Seventh Day of Pesach: The Day of the Splitting of the Sea Rabbi Eliot Malomet April 19, 2025 21 Nisan 5785

The Torah reading for the Seventh Day of Passover consists of the first four alivot of Parashat **Beshalach** leading up to the Song of the Sea and its immediate aftermath (Exod. 13:17 - 15:26). The reason for this is because the rabbis believed that the miracle of the splitting of the sea occurred on the seventh day of the Exodus. Surprisingly though, the text does not explicitly say that. Considering that other lesser important events in Israel's journey have an explicit timestamp, this omission is rather odd. How then do we account for commemorating the splitting of the sea on the Seventh Day of Passover? We can piece together some details from the text. 1. The Israelites were to slaughter their paschal lambs at sunset of the 14th day of the 1st month (Exod. 12:6). 2. They were to roast the lambs through the night and eat them with unleavened bread and bitter herbs not leaving any leftovers by morning (12:8-10). 3. However, it was in the middle of that evening that the plague of the firstborn erupted (12:29) during which the people were ordered to leave Egypt. That was the evening between the 14th and 15th, which we conventionally understand to be already part of the 15th day, even though the Torah does not explicitly say so. It will say so explicitly in the book of Numbers (33:3). Beyond that, the Torah does not date the events that occurred in the immediate days following the Exodus. To fill in the blanks, therefore, we have to rely on a midrashic analysis. Enter Midrash Seder Olam Rabbah²:

בי"ד יוֹם בּוֹ שָׁחָטוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת פְּסְחֵיהֶן בְּמִצְרִים, וְיוֹם חֲמִישִׁי הָיָה, וּבּוֹ בּלַּיְלָה לָקוּ הַבְּכוֹרוֹת. מְמָּחֲרַת הַפֶּסְח עֵרָב שַׁבָּת הָיָה, נָסְעוּ מֵרְעִּמְסֵס, שֻׁנְּאֱמֵר: וַיִּסְעוּ בְּנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵרְעָמְסִס סֻכֹּתָה (שׁמִּ יבּ:לוּ), וּכְתִיב: וַיִּסְעוּ מֵרְעְמְסֵס בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן בַחֲמִשָּׁה עָשֶׁר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ (במי לִּגִּנּ) וְּכְתִיב: וּמְצְרִים מְקַבְּרִים וְגוֹ' (בּמִי לִּגִּיז). וּמְרַעְמְסֵס נָסְעוּ לְסָכּוֹת, וּמְסֵּכֹּת לְאַתָם, [וּמֵאֵתָם] לְּפְנֵי פִּי הַחִירֹת. הָרִי ג' יָמִים! בְּבְיעי, וַיָּגַד לְמֶלֶּדְ מִצְרִים כִּי בָרְח הָשֶׁם (שֹמִי יִדִּה) בַּחֲמִישִׁי וּבִשְׁשׁ, וַיִּרְדְפוּ מִצְרִים וְגוֹ' (יִדִּיט). אוֹר שְׁבִיעִי יֵרְדוּ לַיָם, שֶׁנָּאֱמֵר: וַיְהִי הָעָנָן וְהַחֹשֶׁךְ וַיָּצְר אֶת הַלַּיְלָה (יִדִּים) לְשַׁחֲרִית, עָלוּ יִשְׁרָאֵל מִן הַיָּם וְנִשְׁקְעוּ מִצְרִיִּים. וּבְאוֹתָה שָׁעָּה אָמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁירָה שְׁנָאֶלֵה: אָז יָשִיר וְגוֹ' (שֹמִי טִיא) וְיוֹם חֲמִישִׁי בְּשַבָּת הָיָה. וְהוּא הָיָה יוֹם טוֹב אַחְרוֹן שֶׁל פֶּסָח. (סדר עוֹלם רבה ה׳)

