

# Parasha B'Shalach

1-10-2022

## Introduction

Chaverai v'Rabotai

This week's parasha, B'Shalach, begins with HaShem leading the Jewish people (הָעָם) out of Egypt. Because it would not be possible for the people to look upon him directly (as we later learn from Moshe on Har Sinai), "The LORD went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light" (Shmot 13:21). It is light that also brackets our Shabbat observance as we studied this week – beginning with the Shabbat candles and ending with the candle of Havdalah.

In the next verse (13:22), the parsha continues that "The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people." Rashi explains that "...the pillar of cloud handed over the camp to the pillar of fire and the pillar of fire handed it over to the pillar of cloud — that before the one set the other rose." He learns this from the Gemara in Tractate Shabbat (23b), where Rav Yosef explained to his wife, concerning the time of lighting Shabbat candles, "...with regard to the verse: "The pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, departed not from before the people" (Exodus 13:22), this teaches that the pillar of cloud would overlap with the pillar of fire. The pillar of fire would appear slightly before nightfall. And the pillar of fire would overlap with the pillar of cloud, as well. The pillar of cloud would appear slightly before daybreak. Therefore, in lighting the Shabbat lights it is also appropriate to light earlier, beginning Shabbat slightly before dark on Shabbat eve."

While the timing of light benching is important, I think there is another lesson that we can take away from the overlapping behavior of the pillars – that they (like HaShem, that they were representing) were ever-present in the lives of the Jewish people from that start on our path to Sinai and the Aseret HaDibrot until today. It was that goal that the people wished to obtain as quickly as possible, as our sages teach, "a person should always run to perform a mitzva, even on the Sabbath" (Pesachim 4a) By having the light from the cloud and the fire 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, they were able to move quickly towards their goal of receiving the Torah.

When the people reached the Yam Suf, the fire went away and there was a cloud day and night, though it traveled from in front of the people to behind them (וַיֵּלֶךְ עִמּוֹד הָעָנָן מִפְּנֵיהֶם וַיִּצְמַד מֵאַחֲרֵיהֶם). Rashi explains that this put the cloud (HaShem) between the people and Egypt. While it cast light for the people, it cast darkness over the Egyptians. Having just suffered through the plague of darkness (followed by the death of their first born), the last thing that Egyptians wanted was to spend more time in darkness which kept them far from the Israelites, "so that the one could not come near the other all through the night." (Shmot 14:20)

## Story of the Cloud

Clearly, the pillar of cloud was present for the Jewish people for their forty years of wandering, but the Sefer Divrei Yosef tells us about a time when the cloud appeared in more recent times. One that also connects directly to our studies of the Shabbat.

As Rabbi Moshe Cordovero lay on his deathbed, his disciples begged him to reveal his successor. But the Ramak, as the rabbi was known, refused to do so. Instead, he told them to watch for a sign: whoever saw a pillar of

cloud at his funeral would be the one that they should follow. This greatly confused the disciples and when the Ramak died, all of Tzfat was filled with mourning.

As the funeral procession reached the graveyard, a young disciple named Rabbi Isaac Luria, approached Rabbi Joseph Karo and said: "Ever since we left the synagogue, there has been a pillar of cloud going before us." He pointed to it, but it was invisible to all the others. When he entered into it, he vanished from their sight. When Rabbi Isaac stepped out of the cloud his face was glowing like the face of Moshe as he descended Har Sinai. Then they all understood that this was the sign the Ramak had given them and that Rabbi Luria, who was to be known as HaAri or the AriZal, was destined to be their teacher. As we learned this week, the AriZal was one of the kabbalistic masters who brought about the service of Kabbalat Shabbat.

## Story of the Fire

As we have the pillar of clouds leading us to the beginning of Shabbat, the pillar of fire is key to the end of Shabbat, the Havdalah service.

At the close of the first Sabbath as the sun set, the midrash tells us that Adam saw darkness creeping upon him, and he began 'Woe is me· can it be that the serpent is coming to bruise me?' While we learned of one story – that of the two stones that were stuck together, the Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer (chapter 20) tell us another story of what happened.

A pillar of fire was sent to Adam to illuminate him and to guard him from all evil. When Adam saw that pillar of fire, he rejoiced, and he put forth his hands to the light of the fire and said, "Blessed are You, HaShem, King of the universe, Who creates the flames of fire." And when he removed his hands from the light of the fire, he said, "Now I know that the holy day has been separated from the workday here below, for fire may not be kindled on the Sabbath day." And at that hour he said, "Blessed are You, HaShem, King of the universe, who divides the holy from the profane, the light from the darkness." Therefore, the pillar of fire not only brought us two of the brachot from Havdalah, but also the minhag of holding our hands towards the light of the fire.

## Closing

I'd like to note that today is Yud Shvat, the day of the yartzeit of the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe and the day (one year later) when the Rebbe (M.M.Schneerson) took the helm of Chabad.

One of his lessons that I believe all of us as Rabbis should take to heart is that:

When a Jew prays, studies Torah, and performs mitzvos, he should approach it as his normal "profession" and not for any other motive such as praying for something, etc.

Never be discouraged if you encounter fellow Jews who appear to have no connection with Torah, prayer or mitzvos, because, essentially and truly, Torah and mitzvos are the natural "profession" of every single Jew. It is our duty and privilege to reveal this fact to every Jewish person.

This should guide us to be as the pillars of cloud and fire, to be there day and night for our family, friends and community doing kiruv to guide them closer to HaShem and the coming of Mashiach in our days.

Thank You.