

## Liminal Moments

Parshat B'Shalach 5782, Yael Keller

### Definition



- 1: of, relating to, or situated at a sensory threshold : barely perceptible or capable of eliciting a response
- 2: of, relating to, or being an intermediate state, phase, or condition: In-between, transitional ... in the liminal state between life and death.

### Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “The Space Between - Bamidbar”

Van Gennep in his *The Rites of Passage* argued that societies develop rituals to mark the transition from one state to the next – from childhood to adulthood, for example, or from being single to being married – and they involve three stages. The first is separation, a symbolic break with the past. The third is incorporation, re-entering society with a new identity. Between the two is the crucial stage of transition when, having said goodbye to who you were but not yet hello to who you are about to become, you are recast, reborn, refashioned.

### Shmot 13:17-18

Now when Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the Phillistines, although it was nearer; for God said, “The people may have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.” So God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up armed out of the land of Egypt.

וַיְהִי בְשַׁלַּח פָּרְעֹה אֶת־הָעָם וְלֹא־נָתַם  
אֱלֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פִּלִּשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הָיָא  
כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים פְּנִי־נָתַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם  
מִלְחָמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִם: וַיֹּסֶב אֱלֹקִים  
אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף וַחֲמִשָּׁים  
עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

### Rabbeinu Chananel, 13:17

He led them through the desert for a different reason, apart from the fact that the route through the land of the Philistines was the most convenient one. Had He led them in that direction... God could not have performed even a fraction of the miracles He had in mind to perform in order to strengthen the people's confidence in Him. (translated by Sefaria)

### Guide to the Perplexed, Part 3:32

Here God led the people about, away from the direct road which He originally intended, because He feared they might meet on that way with hardships too great for their ordinary strength; He took them by another road in order to obtain thereby His original object. In the same manner God refrained from prescribing what the people by their natural disposition would be incapable of obeying, and gave the above-mentioned commandments as a means of securing His chief object, viz., to spread a knowledge of Him [among the people], and to cause them to reject idolatry. It is contrary to man's nature that he should suddenly abandon all the different kinds of Divine service and the different customs in

וכמו שהסב האלוה אותם מן הדרך  
הישרה אשר היתה מכוונת תחלה מפני  
יראת מה שלא היו גופותם יכולים לסבלו  
לפי הטבע אל דרך אחרת עד שתגיע  
הכונה הראשונה - כן צוה בזאת המצוה  
אשר זכרנו מפני יראת מה שאין יכולת  
לנפש לקבלו לפי הטבע שתגיע הכונה  
הראשונה והיא - השגתו ית' והנחת  
'עבודה זרה'. כי כמו שאין בטבע האדם  
שיגדל על מלאכת עבדות בחומר  
ובלבנים והדומה להם ואחר כן ירחץ ידיו

which he has been brought up, and which have been so general, that they were considered as a matter of course; it would be just as if a person trained to work as a slave with mortar and bricks, or similar things, should interrupt his work, clean his hands, and at once fight with real giants. It was the result of God's wisdom that the Israelites were led about in the wilderness till they acquired courage.

לשעתו מלכלוכם וילחם עם 'ילידי הענק'  
פתאום כן אין בטבעו שיגדל על מינים  
רבים מן העבודות ומעשים מורגלים  
שכבר נטו אליהם הנפשות עד ששבו  
כמושכל ראשון ויניחם כולם פתאום. וכמו  
שהיה מחכמת האלוה להסב אותם  
במדבר עד שילמדו גבורה

#### Eruvin 53b.

**One time I was walking along the path, and I saw a young boy sitting at the crossroads. And I said to him: On which path shall we walk in order to get to the city? He said to me: This path is short and long, and that path is long and short. I walked on the path that was short and long. When I approached the city I found that gardens and orchards surrounded it, and I did not know the trails leading through them to the city. I went back and met the young boy again and said to him: My son, didn't you tell me that this way is short? He said to me: And didn't I tell you that it is also long? I kissed him on his head and said to him: Happy are you, O Israel, for you are all exceedingly wise, from your old to your young.**

פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך וראיתי  
תינוק יושב על פרשת דרכים ואמרתי  
לו באיזה דרך נלך לעיר אמר לי זו  
קצרה וארוכה וזו ארוכה וקצרה  
והלכתי בקצרה וארוכה כיון שהגעתי  
לעיר מצאתי שמקיפין אותה גנות  
ופרדיסין חזרתי לאחורי אמרתי לו בני  
הלא אמרתי לי קצרה אמר לי ולא  
אמרתי לך ארוכה נשקתיו על ראשו  
ואמרתי לו אשריכם ישראל שכולכם  
חכמים גדולים אתם מגדולכם ועד  
קטנכם: