



PORTION FROM

BY RAKEL BERENBAUM

Contributor, Torah Tidbits

THE PORTION

# Then, They, the Children of Israel, Sang this Song of the Well

I wasn't allowed to be in the school choir, because they thought that I was a hopeless case, that I'd never be able to sing on key. While other family members are still wondering if I'll ever be able to hear the difference between "do", "re" and "mi", one of my daughters has taken me on as a "project". She is teaching me how to play piano and was so proud when she got me to play the song "doe a deer" by ear. While I may never sing (for women only) in Carnegie Hall, I will be happy to join in singing

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zemirot without having other family members grimace.

Since I've been working on my musical ability, the song in this week's portion caught my eye (21:17-22). It is a song that isn't as well known and famous as the one sung after the nation crossed the Red Sea, but it is also a song sung by the whole nation. The verse describing the song, even starts with the same words "as the song they sang after the splitting of the sea began *Az Yashir*- אז ישיר, Then they sang"..

In that regard they are similar, but they also have differences. Firstly at the sea, Moshe initiated the singing, and Israel joined in. Here it is Israel that began to sing, and Moshe isn't even mentioned.

Another question is why exactly are they singing now? Rashi actually asks if their song is related to the well that God gave them 40 years ago when they began their travels in the desert, why are they only singing a song of praise about it here. He brings one answer. The verse that directly precedes the song is God telling Moshe "Gather the people, and I will give them water" so the song is connected. But it doesn't answer the question, why didn't they sing their praises before? Why did they wait so long? Forty years is a long time.

The Oznaim L'torah has an interesting explanation. He brings a halacha that is learned from the verse in Tehilim 107 - "Four people must give praise, one who completes a boat trip, one who completes a dangerous land journey through the desert, one who recovers from a major illness, and one who is released from captivity" (Orach Chaim: 219). If we look closely, the praise must be sung not when the person is in the middle of the dangerous situation but when they are finally safe. The Children of Israel did not sing the Song of the Sea, when they were walking across on dry land and the sea was like walls on either side of them. Their situation was still precarious. They waited to sing till they got to the other side, after the waters returned to its original place, drowning all the Egyptians.

The same is the case while they were in the desert. It's true God miraculously gave them water in the desert and they should be grateful for that. But throughout their time in the desert they were still in a very perilous situation - with all kinds of dangers hidden around them. The well did actually dry up and they had to ask for water. They couldn't sing before. But now at the end of the 40 years, they know their time of wandering in the desert is ending, now when they have water they can sing a song of praise to God all together. Their song expresses their deep feelings of thanks for their safety.

Maybe one day I'll also feel safe to sing - without worrying about singing off key.



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## RECIPE

During these hot summer days, it's very important to drink enough, but it's not always easy. Since in the portion we talked about water, for this week's column I decided to include a recipe related to water, that might just help everyone keep hydrated. Most people don't like the taste of plain water, but are able to increase their consumption of this life-giving drink just by adding some flavor. I have a daughter who adds a bit of grape juice, another daughter likes lemon, and I myself am happy with a bit of apple juice concentrate. So below is a recipe for infused water, water that has fruits and/or herbs added to it that can both increase your vitamin intake as well as your water consumption. No one combination is better than the other. Use your imagination. The most important is that you or those you are serving like the taste of the infusion, find it refreshing and would want to drink more and more of it. And of course be sure to "sing" its praises.

## INFUSED WATER

Fill a 1 liter glass jar with cold or room temperature water. Chose one, two or three of the ingredients listed below ( i.e. lemon & ginger or cucumber & lime, or watermelon & strawberries). Wash. Cut into slices or chunks and add to the jar. Seal and refrigerate. You can drink it right away, if you want but it will taste better if you infuse for about 3-4 hours in the refrigerator. If you like a really fruity taste you can even

leave it overnight. It can last anywhere from a few days to a week in the fridge, but it's a good idea to take out the citrus after 48 hours so as not to let the peel make it bitter.

Use your favorite, freshest fruits and herbs from the suggested list below:

Carrot, Cucumber, Celery, Blackberry, Strawberry, Watermelon, Grapefruit, Orange, Lemon, Lime, Apricot, Peach, Apple, Cinnamon stick, Rosemary, Mint, Ginger ■

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