

## Torah Thoughts Beshalakh

5778:

There are times when events are so dramatic, when things affect us so deeply and immediately, that our automatic response is to break out in song and even dance. That is especially true when we are witness to history-altering events: the Allied victories in World War II, Israel's declaration of independence, the fall of the Berlin wall. In parshat Beshalakh this week we read of a similar spontaneous celebration as the sea of reeds closes over the Egyptian army and the Israelites realize that their redemption from slavery is truly complete and irreversible.

That moment remains a crucial memory for all Jews. Thousands of years later, we continue to read, and even sing, the words that the Torah records our ancestors singing at the shores of the sea on a daily basis: *Az yashir Moshe u'venei Yisrael...* The importance of that event resides both in what it meant for our history – the people would now go to Sinai and ultimately to the Promised Land – and in what it meant for Jewish identity and how we understand our relationship with God. Singing the Song of the Sea dramatically emphasizes our indebtedness to God and an identity as a redeemed people, not just in the past but in our own lives. Just as they were redeemed from actual slavery, we too are redeemed from every variety of slavery and suffering that constitute our personal 'mitzrayim.'

When we recover from illness, we are redeemed from mitzrayim. When we pull ourselves out of a damaging relationship or repair it to its former health, we are redeemed from mitzrayim. When we overcome fear, disillusionment or disappointment, we are redeemed from mitzrayim. Each time we survive a threat as individuals or as a people, we are redeemed. The Song of the Sea frames each redemption as an echo of that first redemption and, implicitly, puts God at the center of the process. Our ancestors saw dead Egyptians, and understood it as the hand of God. We too can see our own redemptions as evidence of God's presence and care for each life and each moment we rise up above what enslaves us.