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Parashat Hashavua  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

### PARASHAT YITRO

**"When you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God upon this mountain"**

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In last year's *shiur* on *Parashat Beshalach* [<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha67/16-67beshalach.htm>], we tackled the subject of Bnei Yisrael's roundabout journey in the desert. Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt with the aim of reaching Canaan, but instead of proceeding directly they follow a circuitous route through the wilderness. The purpose of this route is to liberate them psychologically from their dependence on Pharaoh. Thus, the wandering about in the wilderness (prior to the giving of the Torah) is important for the process of building up the nation of Israel. The wilderness is not a place with its own independent importance; rather, it is "the way" to the land – not only geographically, but also psychologically; it represents the process that Bnei Yisrael must undergo in preparation for entering the land. Seemingly, if the nation had been ready to enter the land immediately, and had not been in need of some time to be liberated from dependence on Egypt, there would have been no need for the circuitous travels.<sup>1[1]</sup>

Indeed, at the beginning of Moshe's mission, no mention is made of journeying around the wilderness:

God said: I have truly seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their cry as a result of their taskmasters, for I know their pain.

And I shall go down to deliver them from the hand of Egypt and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Chitti and the Emori and the Perizi and the Chivi and the Yevusi.

And now, behold, the cry of Bnei Yisrael has come to Me; and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.

And now, go – I shall send you to Pharaoh, and bring My nation, Bnei Yisrael, out of Egypt. (*Shemot* 3:7-10)

The purpose of the Exodus from Egypt, according to these verses, is deliverance from servitude and moving to the Promised Land.

Moshe is not enthusiastic about accepting the mission:

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<sup>1[1]</sup> These verses make no mention of any other significant event that is meant to take place in between the departure from Egypt and the entry into the land of Canaan. Hence, the journey has no intrinsic significance; it is simply a "path" that must be followed in order to reach the land.

And Moshe said to God: Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt? (11)

God answers him:

And He said: I shall be with you, and this will be your sign that I have sent you: When you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God upon this mountain. (12)

Moshe claims that he is not suited to the mission, and therefore God assures him, "I will be with you." But what is the meaning of the continuation of God's words? What is the sign? What does it have to do with "serving God upon this mountain"? And how does God's response answer Moshe's claim?

Rashi, commenting on verse 11, divides Moshe's words into two separate arguments. One is, "Who am I" – i.e., "I am not so important as to speak to kings." The second argument is, "and that I should bring Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt" – i.e., even if I am important, how have Bnei Yisrael merited having You perform a miracle for them and bringing them out of Egypt?"

Accordingly, Rashi goes on to explain God's response as containing two answers, each addressing a different argument raised by Moshe:

He answered him concerning the former [argument] – first, and concerning the latter one – afterwards. Concerning that which you [Moshe] said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh" – it is not you who is going, but I, for "I shall be with you. And this vision which you have seen, of the [burning] bush – "shall be a sign for you that I have sent you" - and I am ready to deliver [them]. Just as you have seen the bush perform My command without being consumed, so you shall go at My dispatch, and you will not be harmed.

And concerning your question of what merit [Bnei] Yisrael have, that they should come out of Egypt – I have an important objective in taking them out, for they are destined to receive the Torah "upon this mountain," three months after they come out of Egypt.

Moshe's first argument concerns his personal suitability for the task. To this God responds, "I will be with you." God gives him further encouragement by telling him that the bush which is on fire but is not consumed, is a sign that "I have sent you." The vision of the burning bush is also a sign that Moshe will not be harmed by the mission.

Moshe's second argument, according to Rashi, concerns the merit of Bnei Yisrael by which they will leave Egypt. In this regard, God tells him: "When you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God upon this mountain." In other words, at this time Bnei Yisrael are truly not worthy of leaving Egypt, but the reason for God taking them out is so that they will serve Him. The future service of God justifies taking them out of Egypt at this time.

According to this interpretation, the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt is that "You will serve God upon this mountain." Serving God at this mountain is so important that by this merit, Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Egypt. It is here that

God reveals to Moshe the main objective of the Exodus. Until now, it might have been assumed that it was a matter of deliverance from subjugation and leading Bnei Yisrael to the land of Canaan. Now it becomes clear that there is another issue – perhaps the main issue: "When you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God upon this mountain."