On the 14th [of Nisan] the Children of Israel slaughtered their Pesach offerings in Egypt, and it was a Thursday. And on that night the firstborn [of Egypt] were stricken. From the day after Pesach, which was a Friday, they travelled from Rameses, as it is written: And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succot, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children (Exod. 12:37). And it is written, And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after Pesach the children of Israel went out with a high hand

in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians buried all their firstborn, which the Lord had smitten among them: upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments (Num. 33:3-4). From Rameses they traveled to Succot, and from Succot to Etham, and from Etham to Pi-hahiroth, in all three days! On the fourth day, And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled (Exod. 14:5). On the fifth and the sixth, And the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baalzephon (Exod. 14:9). In the evening of the seventh day, they went down to the sea, as it is written, And the cloud and darkness [were there, but it gave] light by night [to them] (Exod. 14:20). In the morning, Israel went up from the sea, and Egypt sank, and in that hour the Children of Israel said the song, as it is written, Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord (Exod. 15:1). And the day was Thursday, and it was the last festival day of Pesach.

We can explicate this a little more clearly with the following chart:

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Date	The Event	How Do We Know
Thursday,	Slaughter of the lambs.	Exod. 12:6 and
14 Nisan	At sunset on day 14.	Num. 33:3. (See
Exodus	Eve of day 15.	below why this
Day 0		day was a
		Thursday.)
Friday,	At night, eve of day 15,	Implied by the
15 Nisan	they leave Rameses and	text, assuming
Exodus	arrive at Succot	that it took only
Day 1	sometime the next day.	one day to get
, and the second	By the end of the 1st	there.
	day, they are at Succot.	
Saturday,	They travel from	Implied by the
16 Nisan	Succot and arrive at	text, assuming
Exodus	Etham sometime that	that it took only
Day 2	day. By the end of the	one day to get
	2nd day, they are at	there.
	Etham.	
Sunday,	They travel from	Implied by the
17 Nisan	Etham and arrive at Pi	text, assuming
Exodus	Hahirot sometime that	that it took only
Day 3	day. By the end of the	one day to get
	3rd day, they are at Pi	there.
	Hahirot.	
Monday,	Pharaoh hears that they	This corresponds
18 Nisan	have escaped. This is	to Moses' earlier
Exodus	the 4th day. He	request that they
Day 4	dispatches his army.	have a three-day

¹ For example, the arrival at the Wilderness of Syn immediately following this story takes place *on the 15th day of the second month* (Exod. 16:1). Really? That's more important than the splitting of the sea?

stories beyond what is in the biblical text and instead fills in gaps and addresses questions that arise in the biblical text, like Isaac's age at the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) and the number of years that Joshua led the Israelites. It is referred to often, by direct quotation or allusion, in the Talmud, early midrashim, and early biblical commentaries like that of Rashi. From Sefaria.

² "The Great Order of the World" a second-century chronicle that details the dates of biblical events from creation to Alexander the Great's conquest of the ancient Near East (333 BCE). It adds no

	1st day of the Egyptian pursuit.	journey in order to worship God
Tuesday, 19 Nisan Exodus Day 5	2nd day of the Egyptian pursuit.	(Exod. 3:18) When Pharaoh was informed that they were not returning, he concludes that they escaped.
Wednesday, 20 Nisan Exodus Day 6	3rd day of Egyptian pursuit. They catch up to them that evening.	Israelites travel three days. While Israel encamps at the shore of the Sea of Reeds for three days the Egyptians catch up to them.
Thursday, 21 Nisan Exodus Day 7	The splitting of the sea took place at eve of the 7th day. The singing took place the following morning.	The text says all of this happened throughout the night.

How do we know that the **splitting of the sea** took place on the eve of a **Thursday**? The Torah tells us that **after** the splitting of the sea the people journeyed from the Wilderness of Shur for three days to a place they called Mara because the water there was too bitter to drink. God told Moses to throw a piece of wood into the water to make it potable and it was there that he imposed law and judgment for them (Exod. 15:25). The law in that instance according to the Rabbis, was the law of the Shabbat. While that was not their first Shabbat from the Exodus, it was the first Shabbat during which they were truly free and safe from the possibility of being captured and returned to Egypt. According to this chronology, they left the safe side of the Sea of Reeds on the same day that it split, and they sang, (i.e. day 7, a Thursday) and got to Mara on Shabbat. (3-day journey: Thursday, Friday, Shabbat).

