



Crying Out into the Darkness: Leading in Times of Uncertainty

Hadar Institute

Wexner Institute 2025

I. Between the Army and the Sea

The first vignette to explore is from this week's Torah portion, parashat BeShallah. In this story, Moshe and the nation have to grapple with the uncertainty of being trapped between the Egyptian army and the Reed Sea.

We invite you to use the "Zoom In" side of your Pedagogy of Partnership bookmark to unpack this source with your havruta.

שמות יד:א-ד, ט-טז	Exodus 14:1-4, 9-16
א וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּשְׁבוּ וַיִּחַנוּ לִפְנֵי פִי הַחִירֹת בֵּין מִגְדֹל וּבֵין הַיָּם לִפְנֵי בַעַל זַפְּוֹן נֶכְחוּ תַּחְנוּ עַל הַיָּם: ג וְאָמַר פַּרְעֹה לְבָנָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל נִבְכִּים הֵם בְּאֶרֶץ סֹגְרָ עֲלֵיהֶם הַמִּדְבָּר: ד וַחֲזַקְתִּי אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה וַיִּרְדֹּף	¹ God said to Moshe: ² Tell the People of Israel to turn back and encamp before Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, before Baal-zephon; you shall encamp facing it, by the sea. ³ Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, "They are astray in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them." ⁴ Then I will stiffen Pharaoh's heart and he



<p style="text-align: center;"> אַחֲרֵיהֶם וְאֶכְבְּדָהּ בְּפָרְעָה וּבְכָל חִילוֹ וַיַּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי אֲנִי ה' וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן: </p>	<p>will pursue them, that I may gain glory through Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am God. And they did so.</p>
<p><i>Pharaoh is told that the nation has fled and he changed his mind. Upset at letting the People of Israel go, Pharaoh saddles up his horses and chases after them with 600 soldiers.</i></p>	
<p> ט וַיִּרְדְּפוּ מִצְרַיִם אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁיגוּ אוֹתָם חֲנִיּוֹת עַל הַיָּם כָּל סוֹס רֶכֶב פָּרְעָה וּפָרָשָׁיו וַחִילוֹ עַל פִּי הַחִירֹת לְפָנָיו בְּעַל צָפֵן: י וּפָרְעָה הִקְרִיב וַיִּשְׂאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת עֵינֵיהֶם וְהִנֵּה מִצְרַיִם נֹסְעֵי אַחֲרֵיהֶם וַיִּירָאוּ מְאֹד וַיִּצְעֲקוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל ה': יא וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה הַמַּבְלִי אִין קְבָרִים בְּמִצְרַיִם לְקַחְתָּנוּ לְמוֹת בְּמִדְבָּר מִה זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לָנוּ לְהוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם: יב הֲלֹא זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְנוּ אֵלֶיךָ בְּמִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר חַדְל מִמֶּנּוּ וְנַעֲבֹדָה אֶת מִצְרַיִם כִּי טוֹב לָנוּ עֲבֹד אֶת מִצְרַיִם מִמֵּתְנוּ בְּמִדְבָּר: יג וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אַל תִּירָאוּ הַתִּיצְבוּ וּרְאוּ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם כִּי אֲשֶׁר רְאִיתֶם אֶת מִצְרַיִם הַיּוֹם לֹא תִסִּיפוּ לְרַאֲתָם עוֹד עַד עוֹלָם: יד ה' יִלְחַם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחְרִישׁוּן. </p>	<p> ⁹the Egyptians gave chase to them, and all the chariot horses of Pharaoh, his riders, and his warriors overtook them encamped by the sea, near Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon. ¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the People of Israel caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the People of Israel cried out to God. ¹¹And they said to Moshe, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?’” ¹³But Moshe said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which God will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. ¹⁴God will battle for you; you hold your peace!” </p>
<p> טו וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִה תִצְעַק אֵלַי דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְעוּ: טז וְאַתָּה </p>	<p> ¹⁵Then God said to Moshe, “Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the People of Israel to go forward. ¹⁶And you lift up </p>