This idea appears in several *midrashim*<sup>2</sup>[2] and commentaries<sup>3</sup>[3]. Nevertheless, Rashi's explanation raises several difficulties.

Firstly, nowhere in Moshe's words is there any hint of a claim against Bnei Yisrael's right or merit to leave Egypt. Had there been such a claim against them, Moshe should have said, "Who am I... And who are Bnei Yisrael, that You should take them out of Egypt?" A simple reading of the verse tells us only that Moshe doubts his own personal suitability for the mission. "Who am I" is the main clause, with two continuations: "Who am I – that I should go to Pharaoh," and "(Who am I) – that I should take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt?"<sup>4</sup>[4]

The second difficulty concerns God's response. According to Rashi, the first part of God's words is, "I shall be with you, and this will be a sign for you that I have sent you," while the second part is, "When you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God...." However, if the verse were indeed divided thus, there should be a *vav* introducing the second part, indicating an additional, separate clause: "**And** when you bring the nation...." The language of the verse as it is, without the *vav*, would seem to be connecting "this will be a sign for you" and "when you bring...." It is as though the verse were punctuated with a colon:<sup>5</sup>[5] "This will be a sign for you that I have sent you: when you bring the nation... you shall serve God...."

A different interpretation is offered by Ramban:

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<sup>2</sup>[2] *Shemot Rabba parsha 3*: "Concerning your question, by what merit I will bring them out – know that it is in the merit of the Torah, which they are destined to receive through you, on this mountain, that they know and will come out of there."

*Midrash Shemuel, parasha 8*: "And this will be your sign that I have sent you – Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman said: It will be clear that I have sent you, when you take the nation out of Egypt, for when you take the nation out of Egypt – know that you will serve God upon this mountain."

*Midrash Tehillim* chapter 114: "A different explanation: When Israel came out of Egypt – By what merit did Bnei Yisrael come out of Egypt? ... R. Nechemia said: **By the merit of the Torah, which they were destined to receive...** When you take the nation out of Egypt you will serve God... R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: **By the merit of the Mishkan which they were destined to build...** Whom I took out of Egypt to make My dwelling in their midst – on condition that I shall dwell in their midst.

<sup>3</sup>[3] The second explanation that Rashi proposes for this verse emphasizes this even more strongly: "A different explanation: 'For I shall be with you' – the fact that you will be successful in your mission will be your sign concerning a different promise that I make to you – that when you take them out of Egypt, you will serve Me on this mountain; that you will receive the Torah upon it, and that is the merit that Bnei Yisrael have." According to this explanation, the Exodus from Egypt is merely a sign, signifying that they will serve God upon the mountain.

Ibn Ezra understands the verse in a similar way: "And the reason for [God saying,] This will be your sign – Why am I sending you to bring out the nation? So that you will serve Me upon this mountain. Thus the text reads, 'Who brings you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God' (*Vayikra* 22:33)." See also the commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Ramban on *Shemot* 29:46.

<sup>4</sup>[4] As Ramban understands it. See below.

<sup>5</sup>[5] It is interesting to note that the way in which the *te'amim* (cantillation marks) divide the verse accords with Rashi's interpretation. The *etnachta* (pause) is located at the word "*shelachtikha*" (I have sent you); such that "when you bring the nation..." is a separate matter. Had the *etnachta* appeared at the word "*imkha*" (with you), then it would accord with the reading that we propose.

The correct understanding, on the literal level, is that the Holy One, blessed be He, told Moshe two things: [firstly,] that he should go down to save them from the hand of Egypt; and it could have been possible for him to save them within the land of Goshen itself, or somewhere close by, but He also promised to bring them up out of that land altogether, to the place of the Canaanites. (3:12)

Moshe was fearful of both. He said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh" – I am the lowliest of men, a shepherd, while he is a great king, and if I tell him to let the entire nation go, he will kill me.

