

# א שטיקל תורה A LITTLE SLICE OF TORAH

פון פרשת דער וואָך FROM THE WEEKLY PORTION

January 31, 2026



**"Fostering diverse modes of attention to textual details cultivates correlative forms of attention to the world and divine reality"**

Michael Fishbane (1943- ), *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology*

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם,  
אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה:

## "Tachometer Torah"



...read down to the red line

## Parashat-haShavu'a Stats

Weekly Portion: b'Shallach

Consists of: Exodus 13:17-17:16

Sequence—

in annual Torah cycle: 16<sup>th</sup> of 54

in Exodus: 4<sup>th</sup> of 11



## A Salient Selection from the Portion -

Exodus 13:17-22

Context: *Exodus, second of the Five Books of the Torah, is an account of how God liberated the Israelites from Egypt and entered into a Covenant with us at Mount Sinai, and a record of the legislations we undertook for the conduct of the society we were to establish in the Promised Land.*

Content: *The Israelites from all over Goshen, summarily released from servitude, depart the Nile delta and converge on a temporary tent-city before undertaking their roundabout journey through the Wilderness to the Promised Land.*

13:17a] - Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God not guide them on the road to the land of the Philistines, **although it was nearer;**

וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פָּרְעָה אֶת הָעָם וְלֹא  
נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי  
**קָרוֹב הוּא**

13:17b] - for God reasoned: "Lest the people have a change of heart, when they see war, and return to Egypt." [13:18a] - **So God led the people round about,** on the wilderness road to the Border Sea.

כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹהִים פֶּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם  
בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרֵימָה  
וַיֹּסֶב אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ  
הַמִּדְבָּר יָם סוּף

13:18b] - Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt. [13:19] - And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph (who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying: "God will assuredly take account of you, and at that time carry up my bones from here with you."

וַחֲמִשִּׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת עֲצָמוֹת  
יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הִשְׁבַּע הַשְּׂבִיעַ אֶת בְּנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים  
אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלִיתֶם אֶת עֲצָמֹתַי מִזֶּה  
אִתְּכֶם

- more over

13:20] - They set out from Sukkot, and encamped at Eitam, at the edge of the wilderness.

13:21] - The Eternal One 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, that they might travel day and night; [13:22] - nor did the pillar of cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, ever depart from before the people.

וַיֵּסְעוּ מִסֻּכּוֹת וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּאֵתָם בְּקֶצֶה הַמִּדְבָּר

וַיְהִי הָלֶךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לְנַחֲתָם הַדֶּרֶךְ וּלְיָלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהָאִיר לָהֶם לָלֶכֶת יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה לֹא יָמִישׁ עַמּוּד הָעָנָן יוֹמָם וְעַמּוּד הָאֵשׁ לְיָלָה לִפְנֵי הָעָם



לֹא נָחַם אֱלֹהִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים

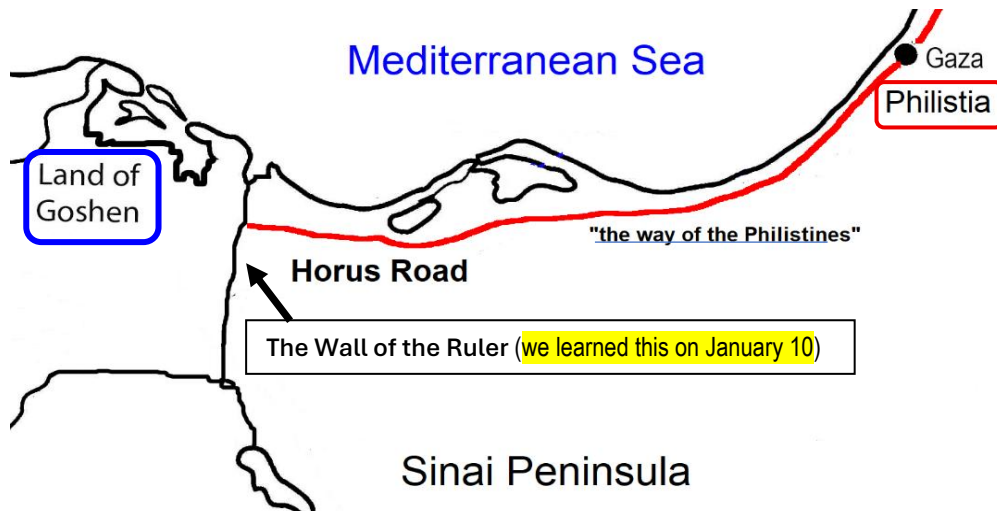
13:1 - God did not guide them on the road to the land of the Philistines,

**כִּי קָרִיב הוּא**

**although** it was **nearer**—

פֶּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִמָּה

lest the people have a change of heart, when they see war, and return to Egypt.



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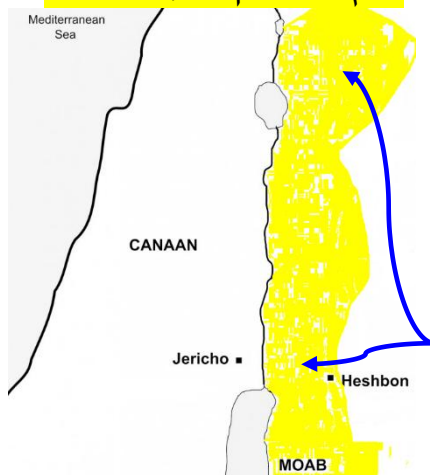
לא נחם אלהים דרך ארץ פלשתים אשר הוא **קרוב** וטוב לנחותם בדרך ההוא  
**כי** אמר אלהים **פן ינחם העם בראותם מלחמה** וישבו מצרימה

A) RaMBaN (Bonastruc da Porta, 1194-1270) - God was not willing to guide them on the road to the land of the Philistines— which would have been **the most direct route**, as well as the easiest to travel— **because** God reasoned that **once the people experienced warfare they would relent** and return to Egypt.

וטעם המלחמה שיהיה להם לעבור דרך  
 ארץ פלשתים ופלשתים לא יתנום לעבור  
 בשלום וישבו למצרים

The reason for that warfare, is that they would have to cross Philistine territory— and since the Philistines would certainly not allow them to pass without a challenge, they would then return to Egypt.

אבל בדרך המדבר לא יראו מלחמה עד  
 היותם בארצם בארץ סיחון ועוג מלכי



**האמורי שהיא**  
**נתונה להם**  
**ורחוקים הם**  
**ממצרים בעת**  
**ההיא**

But by taking the round-about desert route, they would not encounter any armed challenge [for another forty years,] until they were in their own land— in **the territory of the Amorite [colonist-kings] Sichon and 'Og, which was being given to them**... and by that time they would be a long way from Egypt.

ומלחמת עמלק ברפידים לא היתה ראויה לשוב

בעבורה **כי הם לא יעברו עליהם והוא שבא מארצו ונלחם בהם לשנאתו אותם**

And as for the battle with 'Amaleiq at R'fidim [shortly after arriving in the southern Sinai, as described in this week's portion in Exodus 17], there would have been no need to go back [to Egypt] on **their** account. For [the Israelites] had not encroached upon ['Amaleiq]; rather, [the 'Amaleqites] **came forth from their land to attack us out of their malice towards us**.

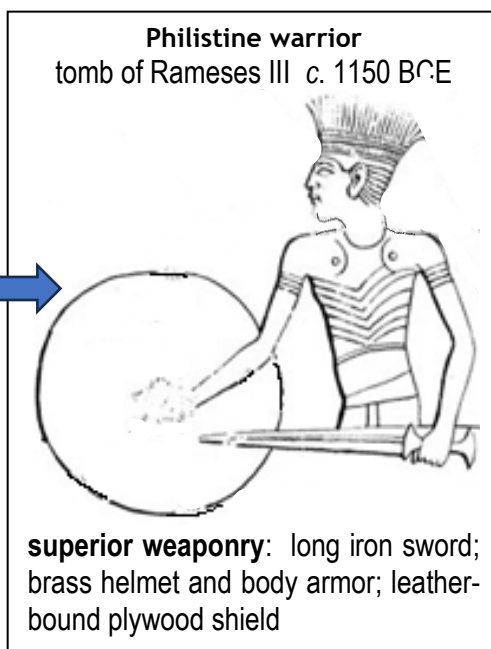
ואם יתנו ראש לשוב למצרים לא יועיל כי ילחם בהם בדרך וגם **רחוקים היו**  
**ממצרים בדרך העקום אשר הלכו בה ולא ידעו דרך אחרת**

Neither would it have availed [the Israelites] to turn tail and flee back to Egypt, since ['Amaleiq] would simply have harried their rear on the way— and, besides, on account of **the circuitous route they had followed, they were already very far** from Egypt, and they knew no other way to go.

**כי קרוב הוא - ונוח לשוב באותו הדרך למצרים**

B) RaSHI (Shlomo Yitzchaqi, 1040-1105) - "**Although** it was nearer"— so that it would have been easy enough for them **to have gone back to Egypt by that same route.**"

**ומדרש אגדה יש הרבה**



And there is plentiful aggadic *midrash* [on this verse].

conjunction	<b>כי</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“even though...”</li> <li>“when it happens that...”</li> <li>“should it happen that...”</li> <li>“that...”</li> <li>“for...”</li> <li>“because...”</li> </ul>	adjective	<b>קרוב</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“close[er/est]”</li> <li>“nearby”</li> <li>“near[er/est]”</li> <li>“adjacent”</li> <li>“kin relation”</li> <li>“soon”</li> </ul>
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### **כי קרוב הוא - שהם קרובין של הקב"ה**

C) Midrash Tanchuma, B'shallach 10 - “**Because** He is **close**” – signifies that [the Israelites are] **kin to The Holy And Blessed One**.