<p>הָרַם אֶת מִטְּךָ וַנִּטֵּה אֶת יָדְךָ עַל הַיָּם וּבִקְעָהוּ וַיָּבֵאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֶּשֶׁה:</p>	<p>your rod and hold out your arm over the sea and split it, so that the People of Israel may march into the sea on dry ground.</p>
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When you are done zooming in, turn the bookmark over to the “Zoom Out” side. Share with your partner where you see uncertainty in this passage: How do the people navigate uncertainty in this passage? How does Moshe? What about God?

Notice that in verse 15, God gets upset at Moshe for crying out. The following interpreters grapple with Moshe’s shouting in this uncertain moment:

Rashi: Praying in Uncertain Times

רש"י שמות יד:טו	Rashi on Exodus 14:15
<p>מה תצעק אלי – למדנו שהיה משה עומד ומתפלל. אמר לו הקב"ה: לא עת עתה להאריך שישראל נתונין בצרה.</p>	<p>“Why do you cry out to me?” teaches us that Moshe was standing and praying. God said to him, “Now is not the time to go on at length, because Israel is in trouble!”</p>

According to Rashi, what is Moshe’s response to uncertainty? What is the source of God’s upset?

Ramban: Emotional Reaction to Uncertainty

רמב"ן שמות יד:טו	Ramban on Exodus 14:15



<p>ורבותינו אמרו שהיה משה צועק ומתפלל. והוא הנכון, כי לא ידע מה יעשה, ואף על פי שאמר לו השם: ואכבדה בפרעה, הוא לא היה יודע איך יתנהג, כי הוא על שפת הים והשונא רודף ומשיג, והיה מתפלל שיורנו ה' דרך יבחר. וזה טעם מה תצעק, שהיית צריך לשאל מה תעשה ואין לך צרך לצעוק, כי כבר הודעתוך: ואכבדה בפרעה.</p>	<p>Our rabbis said that Moshe was crying out and praying. And this is correct because he didn't know what to do, even though God said to him, "I will gain glory through Pharaoh," he did not know how he should act, because he was at the shore of the sea with the enemy pursing and catching up, so he was praying that God should instruct him on the path to choose. And this is the meaning of "Why do you cry out?"—[God said to Moshe,] "You needed to ask what to do, and there is no need to cry out—because I already informed you, 'I will gain glory through Pharaoh.'"</p>
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The Ramban notices that God already shared with Moshe what was about to transpire, and yet Moshe cries out. What do you think led Moshe to cry out? Where do you see yourself as a leader - in the shoes of people, Moshe, or God?

Sefat Emet: God's Leadership

In the following passage, the Sefat Emet empathizes with the people's uncertainty—although they had already seen God's miracles, now God was asking them to step up on their own. Share with your havruta what dynamic the Sefat Emet sees at play here. What can we learn from the Sefat Emet about leading at a time of uncertainty? What makes you feel "ready" to lead? What resources can we draw upon to feel able to lead when we don't feel ready?