[...] And he said further, "Who am I that I should take Bnei Yisrael out of the land of Egypt" – as You have told me, to bring them up to the land of Canaan? For this nation is a wise and understanding great people. They will not consider me worthy to follow me to a land of nations that are greater and mightier than themselves, as You have said – to bring them up to a good and spacious land, to the place of the Canaanites. [...]6[6] Thus, Moshe was afraid of Pharaoh, and also afraid of them [Bnei Yisrael], and God answers him concerning both [fears]. He tells him, "Do not be afraid of Pharaoh – for I shall be with you, to save you. And this will be a sign for you to the nation that I have sent you to them: that when you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God upon this mountain, and since they will then accept the service of God, to follow His commandments, and they will also believe in you forever, and will happily follow you to any place you lead them. And behold, I am revealed to you at this mountain in a flame of fire, for so it will be in the eyes of all the nation when they serve Me at this mountain."

According to Ramban, Moshe doubts only his ability to carry out his mission (and not the merit by which Bnei Yisrael will come out of Egypt). His doubts concern two issues: first, his fear that Pharaoh will not listen to him and will seek to kill him, and second – his fear that Bnei Yisrael will not want to listen to him.7[7]

God's response likewise consists of two parts. Concerning the fear of Pharaoh, God promises, "I shall be with you." As to the fear that Bnei Yisrael will not have faith in him, God gives him a sign that will prove to the nation that "I have sent you." What sign can prove that Moshe is God's emissary?

God does not give Moshe some wonder or act of witchcraft to perform in order to prove that he is God's emissary. Rather, he gives him a future promise: "You will serve God upon this mountain."

The worship of God at Mount Sinai is proof that Moshe's mission is God-given. When Bnei Yisrael reach Mount Sinai, they will find out that Moshe is indeed God's loyal messenger.

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6[6] Here Ramban goes on to explain that Bnei Yisrael would certainly be ready to leave Egypt with any person who could promise them liberty from subjugation; the problem would lie in convincing them to go up to the land of Canaan and to fight for it.

7[7] Ramban focuses the lack of faith on the part of Bnei Yisrael only on the issue of Moshe's ability to bring them to the land (see previous note), but we will expand his view and treat Bnei Yisrael's projected reaction as a complete lack of faith in Moshe.

Ramban's explanation sits well with the language of the verse. However, it raises a conceptual difficulty. How will this sign convince the nation? Right now, in Egypt, they are not able to see the sign. It is only later, after the Exodus, when they reach Sinai, that they will find out that Moshe is God's emissary. This being the case, how will Moshe convince the nation to believe in him right now?<sup>8</sup>[8]

Indeed, throughout the rest of the dialogue between Moshe and God, Moshe does not mention his concern about Pharaoh again, but he does continue to raise his concern that Bnei Yisrael will not believe in him (see 3:13, 4:1).

In the wake of this concern, God tells Moshe how to speak with Bnei Yisrael in such a way as to convince them (3:14-17), and also gives him wonders to perform, which are meant to prove to them that Moshe is indeed God's emissary (4:2-9).

Nevertheless, we need to understand why God originally proposes the Revelation at Mount Sinai as a sign that will lead to faith in Moshe as God's emissary. How does this cause the people to believe in Moshe right now?

A further question that arises in the wake of this interpretation is whether the Revelation at Sinai is merely a "sign that I have sent you"; does it have no inherent importance its own right?<sup>9</sup>[9]

We shall address these questions below.

Meantime, let us return to the rest of the dialogue between Moshe and God.

And you and the elders of Israel shall come to the king of Egypt and you shall say to him: The Lord God of the Hebrews met with us, and now – let us go, we pray you, on a journey of three days in the wilderness, **that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.** (3:18)

Once again, when God speaks with Moshe in Midyan and sends him to Pharaoh, He tells him:

... And you shall say to Pharaoh: So says the Lord: Israel is My first-born son. And I say to you: Let My son go, **that he may serve Me....**" (4:22-23)

God tells Moshe to demand of Pharaoh that he let Bnei Yisrael go in order to serve God. Indeed, when Moshe presents himself before Pharaoh, he does not demand that he free his slaves; rather, he asks that they be permitted to serve God:

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<sup>8</sup>[8] Ramban answers the question by explaining that Moshe was not concerned that Bnei Yisrael would not want to leave Egypt; rather, his concern was that they would not want to go up to Canaan (see previous note).

