

SONG OF TRUTH

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Beshalach

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Today's Learning:

Ketubot 7:2-3

Orach Chaim 372:12-14

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Gittin 3

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Makkot 3

A central portion of this week's parashah is the "Shirat Ha'yam" / "The Song at the Sea," which Bnei Yisrael sang in praise of Hashem after He split the sea and rescued Bnei Yisrael from the Egyptians. As interpreted by the Sages and by Rashi, the song describes in detail each aspect of the punishment that Hashem meted out to the Egyptians for oppressing and pursuing Bnei Yisrael.

R' Avraham Grodzenski z"l hy"d (mashgiach of the Slobodka Yeshiva; killed in the Holocaust) asks: At first glance, the Song at the Sea sounds like a victor's gloating over the vanquished. If so, was this appropriate behavior for Moshe Rabbenu and the generation which was about to receive the Torah? Certainly vengeance is a very lowly trait!

R' Grodzenski explains: This song was not, in fact, a song of the victor, for it was Hashem who fought and won the battle, not Bnei Yisrael. Rather, what this song embodies is Bnei Yisrael's love of good and hatred of evil. They saw true justice being done and they praised the Just G-d.

For decades, Bnei Yisrael suffered at the hands of the Egyptians. They saw the Egyptians place Jewish infants into brick walls when there was a shortage of bricks. They saw the Egyptians bathe in the blood of Jewish children. Undoubtedly, Bnei Yisrael had a question in their hearts. They knew that "Hashem's seal is truth," but they did not see that trait in practice. Now, when Bnei Yisrael saw evil perish, they sang - they sang about the destruction of the doers of evil only because the doers of evil were inseparable from the evil itself. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Knesset Yisrael p. 156)

"He took 600 elite chariots and all the chariots of Egypt, with shalishim / 'officers of thirty' on them all. (14:7)

Why did Pharaoh take 600 chariots? Also, why did he have one officer for every thirty men? R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (1690- 1764) explains:

We read (Devarim 32:30), "For how could one pursue a thousand?" Pharaoh knew that there would be a time when Hashem would cause one pursuer to defeat 1,000 of Bnei Yisrael, and he assumed that this was that time. Thus, to defeat the 600,000 adult men who left Egypt, Pharaoh needed 600 soldiers.

In addition, there were 22,000 Levi'im among the Jews. Twenty- thousand is 1/30 of 600,000, so Pharaoh took a one-to-thirty ratio of officers to soldiers. As for the last 2,000 Levi'im, Pharaoh assumed that he himself, being the king, could defeat twice as many Jews as each of his soldiers could.

(Tiferet Yehonatan)

"And they believed in Hashem . . ." (14:31)

Rambam z"l ("Maimonides"; 1135-1204) writes (Hil. Yesodei Ha'Torah 1:1): "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a First Being, and that He created all that exists . . ." R' Elazar M. Shach shlita (rosh yeshiva of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) comments on this:

Rambam does not speak of "believing" in Hashem, but rather, of "knowing" that Hashem exists. Apparently it is possible for someone to know that Hashem exists, to be as confident of His existence as one is confident of the existence of something tangible. And, it appears that this is a mitzvah which even a thirteen-year-old is capable of fulfilling [since Hashem would not command a person to fulfill a mitzvah which he is not capable of fulfilling].

The midrash relates that Avraham began in his youth to wonder about the existence of a creator. Is it possible, he pondered, for the universe to function constantly without a director directing it? Any person who thinks intelligently and does not twist his logic can come to the same conclusion, writes

R' Shach. And, by the same logical process, one can come to the conclusion - one can know - that the Director of the universe has unlimited power, that He is one, and that He is incorporeal.

R' Shach continues: The midrash teaches that Avraham's search for the Creator was like a person walking past a lighted palace and asking, "Is it possible that such a beautifully lighted palace has no master?" When Avraham asked that question, Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham - like the master of the palace sticking his head out of the window and calling, "Indeed, I am the master of the palace." But Hashem does not reveal Himself to us, so how can we know Hashem as Avraham did?

R' Shach answers: The question itself ("Is it possible that such a beautifully lighted palace has no master?") is all that we need. It is a rhetorical question, for it is plainly obvious that such a well-organized world could not exist by chance. Simply by pondering this we can know there is a master of the palace.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Avi Ezri p. 140)

"Behold! I am standing before you by the rock in Horev; you shall strike the rock and water will come forth from it, and the people will drink." (17:6)

Rashi writes: "It is not written, 'You shall strike over the rock,' but rather, 'You shall strike the rock.' Thus we learn that Moshe's staff was made of a hard material."

Why is the material from which Moshe's staff was made significant? R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach in the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) explains:

We live in a world where some events seem to be natural and others seem to be miraculous. It is also a world where our actions seem to move events and it appears that, but for our actions, many events would not occur. In reality, though, there is no nature and there are no miracles; there is only Hashem, Who is One, and Who causes all events to happen.

Avraham was commanded (Bereishit 17:2), "Walk before Me and be perfect." Hashem wants us to walk before Him, to initiate events, but to be perfect, to always remember that it is really Hashem who determines what events will be. Moshe was commanded to hit the earth of Egypt in order to bring about the plagues. He was commanded to raise his staff over the Sea in order to split it. Had Moshe not done these things, there would have been no plagues and the Sea would not have split. Moshe was Hashem's agent to bring about these miracles, and, like an agent, he does not deserve (and did not take) any credit. Rather, the credit goes to the principal, while Moshe, for his part, said (Shmot 16:8), "What are we?"

This is the significance of the fact that Moshe's staff was made of a hard material. Had Moshe merely waved his staff in the air ("over the rock") and brought water out of the stone, there would be no doubt that a miracle had occurred. However, that is not the way in which Hashem wants to conduct the world. Hashem's challenge to Moshe and Bnei Yisrael was that Moshe should shatter the stone

with his hard staff without forgetting that the real reason that water came out of the stone was that "I am standing before you by the rock."
(Da'at Chochmah U'mussar Vol. I, p. 41)

Introducing . . .

In this feature, we present excerpts from the introductions to famous (and not so famous) works. This week, we present the fourth installment of Rambam's introduction to his halachic code, Mishneh Torah.

From the two Talmuds [i.e., the Bavli and the Yerushalmi, together with other works from the same period called] the Tosefta, the Sifra and the Sifrei- from these we know what is forbidden and what is permitted, what is tamei / ritually impure and what is tahor / ritually pure, in what cases one is liable [to be punished or to pay damages] and in what cases one is not liable, what is not kosher and what is kosher. All of these laws are what was passed down by word-of-mouth from one person to the next since Moshe Rabbenu.

These works also detail that which the Sages and the prophets in each generation decreed in order to safeguard the laws of the Torah, as they heard from Moshe that they were supposed to do, as it is written (Vayikra 18:30), "You shall safeguard My charge . . ." These works also detail the customs and the enactments which were enacted in each generations, as the bet din of that generation saw fit. It is forbidden to deviate from these, as it is written (Devarim 17:10), "You shall not deviate from the word which they will tell you, right or left." Also in these works are the laws which were not received from Moshe but which the bet din of one of the generations derived [from the Torah] using the rules by which the Torah may be interpreted ("midot she'ha'Torah nidreshet ba'hain"). All of this was composed by Rav Ashi in the gemara [i.e., the "Talmud Bavli"]. The sages of that time also composed other works: R' Hoshiah, a student of Rabbenu Hakadosh [the author of the Mishnah], composed a commentary on the book of Bereishit and Rabbi Yishmael composed a commentary called the Mechilta, which covered from the beginning of Shmot until the end of the Torah. Rabbi Akiva also composed a "Mechilta," and other sages composed other midrashim, all before Rav Ashi composed the gemara.

Thus, Ravina and Rav Ashi and their colleagues are the last of the sages who passed down the oral tradition. . . After the bet din of Rav Ashi, which composed the gemara and finished it in the days of his son, the Jews spread out all over and reached the distant lands and islands. Wars increased and travel was made difficult by armies, and Torah study decreased. [Ed. note: The writing of the gemara in Persia corresponds to the breakup of the Western Roman Empire in 475 C.E.] Jews no longer gathered to study in yeshivot by the thousands and myriads as they had in the past. Instead, only individuals in each city - "the remnants to whom Hashem called" [Yoel 3:5] - studied the Torah and understood the books and the laws which they contained.

As for any bet din which followed the writing of the gemara, its decrees, enactments and customs were for its city or region only, and they did not become widespread among all Jewish communities because of the distance between them and the difficulty of traveling. As for the "Great Bet Din" of 71 members, that was abolished many years before the gemara was composed. Therefore, the Jews of one nation cannot impose their customs on the Jews of another nation.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