<p style="text-align: center;">שפת אמת בשלח תרל"א</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sefat Emet BeShallah (1871)</p>
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<p>דבר אל בני"י וישבו כו'. י"ל טעם הענין שיצ"מ הי' נס שלא בהדרגה. והיא לשעה.</p>	<p>“Speak to the People of Israel, and have them return...” One can explain the reason for this matter: the Exodus was a miracle that did not happen in stages; it was of the moment.</p>
<p>ורצה הש"י שישאר גאולה זו בעצמות ישראל. וכן רצון הש"י תמיד מכל איש ישראל. לעת מצוא השעה. שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה. ואז צריך לקבוע בלבו על אח"כ שידע להתנהג גם בעת ההסתר. ולכך צוה שיחזרו ויעלו מעצמותם. ולכך ויצעקו.</p>	<p>And the Blessed Name wanted this redemption to remain within the essence of Israel. And this is the will of God for every Jew, at all times, at the proper moment. There is no person who does not have their own moment. At that time, one must affix it in their heart so that afterward they will know how to function, even in times of concealment. Therefore, God commanded them to return and rise up from their own selves. And this is why they cried out.</p>
<p>ולכאורה מאחר שראו נפלאותיו שאין להם שיעור למה יראו. אך כי ידעו שעתה צריכין לגבור מעצמם... ואפשר ז"ש בני"י טוב לנו עבוד כו'. פי' שחששו שלא יוכלו לגבור מעצמם. והי' רצונם שבמצרים עצמו יאריך הזמן עד שיהיו ראויין מעצמם. והי' בנקל יותר. כי הש"י הבטיח אנכי אעלך כו'. אך כי רצון הש"י הי' שהם בעצמם ממש יזכו ע"י נס הקדום כנ"ל.</p>	<p>At first glance, since they had seen wonders without measure, why should they be afraid? But because they knew that now they needed to be strong on their own... And it is possible that this is the meaning of their words “It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians...” That is, they feared they would not be able to be strong on their own. They wanted the time to be lengthened in Egypt until they were worthy on their own, which would have been easier. After all, God had promised, “I will bring you up...” (Exodus 6:6). But the will of God was that <i>they themselves</i> would earn it through the previous miracle, so it seems to me.</p>

Sefat Emet Continued: Moshe’s Leadership



In this passage the Sefat Emet turns the tables on the critiques of Rashi and Ramban. The Sefat Emet sees Moshe's shouting as a positive act of leadership. According to the Sefat Emet, what is the emotional quality of Moshe's shouting? How is Moshe's shouting and prayer an act of leadership?

<p>שואלין מה תצעק שאין צריך צעקה כלל. ...וא"ע ורמב"ן מקשים על צעקת מרע"ה. הלא הקב"ה הבטיחו שאכבדה בפרעה כו'. וצעקת בני"י לא ידעו מזה כי אין מפורש שמרע"ה הגיד להם וי"ל שא"ל רק שישובו. [ומה שלא אמר להם. נראה כי לשון מאמר ה' ואמר פרעה לבני"י כו' משמע שזה נאמר לו. והפסיק הציווי של אמירתו לישראל וישובו ע"ש].</p>	<p>They asked: Why are you crying out? There is no need for a cry at all... And both the Oh ha-<u>Hayyim</u> and the Ramban raise a difficulty about Moses' cry: Didn't God promise: "I will be made great through Pharaoh"? As for the cry of the children of Israel, one could explain that they did not know about this promise, because it is not explicitly mentioned that Moses had told them—it could be he only told them that they would return [from Egypt]...</p>
<p>אבל מרע"ה למה צעק. אך נראה כי מדרך הצדיק לצעוק אף על מה שנבטח. שמאמר הש"י הוא אחר שלימות פעולותיו של האדם. ותפילה וצעקה בכלל פעולת אדם השלם לאלהיו. ולזאת מה שיהי' נושע ע"י תפילה וצעקה. הוא הישועה שנבטח עליו. ונראה שאין מבטיחין באמת רק למי שידע זה שצריך צעקה גם אחר ההבטחה. [וז"ש אין הבטחה לצדיקים. וי"ל שלכך לא נאמר לישראל ההבטחה שלא היו צועקין. והש"י רצה שיצעקו כמ"ש במד' השמיעני את קולך. (שיר</p>	<p>But why did Moses cry out? It seems that it is the way of the righteous to cry out even regarding what they were promised, for God's promise comes <i>after</i> the completion of human actions. Prayer and crying out are <i>part of</i> the actions of a person striving to become complete towards God. Therefore, the salvation achieved through prayer and crying out is the salvation that one was promised. And it seems that promises, in truth, are only made to those who recognize that crying out is necessary, even after the promise. And this is what is meant by, "There is no promise to the righteous." And it could be that this is</p>