<sup>9</sup>[9] Rashi's commentary, as well as other commentaries and *midrashim*, award the Revelation at Sinai a very central position – to the point of declaring that the point or objective of the Exodus from Egypt is the Revelation at Sinai.

And afterwards Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh: So says the Lord God of Israel – Let My people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness...

And they said: The God of the Hebrews has met with us: Let us go, we pray you, on a three-day journey in the wilderness, **that we might sacrifice to the Lord our God**, lest we be struck by pestilence, or by the sword. (5:1-3)

Later on, too, the discussion between Pharaoh and Moshe and Aharon concerns the demand that Bnei Yisrael be allowed to go and serve God:

...And you shall say to him: The Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying: Let My people go, **that they may serve Me in the wilderness.** (*Shemot* 7)

This demand is repeated **seven** times (5:1-3; 7:16; 7:26; 8:16; 9:1; 9:13; 10:3).

Likewise in Pharaoh's words to Moshe:

Pharaoh called to Moshe and to Aharon and he said: Pray to the Lord, that He may remove the frogs from me and from my nation, and **I shall let the people go, that they may serve God.**

On three different occasions there is a discussion between Pharaoh and Moshe in which Pharaoh is "ready" to allow Bnei Yisrael to serve God, with limiting conditions, while Moshe rejects Pharaoh's conditions.<sup>10</sup>[10]

Eventually, when Pharaoh lets the people go, we read:

And he called to Moshe and to Aharon in the night, and he said: Arise, get out of the midst of my nation – both you and Bnei Yisrael, and **go and serve the Lord as you have spoken.** (12:31)

Pharaoh thinks that he is letting Bnei Yisrael go for three days, for the purposes of serving God, but suddenly it becomes clear that his slaves are fleeing:

And it was told to the king of Egypt that the nation had fled.... (14:5)

As Rashi explains it:

"And it was told to the king of Egypt" – he sent spies with them, and when the agreed-upon three days for going and returning were up, and they saw that [Bnei Yisrael] were not returning to Egypt, they came and told Pharaoh...."

According to Rashi, Moshe tells Pharaoh that the nation is going for only three days, to worship God, and when the three days are up Pharaoh finds out that they have fled.

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<sup>10</sup>[10] *Shemot* 8:21-24 (Pharaoh suggests that they serve God in Egypt); 10:7-11 (he suggests that only the men go); 10:24-26 (he suggests that they leave their livestock behind).

Ramban provides another explanation for Pharaoh's feeling that his slaves are gone:

On the level of the literal text, this is what God said that Pharaoh would say concerning Bnei Yisrael, that when Bnei Yisrael did this and returned and encamped in front of Pi Ha-chirot, before Ba'al Tzafon, this was told to the king of Egypt, and he said that the nation had fled, and were lost in the wilderness, and were not headed for any known place of sacrifice. And this is the reason why the verse reads, "And Bnei Yisrael went out with a high hand" (verse 8)- [it means] that they made themselves a flag and banner to wave, and they went out with joy and songs, with tambourines and lyres, like people redeemed from slavery to freedom, and not like slaves who were going to return to their slavery. All of this was told to him.

According to Ramban, Pharaoh now hears that Bnei Yisrael are wandering about in the wilderness, instead of following a straight route to some known place for Divine worship. In addition, their departure was accompanied with great joy, and nobility – like slaves on their way to freedom! Pharaoh deduces from all of this that they have not just gone to sacrifice to God, but have fled the country.

Thus, a review of the verses shows that the demand made of Pharaoh is that he free Bnei Yisrael for the purposes of going to sacrifice to God, and it is over this demand that he and Moshe argue. Only after the nation has left Egypt is Pharaoh surprised to discover that their intention had been to go free; to "flee," or escape.

Why is Pharaoh presented only with the demand to allow Bnei Yisrael to go and serve God, rather than the demand to free them from slavery?

It is possible that this demand is employed as a tactic. Getting Pharaoh to agree to free all of his slaves is certainly out of the question. On the other hand, asking that they be permitted to go and worship God for just three days is a more reasonable request. In any event, Pharaoh refuses, as predicted in advance, when God tells Moshe, "I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go, except with a strong hand" (3:19) This being the case, Moshe may as well have presented his greater, real demand, exercising a "strong hand" in order to force Pharaoh to agree!

