



Torah for Turbulent Times

"Crossing the Sea"

Sometimes we feel stuck, especially these days. It can be hard to even imagine getting to the other side of the sea of our lives. In the past week's Torah reading, the Israelites are stuck. On the run from their oppressor of 430 years, they stand at the shores of the Reed Sea, frightened and crying out to G-d. In a dramatic moment, the impassable sea is before them and the Egyptians are approaching. What are they to do? What are we to do?

First, they begin to kvetch. "Moses, why did you even bother liberating us from Egypt if this is to be our demise? We would have been better off if we had stayed there." Complaining is in our DNA from the very beginning. Next, Moses tells them, "Have no fear. G-d will deliver you." Have courage. Be brave. We can get through this with a little help. And then, we finally hear from G-d. "Why are you crying out to me? Move forward!" (Exodus 14:13-15) Yes, calling and crying out are natural instincts in a time of crisis. However, there comes a time to move forward. As the Israelites begin to take their first steps, Moses lifts his staff and G-d parts the sea. Of course, it's easy for this narrative to move forward and for the very lives of our ancestors to be saved when the next action involves the miracle of the splitting of the sea.

Today we face seemingly impassable waters and are surrounded by all kinds of adversarial forces. How can we get to the other side? Perhaps we can take one from the Torah's playbook. Kvetching, crying, mourning, and calling out to G-d are all natural responses. And, we can take our own small steps forward. We can also affirm the miraculous nature of life and the amazing human resilience and brilliance to create cures for healing. All of these can help split the waters before us and create a path for the journey to the other side.

Once the Israelites touched down on the other side of the sea, the Torah tells us that at that very moment they had faith. Going through a sea-splitting experience gave them faith. We might think it also took some faith in order to make their first steps. Standing on the shores of safety and sanity, they sang out what is known traditionally as the "Song of the Sea." I imagine that some even began to sing as they walked upon the dry land that traversed through those troubled waters. As we continue to move forward, may we have the patience, courage and vision to keep on singing our own song of the sea.

-Rabbi Mark