

CHAPTER 3, VERSES 8-9

by Rabbi Dovid Siegel

(3, 8)

"And you shall command the Kohanim who carry the ark of the covenant saying, 'When you come to the edge of the Jordan waters, stand there.'" In essence, this step introduced the miraculous process of the splitting of the Jordan. However, Hashem's command was limited to the Kohanim's stance in the Jordan and did not include any orders for the Jewish people. It seems that the entire focus here was the Kohanim and the ark they were carrying rather than the crossing of the Jewish people.

If we compare this miracle to the splitting of the Reed Sea, we will discover a major difference in their description. Regarding the miracle at the Reed Sea, the Torah describes it as a splitting of water, as is stated, *"And the waters split."* (Shemos 14:21) However, in regards to the Jordan the Scriptures say, *"And the waters were cut off from continuing downwards."* (3:13) This description removes the focus from the actual split and suggests that it developed indirectly. The Scriptures indicate that the interruption of the upper water's flow to its lower level caused a natural split which was increased by the continuous flow of the lower waters downward along their course.

The significance of this contrast can be understood in the following manner. The purpose of the miracle at the Reed Sea was to drown the Egyptians and to demonstrate Hashem's mastery over the Universe. For this the actual split was an absolute necessity, and so was the return of the water after the Jewish people crossed over. In effect, there was a momentarily crack in the water to allow for the Jewish nation's crossing and an immediate return in order to drown the Egyptians. However, in regards to the Jordan, the purpose for its miracle was quite different. The timely interruption of its flow was to encourage the Jewish people in the conquest of the land. Through this experience they would recognize that Hashem's presence atop the ark would accompany them throughout their challenging times.

We now understand the accent placed on the Kohanim and the nature of this miracle. The moment the Holy Ark which was carried by the Kohanim entered the Jordan, its waters ceased to flow. How could the water continue along its path and pass by the ark with the presence of Hashem firmly standing there? The waters therefore began piling up which ultimately caused a split in the Jordan. In truth, the entire miracle was focused upon the Kohanim standing in the water. The water's respect of Hashem's presence was the true dimension which needed to be revealed. For this reason, Hashem's instructions were limited to the Kohanim remaining in their place at the river's edge, the focal point of the miracle.

(3, 9)

And Yehoshua said to the Jewish people, "Draw near and hear the words of Hashem." Rashi quotes Chazal who comment on the words, "draw near" which indicate a very close proximity. Chazal explain that Yehoshua miraculously gathered the entire nation between the poles of the ark, an area which couldn't normally contain more than one person. One could question the need for this peculiar experience and certainly, its timely nature. What could be gained by it, especially at the heels of the wondrous splitting of the Jordan River?

This stunning phenomenon can be explained in the following manner. As we have learned, the splitting of the Jordan was to serve as inspiration and assurance to the Jewish people of Hashem's assistance throughout their conquest of the land. In order for this to transpire, an unwavering faith was expected of them. But in addition they were expected to bond together in perfect unity and accept total responsibility for the actions of others. The extent of this dimension can be seen through the Jewish nation's terrible defeat at the war of Ay. An individual named Achan violated a restriction on the spoils of Jericho and caused a devastating defeat to the Jewish army. Hashem explained His reluctance to come to the Jewish people's assistance and said, "*Israel has sinned, stolen and violated the ban*" (7:11). From this we see that all of Israel was held at fault for one person's actions.

We can suggest that this lesson was essential for the Jewish people to appreciate before entering the land. Therefore, with their sights set upon the land, Yehoshua gathered the Jewish people to stand between the poles of the ark. The entire nation, three million in total, stood in the place of one. With their faces towards Hashem and His Torah, the entire nation united into one person. Collectively and individually they sensed their responsibility for one another and realized how every "one" of them was of major significance to the whole. After this binding experience they were prepared to enter the land. After this, they were fully ready to accept responsibility for one another, thereby securing Hashem's assistance every step of their way.

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