Another possible explanation is that God deliberately presents Pharaoh with a modest request that could easily be acceded to. The fact that Pharaoh refuses, testifies to his stubbornness, thereby demonstrating the fact that God has hardened his heart.

According to these interpretations, it would appear that the demand to go and sacrifice to God is a sort of "excuse" that is conveyed to Pharaoh as a tactic, while the real objective is to liberate Bnei Yisrael from slavery and to take them up to Canaan.

However, the fact that this specific demand is repeated so many times, and that the entire debate between Moshe and Pharaoh centers on it, would seem to suggest a different possible understanding of its significance.

The demand presented to Pharaoh is actually the real objective – that Bnei Yisrael should serve God. The purpose of the Exodus from Egypt, from God's point

of view, is that Bnei Yisrael should become His servants. Leaving Egypt in order to be an independent nation, and in order to return to the land of their forefathers, is an important goal – but it is no more than a regular moral, human demand. There is no special Divine imperative involved. For Pharaoh, the thought of freeing his slaves is more difficult than thinking about them going to serve God. But for God Himself, the main objective is that Bnei Yisrael will serve Him.

The debate with Pharaoh turns on the question of who is truly in charge and in control. Who will Bnei Yisrael serve? Are they slaves to Pharaoh, or will they serve God? Indeed, this is the main purpose of the Exodus: for Bnei Yisrael to become the servants of God.<sup>11</sup>[11]

"When you bring the nation out of Egypt, you will serve God upon this mountain." Serving God is an integral part of the Exodus; it is not merely an excuse.

In light of this we may complete our understanding of the verse: "This will be the sign for you that I have sent you: When you bring the nation... you will serve God..." as follows:

God entrusts Moshe with a very major mission: to bring Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt and to lead them to the land of Canaan. Moshe doubts his ability to carry out these tasks. He is concerned about the possible reaction on the part of Pharaoh, but also about Bnei Yisrael not having faith in him.

Moshe needs to convince everyone that God has sent him; that he has not come on his own initiative. How will he do this?

If Moshe comes and says that he wants to liberate Bnei Yisrael from their servitude and lead them to a different land, his cause will sound like a normal, popular liberation movement. In such circumstances Pharaoh will certainly not agree – and perhaps even Bnei Yisrael will not want to go with him.

If, on the other hand, Moshe's demand of Pharaoh is that Bnei Yisrael be allowed to go and serve God, if the aim of leaving Egypt is so that "you will serve God upon this mountain," then it will be clear to everyone that the Exodus is not a human endeavor, a cause spearheaded by Moshe in the manner of all popular liberation movements. Rather, it is a Divine initiative.

This route offers a better chance of convincing both Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh.

Accordingly, what the verse means is that the demand to serve God is the sign that proves that Moshe is God's emissary.

In summary, the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt is so that Bnei Yisrael will serve God. The demand to let Bnei Yisrael go in order to serve God proves that Moshe's mission is a Divine one. The presentation of this demand to Pharaoh is not

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<sup>11</sup>[11] Here we come back to the first interpretation discussed above – that of Rashi and the *midrashim*, according to which the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt is the Revelation at Sinai. We will now try to see how this idea arises from the verses themselves.



an excuse that masks some greater objective. Rather, it is the real demand that is presented to him; the demand concerning which the entire battle is waged, around the question of whom Bnei Yisrael should serve.

The Revelation at Sinai is introduced with this very principle:

I am the Lord your God Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. (*Shemot* 20)

Therefore, when Bnei Yisrael came out of Egypt they were obligated to pass through the wilderness, in order to serve God at "this mountain," which is "the mountain of God, Chorev" (3:1). There was no possibility of them entering the land without first passing through the wilderness.<sup>12</sup>[12]

The journey through the wilderness came about not only "lest the nation fear when they see war, and return to Egypt," but also as a planned initiative, in order to bring them to the mountain of God, so as to "serve God in the wilderness."

Thus, the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was two-fold:  
Firstly – to reach Canaan;  
Secondly – to serve God.

