

**Magdil or Migdol: Two Images of God**Haftorah for Seventh Day of Passover  
Exodus 13:17-15:26/ 2 Samuel 22:1-51

The seventh day of Passover commemorates the miracle at the Red Sea. Appropriately, we read Exodus, Chapter 15, *Az Yashir Moshe*, the song of Moses and the children of Israel which they sang upon experiencing God's miraculous deliverance from the Egypt army. Today's Haftorah contains yet another song of deliverance, "which David addressed to the Lord after the Lord had saved him from the hands of all his enemies and from the hands of Saul."

King David's song of deliverance uses powerful images to describe "the protecting hand" of God. God is a mighty rock shelter and stability to King David. The great singer of Israel also describes God's presence as a mighty storm who, "thunders forth from heaven," and "who lets loose bolts and scatters them." God trains David's hands for battle so that "my arms can bend a bow of bronze." "You have granted me a shield of Your protection and Your providence has made me great." Like the song at the Red Sea, David describes God as a fearsome warrior. The song ends with hope for the future. David is a man of deep faith who sings, "Your praise among the nations and chants Your name." He ends with a well known verse in which he expresses the hope that God will protect not only David but his offspring to come. This verse concludes the Birkat HaMazon, the Grace after Meals. As we chant these words we ought to spend some time reflecting on our own historic deliverance as a nation. After more than thirty five hundred years, and despite persecution and oppression, we are still here to tell our story.

**2 Samuel 22:51**

A tower of victory to His king who deals graciously with His anointed, with David and his offspring ever more.

**Michael Fishbane : Commentary on the Haftorah**

Hebrew: *migdol y'shuot*. As usual this translation as read (*keri*). Meanwhile the text as written (*ketiv*) preserves the first word as a verb, *magdil*, yielding "He accords wondrous victories" (as in Psalms 18:51). The image of God as a tower is not out of keeping with the song, yet the verb better matches the next part of the verse. Both *keri* and *ketiv* versions are preserved liturgically, at the close of the full grace after meals. The *ketiv* is recited weekdays. The *keri*, on Shabbat and holidays.

**Note:** *there are many words in the Biblical text which are preserved in two forms: they are written one way (ketiv) but pronounced another (keri). This may be a product of an error or a variant tradition which was passed on in the transmission of the Biblical text.*

**Midrash Tehilim 18:36**

In the book of Samuel it is said, "God . . . is the mighty tower (*migdol*) of deliverance for His king" (2 Sam. 22:51), while the parallel verse in Psalms, taken literally, reads: "Mightily He enlarges (*magdil*) deliverance for His king" (Ps. 18:51). "This means," R. Yudan said, "that deliverance will come to this people not all at once, but little by little." Can "mightily He enlarges" be understood in any way except that deliverance for Israel will gradually grow larger and larger (*mitgaddelah*)? The children of Israel now live in the midst of great troubles, and if deliverance were to come all at once, they would be unable to bear such great deliverance. . . Hence, it will come little by little and will be enlarged gradually for Israel.

**Reuven Hammer Or Hadash A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom**

There are however, two readings of the first word of the verse, It is either *migdol* (a tower) or *magdil* (He magnifies). The later (from Psalms) is used on weekdays; the former (from 2 Samuel) is used on Sabbath and festivals. The reason is not clear. It may simply be the desire to use both readings. The active verb, *magdil* (He magnifies), is used on weekdays and the passive *migdol* is used on Shabbat, when no work is done. It has also been suggested that the Hebrew abbreviation for 2 Samuel (*Sh-B*) was mistaken for an abbreviation for Shabbat, leading to this custom.

## Arye Leb Gordon Iyyun Tefillah on the Siddur

(Why do we use *magdil* on weekdays and *migdol* on Shabbat and holidays?) Weekdays are more like exile so we pray that God will increase our deliverance; deliverance is not complete yet. We ask that God will increase our salvation. Shabbat, on the other hand, is more like the messianic era when salvation will be complete; it is, therefore, described as a tower since all of our needs have been completed and provided like a great tower of protection.

### Maimonides: Thirteen Principles of Faith (*Ani Ma'amin*)

I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah (*mashi'ach*.) and even though he may delay, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come.

### Questions for Discussion

1. What are some of the reasons given for the different versions of the Birkat Hamazon for holidays and weekdays? What other reasons can you think of for the differences between *migdol* and *magdil*? Do you prefer one text over the other? If so why?
2. It may be that both of these version of the text were included in the Birkat Hamazon simply to account for the variety of different traditions. Consider for instance the fact that there are two versions of the Modim prayer which we recite in the Amida and two different versions of the final blessing of the Amida, Sim Shalom and Shalom Rav. What can the inclusion of these variants teach us about the importance of diversity and pluralism? It is important to make room for all varieties?
3. The verse in Psalms and 2 Samuel speaks of *mishicho*, God anointed one. Who is this verse referring to in its original context and who do you think we are referring to when we use this expression in the Birkat HaMazon? How do you account for the difference in understanding?
4. Notice that some translations translate the word *yeshuot* as victories while others translate the word as salvation. What is the difference between these two translations – how are they different from and similar to one another?
5. Have there been times when you have thought of God as a tower of strength in your life? When and why? Have you ever thought of God as one who “accords salvation?” What do you think the difference is between these two expressions?
6. How do you understand the idea of the Messiah in Judaism? Do you think of the Messiah as a person, a period or an idea? What difference does this make?

### **HELP SUPPORT TTT BY BECOMING A WEEKLY SPONSOR!!**

Torah Table Talk is a weekly e-publication of Rabbi Mark B Greenspan sponsored by the Oceanside Jewish Center on Long Island, New York. If you would like to subscribe to Torah Table Talk please send an e-mail to [Tabletalk\\_subscribe@oceansidejc.org](mailto:Tabletalk_subscribe@oceansidejc.org) or contact Rabbi Mark B Greenspan at [Haravmark@Optonline.net](mailto:Haravmark@Optonline.net). Readers are invited to sponsor a weekly edition of Torah Table Talk.

***“All it takes to study Torah is an open heart, a curious mind  
and a desire to grow a Jewish soul.”***