<p style="text-align: center;">השירים רבה ב:יד) אבל מרע"ה אף</p> <p style="text-align: center;">שנבטח צעק. ולכך נאמר לו ההבטחה</p> <p style="text-align: center;">כנ"ל]:</p>	<p>why the promise was not given directly to Israel, because they would not have cried out. But God wanted them to cry out, as the Midrash says, "Let me hear your voice." (Song of Songs Rabbah 2:14)</p> <p>However, Moses, even though he was promised, still cried out. And that is why the promise was given to him, as mentioned earlier.</p>
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II. Stepping into the Darkness

In this second vignette, the nation fears the moment before revelation but Moshe steps into the darkness. As you study this passage with your havruta, reflect on Moshe's development as a leader since the Reed Sea moment. What do you think Moshe's internal state was as he stepped into the darkness? Has he changed since the moment at the Sea? Do you wish he would have responded differently to the people?

שמות כ:טו-יח	Exodus 20:15-18
<p>טו וְכָל הָעָם רֹאִים אֶת הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת הַלְפִידִם וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר וְאֶת הַהָר עֹשֵׂן וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנְעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק: טז וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֵתָּה עִמָּנוּ וְנִשְׁמָעָה וְאַל יְדַבֵּר עִמָּנוּ אֱלֹקִים כִּי נָמוֹת: יז וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אֵל תִּירְאוּ כִּי לִבְעֹבוֹר נִסּוּת אֶתְכֶם בָּא</p>	<p>¹⁵All the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the blare of the horn and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they fell back and stood at a distance. ¹⁶"You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die."</p> <p>¹⁷Moses answered the people, "Be not afraid; for God has come only in order to test you, and in order that</p>



<p>הָאֱלֹקִים וּבַעֲבוּר תְּהִיָּה יְרֵאתוֹ עַל פְּנִיכֶם לְבַלְתִּי תִחַטָּאוּ: יח וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם מֵרַחֵק וּמֹשֶׁה נִגַּשׁ אֶל הָעֲרָפֶל אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֱלֹקִים.</p>	<p>the fear of God may be ever with you, so that you do not go astray.”¹⁸ So the people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.</p>
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How does Rebbe Nahman of Breslov, in his book the Likkutei Moharan, understand why Moshe was able to step into the darkness of uncertainty?

לקוטי מוהר"ן קטו	Likkutei Moharan #115
<p>וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם מֵרַחֵק, וּמֹשֶׁה נִגַּשׁ אֶל הָעֲרָפֶל אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֱלֹקִים (שמות כ):</p>	<p>"And the people stood from afar, and Moses drew near to the thick cloud where God was" (Exodus 20:21)</p>
<p>כִּי מִי שֶׁהוּא הוֹלֵךְ בְּגִשְׁמִיּוֹת כָּל יָמָיו, וְאַחַר כֵּן נִתְלַהֵב וְרוֹצֵה לֵילֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, אֲזִי מַדַּת הַדִּין מְקַטְרֵג עָלָיו, וְאֵינוֹ מְנִיחַ אוֹתוֹ לֵילֵךְ בְּדַרְכֵי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וּמַזְמִין לוֹ מְנִיעָה.</p>	<p>For one who has spent his whole life engaged in physicality, and afterward becomes inflamed and desires to walk in the ways of the Blessed Name, then the attribute of judgment accuses him, and does not let him walk in the ways of the Blessed Name, and introduces impediments.</p>
<p>וְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ חֲפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא, וּמִסְתִּיר אֶת עַצְמוֹ כְּבִיכּוֹל בְּהַמְנִיעָה הַזֹּאת (עֵין לְמַטָּה). וּמִי שֶׁהוּא בֵּר דַּעַת, הוּא מִסְתַּכֵּל בְּהַמְנִיעָה, וּמוֹצֵא שָׁם הַבּוֹרָא בְּרוּךְ הוּא...</p>	<p>But the Blessed Name desires kindness, and God hides God's self, so to speak, within this impediment (see below). And one who is knowledgeable looks into the impediment and finds there the Holy Blessed One...</p>
<p>וּמְנִיעָה הוּא בְּחִינַת עָנָן וְעֲרָפֶל, כִּי עָנָן וְעֲרָפֶל הֵינּוּ חֹשֶׁךְ, חֹשֶׁךְ הוּא לְשׁוֹן</p>	<p>An impediment is the aspect of “a cloud and a thick mist”, for a cloud and a mist represent darkness.</p>