שנאמר וירם קרן לעמו לבני ישראל עם **קרוב**

Even as it is said in Scripture: “May he exalt the triumph of His People— the Israelites, the People who are His Own **close kin**!” [Psalm 148:14].

### **כי קרוב הוא - פירוש קרוב הוא לרמוז העם מקרוב בא**

D) Chayim ibn-Attar (1696-1742), *Or haChayim* - “**Because** they were **near**” – the word “**near**” is an allusion here to [that mixed multitude of people who— having witnessed God’s wonders wrought in Egypt—] **came along from within that immediate area**.

ואין לו חוזק בקדושה **קרוב** הוא להרשיע ויסובב רעה גם לישראל

Since [this rabble of idolatrous pagans] had no presumptive claim to the holiness [of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah], **their proximity was**[, as will be seen in Numbers 11:4,] **a corrupting influence**, returning evil against the Israelites as well.

### **כי קרוב הוא - קרוב הוא הדבר שאמר הקב"ה למשה בהוציאך את העם**

ממצרים תעבדון את האלהים על ההר הזה

E) Midrash M'chilta d'Rabi Yishma'Eil, b'Shallach Prelude - “**Because** it is **near**” – the time is **nigh for the fulfillment of what The Holy And Blessed One had told Moses**: “When you bring forth the People from Egypt, you will all worship God together on this mountain” [fifty days after leaving Egypt - Exodus 3:12].

**כי קרוב הוא - קרובה היא פורענות של פרעה הרשע**

שיפרע הקי' הקב"ה מהם

F) Midrash P'sikta d'Rav Kahanah, 11:9 - “**Because** it is **near**” – the time is **nigh for the punishment of the wicked Pharaoh**, who had oppressed the people of The Holy And Blessed One[, by overthrowing him in the depths of the Sea].

ד"א **כי קרוב הוא - קרובה**



Pharaoh and his host engulfed in the Sea  
by Frederick Arthur Bridgman, c. 1895



**היא פורענות של מצריים שיפרע הקב"ה מהם**

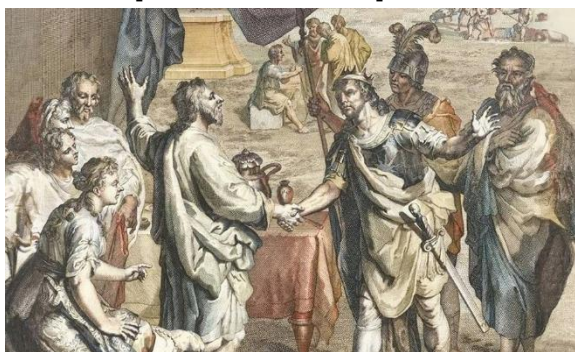
Alternately: “**Because** it is **near**” – the time is **nigh** for the **punishment of the wicked Egyptians**, who had oppressed the people of The Holy And Blessed One[, by overthrowing them— together with their leader, Pharaoh— in the depths of the Sea].

**ד"א כי קרוב הוא - קרוב הוא החסד שעשו הכנעניים עם אבינו יעקב הדא הוא דכתיב וירא יושב הארץ הכנעני את האבל**

Alternately: “**Because** it is **near**” – how **intimate** is the **kindness that the Canaanites showed** [in honoring the burial of] our forebear Jacob. This is as it is written: “When the residents of the land, the Canaanites, saw the scope of the mourning[ attendant upon the entombment of Jacob, they declared: ‘This is a great grieving of the Egyptians’” - Genesis 50:11].

**ד"א כי קרוב הוא - קרובה היא השבועה שהשביע אבימלך את אבינו אברהם הד"ה דכת' ועתה השבעה לי באלהים הנה אם תשקר לי ולניני ולנכדי וגי**

Alternately: “**Because** it is **near**” – how **imminent** is the [long-delayed fulfillment of] the **oath that** [the Canaanite ruler] **Avimelech exacted** of our Patriarch Abraham. This is as it



is written: “And now, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me and [my descendants for **three generations...**” Genesis 21:23].