Did Moses know ahead of time that the **splitting of the sea** would occur on the **seventh** day? Consider that when Moses issued the instructions for the festival of Passover **prior to the Exodus**, he says (Exod. 12:16):

וביוֹם הָראשׁוֹן מִקְרָא לְדָשׁ וּבִיוֹם <mark>הַשְּבִיעִי</mark> מִקְרָא לְדָשׁ יִהְיֶה לֶכֶם. And on the first day, a proclamation of holiness, and on the <mark>seventh</mark> day, a proclamation of holiness.

Moses was a prophet so of course, it is possible that he knew what was going to happen. But it is also possible to argue that the holiness of the seventh day was already built into the Passover festival, and that the occurrence of the *splitting of the sea* on that day is a profound example of the layering of special events on significant days, something that we see elsewhere in the midrash³ and frankly, in all of Judaism.⁴ But there is probably a much more sensible explanation: *Seven is the key number of the Bible. Seven*

Some customs of the Seventh Day of Passover

Several beautiful customs have evolved to commemorate the splitting of the sea on the Seventh Day of Passover. Some communities gather at midnight to recite the Song of the Sea verse by verse with festive melodies and dancing. The community of Tzfat during the time of the great mystic, R. Isaac Luria, (1534-1572) would recite the Song of the Sea in the early morning after a night of study, which would have included passages of the Zohar pertaining to mysteries of the **splitting of the sea**. Libyan Jews would gather their entire communities to recite the Song outdoors beside the synagogue. Tunisian Jews would hold their services by the seashore of the Mediterranean, and when they returned to the synagogue they would hold a procession in which two members would dress up as Moses and Aaron, accompanied by songs and dances. Today in Israel there are some communities along the coast and in Eilat that recite the Song of the Sea at the shore. During the Torah reading, some congregations spill water on the floor. Hasidic communities encourage spiritual efforts to strengthen one's awe and trust in God and one's rebbe on the Seventh Day of Passover as a way of reenacting this verse prior to the Song of the Sea:

וַיַּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַיָּד הַגְּדֹלָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה ה׳ בְּמִצְרַיִם <mark>וַיִּירְאוּ</mark> הָעֶם אֶת ה׳ <mark>וַיַּאֲמִינוּ</mark> בָּה׳ וּבְמֹשֶׁה עַבְדוֹ. (שמ׳ יד:לא)

and Israel saw the great hand that God had wrought against Egypt. The people held God in awe; they trusted in God and in Moses his servant. (Exod. 14:31)

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (1789-1866) the third Rebbe of Chabad invented the idea that the Seventh Day of Passover was the אַסְירוּת הַנְּפֶשׁ - the New Year of selflessness, devotion, altruism and wholehearted dedication. This is because (according to midrash) Nahshon ben Aminadav acted in such a manner when he waded into the sea until the waters were at his neck, at which point the sea split. May we all use this day to strengthen our faith and pledge to live in wholehearted selflessness! Amen! Hag Sameah!

Today is Day 561. We continue to pray for the return of the hostages being held in captivity in Gaza by evil messengers of destruction during this Festival of Freedom. May God comfort the bereaved, protect the IDF, heal the wounded and shield Israel from continued terror. Amen!

In honor of Yaakov and Gabi on the birth of their daughter on the Second Day of Pesach in Jerusalem.

Mazel Tov! Rabbi Eliot Malomet and Kim Pimley

is God's number. Seven days recalls the Creation of the world. Placing the splitting of the sea on the seventh day of the Exodus tells us that just as Creation culminates with Shabbat, the Exodus culminates with the splitting of the sea. The seven days of Passover therefore commemorate a period of re-creation for the world and for Israel. The lack of textual proof for this simply demonstrates how self-evident this is.

³15 Nisan is also the date ascribed to God's Covenant of the Pieces with Abraham (Gen. 15) and the birth of Isaac.

⁴ Tisha B'av is a good example of how calamitous events are layered on a specific date.