear, however, that this seemingly secondary status in no way diminishes its singular import, since it commemorates an overwhelmingly miraculous moment in our nation's history, namely, *Kriyat Yam Suf* – the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds. In turn, this amazing event generated the song of thanksgiving known as the “the *Shirat HaYam*” – “the Song of the Sea:”

...On the fifth and the sixth [days after the Jewish people left Egypt], they [the Egyptians] pursued them. On the night preceding the seventh [day], they [the Jewish nation] went down into the sea. In the morning [of the seventh day], they [the Jewish people] recited the Song [of the Sea]. Therefore, we read the Song [from the Torah] on the seventh day, that is the Seventh Day of Passover. (Rashi, *Commentary on the Torah, Sefer Shemot* 14:5, this and all Bible and Rashi translations with my emendations, *The Judaica Press complete Tanach*)

On a certain level, Rashi's statement, “they [the Jewish nation] went down into the sea,” conceals more than it reveals, as this matter-of-fact phrase hides the drama that ensued immediately prior to our forebears' descent into the *Yam Suf*. The best-known Talmudic version of the “story behind the story” is found in *Talmud Bavli, Sotah* 37a:

Rabbi Yehudah responded to him [Rabbi Meir]: What you suggested is not what happened, instead [when the entire nation was standing at the *Yam Suf*,] this person said, “I am not going down into the water first!” and another responded, “I am not going to go into the water first!” [During this time of endless inaction,] Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped up and became the first one to descend into the waters of the *Yam Suf*. As the text states: “Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah [Nachshon ben Aminadav's tribe] still rules (*rad*, literally,

“has gone down”) with G-d, and with the Holy One He is faithful.” (*Sefer Hoshea* 12:1, Talmud translation and brackets my own) ...

The notion that “Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped up and became the first one to descend into the waters of the *Yam Suf*” is found throughout Midrashic literature. For example, in *Bamidbar Rabbah*, Parashat Naso 13, we find: “‘Nachshon ben Aminadav of the tribe of Yehudah’ — why was he called ‘Nachshon?’ This is because he was the first to descend *l’nachshol sh’b’yam* — into the surging waves of the Sea.” *Midrash Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, Chapter 22, takes a different approach than that of *Bamidbar Rabbah*, and focuses its primary attention on the powerful outcome of Nachshon’s heroic behavior:

And Nachshon was the first to jump up and go into the Sea. In so doing, he sanctified His great Name in the eyes of all. [As a result,] under the Tribe of Yehudah’s leadership [that was led by Nachshon], the entire Jewish people followed them and entered the Sea. As the text states: “Judah became His holy nation, Israel His dominion.” — This means under the rulership of the Tribe of Yehudah. (Translation my own)

In his work, *Netivot Olam (Ahavat Hashem)*, chapter II, the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel, 1520-1609) notes that Nachshon performed a very special kind of *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d’s name), in the sense that he did so “*b’pharhesia*” — before the entire world. In the Maharal’s view, this is the highest form of *kiddush Hashem*, and is thereby categorized as, “*kedushat haShem l’gamrei*” — complete and total sanctification of the Divine Name.

Clearly, not all of us have the opportunity to undertake Nachshon-like public actions that will lead to a *kedushat haShem l’gamrei*. None-the-less, each of us can emulate him on our own level. As the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) teaches us in a celebrated passage in his *Mishneh Torah*: “Anyone who refrains from committing a sin or performs a *mitzvah* for no ulterior motive, neither out of fear or dread, nor to seek honor, but for the sake of the Creator, blessed be He...sanctifies

G-d's name." (*Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah* V:10, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger) Therefore, with the Almighty's help and our fervent desire, may each of us dare to be like Nachshon! *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.