From the point of view of reaching the land, the journey through the wilderness was not essential. Therefore, in the initial verses of Moshe's mission, mentioning bringing Bnei Yisrael to the land, no mention is made of wandering in the wilderness. Even at the beginning of *Parashat Beshalach*, the wandering in the wilderness is described in *post facto* fashion; as a route that prepares Bnei Yisrael for reaching the land.

Serving God, on the other hand, necessarily entails wandering in the wilderness. "You shall serve God upon this mountain"; "Let My people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness" (7:16).

However, these two aspects of the Exodus from Egypt are not separate; they are connected to each other. This idea is reflected in the beginning of *Parashat Vaera*, in the expressions of redemption:

I shall bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt,  
And I shall deliver you from their bondage,  
And I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

Thereafter there is a fourth expression of redemption:

And I shall take you to be My nation, and I shall be your God, and you will know that I am the Lord your God.

After the Exodus from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael become God's nation.

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<sup>12</sup>[12] As we might have understood from the beginning of *Parashat Beshalach*. For an elaboration, see the *shiur* on *Parashat Beshalach*.

Only at the end of all of this do we find an expression of redemption that concerns bringing the nation to the land:

And I shall bring you to the land....

According to the order of the verses, *Am Yisrael* becoming God's nation precedes their being brought to the land.

Hence, the journey that leads to the land has intrinsic significance. Along the way, Bnei Yisrael will serve God; they are going to become God's nation.

In other words, the journeying through the wilderness on the specific route that leads to the mountain of God, Chorev, is not a *post facto* situation; it is not merely a concession to Bnei Yisrael's weakness. Rather, God wants them to serve Him when they leave Egypt, and for this purpose He chooses this particular mountain, which is located specifically in the wilderness. Unquestionably, there is significance to this choice of site.

The route through the wilderness is significant in that it is the place for worshipping God; a place that is suitable for turning the nation that has just left Egypt into the nation of God.

A review of the narratives describing Bnei Yisrael's journey in the wilderness shows that they become God's nation not only at the actual Revelation at Sinai itself, but also through all of their journeying.

The wilderness is not a natural human habitat, and therefore the journey necessarily involves a great degree of dependence and reliance upon God. It is God Who miraculously supplies all of the nation's needs in the wilderness – water, manna, quail. It is God Who ensures that "your garments did not wear out, nor did your feet swell." God proceeds before them in a pillar of cloud and in a pillar of fire, so as to guide them through the wilderness where there is no clear path. God saves them from the snakes and scorpions that swarm all over.

It is specifically in the wilderness, a place that is not suited for normal human life, that Bnei Yisrael are given an opportunity to truly experience and appreciate their great reliance upon God, and God's great love for them, supplying all of their needs.

Thus, the purpose of the journey through the wilderness is to build the special bond between Bnei Yisrael and God, as later described lyrically by the prophet Yirmiyahu (chapter 2):

So says the Lord: I remember in your favor the kindness of your youth, your love as a bride, as you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.

*Parashat Beshalach* describes the journey through the wilderness, with its various elements, leading Bnei Yisrael to become God's nation, liberated from Pharaoh's subjugation.

*Parashat Yitro* describes the main element of the change that is meant to come about in *Am Yisrael*. They reach Mount Sinai; the place where they are meant to "serve God." This is the place where they are going to experience a very powerful revelation of God. It is here that they will become "God's nation," as told to Moshe in *Parashat Vaera*: "I shall take you to be My nation, and I shall be your God."

God Himself explains the purpose of this awesome occasion in these words:

You have seen that which I did to Egypt,  
And how I have carried you upon eagles' wings and brought you to Me.<sup>13[13]</sup>  
And now, if you will diligently obey Me, and observe My covenant, then you  
will be special to Me from among all the nations, for all of the earth is mine.  
And you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (19:4-6)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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<sup>13[13]</sup> It is interesting to note the use of the expression "I have brought you to Me." In the expressions of redemption, "I shall bring you" appears in the context of God bringing the nation **to Canaan**, while here, at the Revelation at Sinai, the verse emphasizes that the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was to bring *Am Yisrael to God*.