



## Table Talk

# Table Talk: Beshalach

Prepared by: Jonathan Eig

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Fifty years ago, when a family wanted to share the details of a big event with their friends and neighbors, they invited them to the house to watch a slideshow. They'd mix a pitcher of cocktails, put out snacks, and tell their story as pictures flashed on the living-room wall.

Now we have Facebook, which works a lot more smoothly even if it doesn't encourage the partaking of cocktails.

But what did people do to share their important stories 3,000 years ago? In *parashat* Beshalach, when God parts the Red Sea and destroys the Egyptian army, the Israelites gather to sing a song. To be sure, the song is offered in thanks to God, but it's also way of recording and sharing history. To use a modern phrase, it's spin control, an attempt to frame the memory and create a narrative that will launch a new nation. The song goes, in part:

*At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up,  
The floods stood straight like a wall*

Those details mattered. It wasn't Moses parting the sea with his staff (ala Charlton Heston) and it wasn't a sudden shift in the tide. The song is clear. This was God's work, and it was awesome. It wasn't God alone, of course. The Israelites had to take the first step. They had to show faith by walking into the sea. But the most important message in *The Song at the Sea* is that God delivered, and that was worth singing about and still is.

At the Shabbat table tonight, tell your own stories of the big events in your family's history. And try these questions:

1. What's a story from your life that you've told many times? What's the story's theme? How does who you're telling define your spin on the event?
2. The Torah says God "drove back the sea with a strong east wind all that night and turned the sea into dry ground." That makes the process seem more natural and less miraculous. Does it matter to our story and to our faith if we have trouble accepting the literal truth of the splitting of the sea?
3. Do you think Pharaoh died in the Red Sea? God didn't send the Israelites on the shortest route to the Promised Land. Why? And don't say he didn't have GPS.

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