Abimelech and Abraham enter into a treaty (Genesis 21)

by Jan van Vianen, c. 1725

**כי קרוב הוא - קרוב הוא שירשו הכנענים את הארץ דכתיב ודור רביעי ישובו הנה ועדיין לא היה להם דור רביעי והקיפן במדבר ארבעים שנה**

G) Midrash Tanchuma, b'Shallach 1 - “**Although** it was **near**” signifies that **it was too soon** for them to dispossess the Canaanites from the land. For it is written [that God had informed Abraham, centuries earlier:] “the fourth generation shall return here” [Genesis 15:16]. Now at that point it was not yet their fourth generation— **and so it is that He circled them around the Wilderness for forty years.**

**אמר הקב"ה אם אני מוליכן דרך פשוטה עכשיו מחזיקין איש איש בשדה**

**ובכרם ומבטלין מן התורה אלא אני**

**מוליכן דרך המדבר ויאכלו את המן**

**וישתו מי באר והתורה מתישבת בגופן**

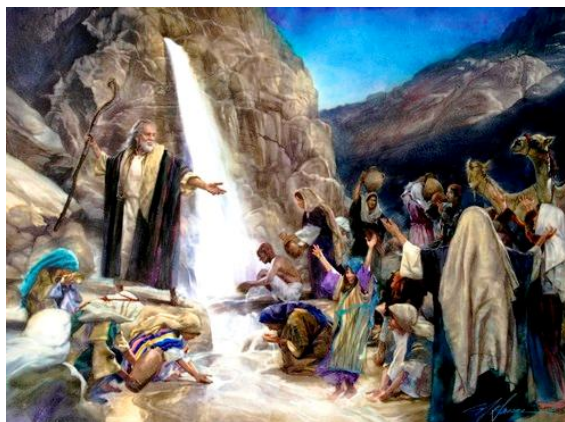
The Holy And Blessed One reasoned: “**If I take them straight there now, each one on acquiring a field and vineyard will neglect My Torah.** Instead I will guide them through the Wilderness, where they will eat *manna* from Heaven and drink water from the rock, so that the discipline of Torah will become incorporated into their bodies.”

**ועוד כששמעו הכנענים שישראל**

**נכנסין לארץ עמדו ושרפו את הזרעים ועקרו את האילנות וקצצו את הנטיעות**

**וסתרו את הבנינים וסתמו את המעינות**

- more over



Moreover, when the Canaanites heard that the Israelites were coming into the land [Exodus 15:15-18], they burned the grain; uprooted the trees; hewed down the plantings; tore down the buildings; and stopped up the wells.

אמר הקב"ה אני הבטחתי את אברהם אביהם להכניסם בארץ מלאה כל טוב  
הריני מעכבן במדבר ארבעים שנה עד שיעמדו הכנעניים ויתקנו מה שקלקלו

So The Holy And Blessed One reasoned: "I swore to their forebear Abraham that I would be bringing his descendants into a land full of every good thing. I will therefore postpone them in the Wilderness for forty years, **until the Canaanites have made good all that they just destroyed.**"

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H) David Feinstein (1929-2020), Kol Dodi - To understand **why The Eternal One found it best to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land the long way around**, we must understand the deep spiritual darkness in which the Jews lived at that time, and how weak was their appreciation of God's power in the world. To attain each new level of awareness, they had to overcome the influence of centuries of exposure to Egyptian idol worship and ignorance of the One God.

Each realization was so hard won, that **they could not be expected to go too far all at once**. God, for His part, chose not to show the Jews too much of His power at once, in order to introduce them gradually to a new way of looking at the world: that every minute detail of everything that happens is under His control. But **that learning process would take time**.

ויהי בשלח פרעה את העם וכו' - נוכל לומר דהנה האדם השב בתשובה לפניו  
יתברך שמו אזי מעלה עצמו מעומק הקליפות שהיה נשתקע שם ומוציא עצמו  
לחירות

I) Mei'ir haLeivi Rottenberg of Apt (1760-1827), Or laShamayim - "Now when Pharaoh **let the people go**" etc. - We can say that the person who repents before The Holy And Blessed One **raises himself up** from deep within the husks of sin in which he was enveloped, **and has thereby brought himself out to freedom**.

ואיתא בגמרא מ"מ תליא כרעיה דה"י דאי בעי ליעול בהא וליעול בהך לא  
מסתייע מילתא מחמת שבאותו דרך חטא וצריך לדחוק עצמו ולהעלות עצמו  
בתשובה שעושה

It is found in the Gemara [Babylonian Talmud, M'nachot 49b] that whoever desires The Ineffable and Blessed Name, who seeks help will receive help, taking delight in you even as you take delight in Him. Because **in the same manner that one sinned, one must push oneself and elevate oneself** by the penitence that we do.

Mei'ir haLeivi Rothenberg of Apt (the Apter Rebbe; the "Or laShamayim")		
	1760-1827	4 times great-grandfather
Pin'chas Rothenberg	1788-1852	3 times great-grandfather
Yitzchaq M'nachem Rothenberg	1822-1874	great-great-grandfather
Jacob Rothenberg	1847?-1913	great-grandfather
Lena Rothenberg	1894-1973	grandmother
Fred Farber	1920-1994	father
Carol Gross	1951-	