

SPLIT-SEA SOUP

by Rabbi Label Lam

Hashem saved on that day Israel from the hand of Egypt and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. And Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt and the people feared Hashem and they had faith in Hashem and Moshe His servant. (Shemos 14:30-31)

It's certainly great news to hear how inspired the Children of Israel were at having the seen the sea split before their eyes. The common complaint and/or question is "How come Hashem doesn't split the sea for us?" Then we can have the same degree of certainty and commitment that they had. We would also probably spontaneously erupt into an ecstatic song shouting "this is my G-d and I will glorify him!" (Shemos 15:2)

There are two different things that the Talmud tells us are as "difficult" (for G-d to do) as the splitting of the sea. One is the making of marriage partners and the other is the livelihood of a person. Is anything more or less difficult for The A-lmighty to do? In which ways are they similar? They are both profound human needs. In which way are they different? One is perhaps a once in a lifetime event while the other is a daily happening. Maybe the answer lies in their commonality as well as their distinctiveness.

Let's imagine the following scenario together. While drinking a coffee at 8:00 AM there's a brief knock and an envelope is seen appearing from underneath the door. A man is spotted running to his car. In the envelope is a hundred dollars cash for you. You wave thanks as the car speeds away. "Who was that stranger?" you wonder, "I wanted to thank him!" The next morning, at the exact time, the same thing happens, and continuously six days a week (on Friday, two hundred) for years.

Each of the first few times you can't stop waving and thanking till the car is well out of sight. After a while, though, you put a sign on the door not to knock and you remain annoyed when your order is ignored. You begin to wonder why you don't just get a lump sum. What's all this business with only the hundred bucks a day anyway, and the paper wasted on envelopes? One day the envelope is empty and you're ready to sue the man and forcefully demand your money the next time he has the nerve to show up on your doorstep. It sounds absurd! No?

No! One of my teachers once said very pithily, "Our definition of nature is repeating miracles", pointing out that the numerical value of "nature" (ha-teva) is the same as the name for G-d, E-lokim (86). When something happens once we call it a miracle. When it happens daily we call it nature. If a baby would be born at the end of a tree limb his picture would fill all the papers. We'd all be

completely consumed with the miracle of the "tree-baby". However if kids started popping up on trees all over the world, people would become occupied with spraying and pruning the things to prevent crowding and inconvenience.

I'm afraid that if the sea would split every day and twice on Saturdays (matinee day) many of us would postpone ever taking the trip to see it indefinitely until it would be too late. Those who will have seen the splitting multiple times will also probably become inured to the event in short order and grow weary of it. However if it only happens once we feel excluded for having missed the big event. What do we do?

There are certain events that happen once in history, which send out great waves of inspiration like the splitting of the sea. There are other monumental happenings like a wedding whose memory echoes good cheer for an entire life long. Not dissimilar are daily occurrences (like getting an orange in the middle of winter, or eating a slice of bread) which may have passed underneath our radar screen unnoticed, if the Talmud had not given us a clue.

The splitting of the sea is not more amazing than finding your soul mate which is not less miraculous than a bowl of granola for breakfast. They each demonstrate an intense degree of personal catering to the nuances of our needs. The only difference may be in the magnitude of the celebration, which is in direct proportion to the frequency of the event, yet each gets a song!

The A-lmighty gives us what we need in the right amounts. Air is more abundant than water, which is more available than food. Our appetite for complaining about the infrequency of so called miraculous events would dissipate instantly if the menu called for breakfast only once in history and every day we'd be forced to endure again and again for lunch -split-sea soup.

Good Shabbos!

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