<p>מְנִיעָה, כְּמוֹ שִׁכְתּוּב (בראשית כב): וְלֹא חִשְׁכֶּתָּ.</p>	<p>Darkness is a term for a impediment, as it is written (Genesis 22): "And you did not withhold."</p>
<p>וְזֶה פְרוּשׁ הַפְּסוּק:</p>	<p>And this is the interpretation of the verse:</p>
<p>וַיַּעֲמֵד הָעָם מֵרָחֵק – כִּי כְשֶׁרוֹאִין הָעֶרְפֶּל, הֵינּוּ הַמְּנִיעָה כִּנ"ל, עוֹמְדִין מֵרָחֵק.</p>	<p>"And the people stood from afar" – because when they saw the mist, which represents the impediment mentioned above, they stood from afar.</p>
<p>וּמֹשֶׁה, שֶׁהוּא בְּחִינּוֹת דַּעַת כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,</p>	<p>"And Moses, who represents the knowledge of all Israel,</p>
<p>נִגַּשׁ אֶל הָעֶרְפֶּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֱלֹקִים – הֵינּוּ אֶל הַמְּנִיעָה, שֶׁבָּהּ בְּעֶצְמָהּ נִסְתָּר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ:</p>	<p>drew near to the thick cloud where God was" – that is, he drew near to the impediment, where within it itself the Blessed Name is hidden.</p>
<p>עוֹד שָׁמַעְנוּ בְּזֶה מִפִּי הַקְּדוֹשׁ, שֶׁהוֹסִיף לְבַאֵר הָעֵנִין הַנ"ל, מֵה שֶׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּעֶצְמוֹ מִסְתִּיר אֶת עֶצְמוֹ בְּתוֹךְ הַמְּנִיעָה כִּנ"ל... וּמִי שֶׁהוּא בֵּר דַּעַת, יְכוּל לְמַצֵּא אֶת הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּתוֹךְ הַמְּנִיעוֹת בְּעֶצְמוֹ, כִּי בְּאֵמֶת אֵין שׁוּם מְנִיעָה בְּעוֹלָם כָּלֵל, כִּי בְּתִקְוַת הַמְּנִיעוֹת בְּעֶצְמוֹ נִסְתָּר הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, וְעַל יְדֵי הַמְּנִיעוֹת בְּעֶצְמוֹ דִּיקָא יְכוּלִין לְהִתְקַרֵּב לְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ, כִּי שָׁם נִסְתָּר הוּא יִתְבָּרַךְ כִּנ"ל.</p>	<p>We have also heard from the mouth of the holy master, that he further explained this matter: that the Blessed Name personally hides God's own essence within the impediment as mentioned above... But one who is a person of knowledge can find the Blessed Name within the impediments themselves, for in truth there is no impediment at all in the world. For within the very force of the impediments themselves, the Blessed Name is hidden, and specifically <i>through</i> the impediments themselves, one can come closer to the Blessed Name, because there the Blessed One is hidden, as mentioned above.</p>



<p>וַיִּזְהַר: וּמֹשֶׁה נִגַּשׁ אֶל הָעֶרְפֹּל – שֶׁהוּא הַמְּנִיעָה, כִּי שָׁם הָאֱלֹקִים – כַּנִּ"ל:</p>	<p>And this is the meaning of: “And Moses drew near to the thick cloud” – this is the impediment, “where God was” – as mentioned above.</p>
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