THE LAND OF THE LIVING

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We read in our parashah, following the splitting of the Yam Suf and the drowning of the Egyptians, "Yisrael saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant." The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni comments: In the merit of having faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant, they merited to inherit the Land.

R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes: This indicates that the generation that entered the Land had two merits--having faith in Hashem and having faith in Moshe. In contrast, Moshe, who did not enter the Land, had only one merit--that of having faith in Hashem. In that merit, he was able to die in Eretz Yisrael. How so? Although Moshe never crossed the border, Hashem miraculously folded the entire Land under the place where he stood, so that he did merit to die in Eretz Yisrael.

This, R' Palagi continues, is alluded to in the verse (Tehilim 116:9-10--recited as part of Hallel), "I shall walk before Hashem in the land of the living. I have kept the faith, for I speak . . ." "I have kept the faith," is what Moshe Rabbeinu said of himself. Also, "I speak"--therefore others believed in You. In that merit, they entered the "the land of the living" (i.e., Eretz Yisrael). Seeming, Moshe did not enter the Land. However, the final letters of the four words, "Lifnei Hashem b'artzot ha'chaim" / "before Hashem in the land of the living" make up the letters of the word "Mitah" / "death." This hints that

Moshe's end was in "the land of the living." (Artzot Ha'chaim p.4)

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"Hashem will do battle for you, and you shall remain silent." (14:14)

R' Chaim Halberstam z"l (1793–1876; Sanzer Rebbe) asks: Why did Hashem command Bnei Yisrael to be silent; are we not taught that "Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous"?! He explains:

Indeed, Hashem does desire the prayers of the righteous when their request is that the subject's suffering be relieved because G-d is, so-to-speak, suffering along with him. (See Yeshayah 63:9 -- "In all their troubles, He is troubled.") But, that was not Bnei Yisrael's concern at the Yam Suf, as we read (14:11), "They said to Moshe, 'Were there no graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the Wilderness?'" Their focus was their own troubles. Thus, we read in Shir Ha'shirim (1:9), "To my horse, among the riders of Pharaoh, I silenced you, my beloved." Kabbalists say that "horse" is a reference to "speech," while "rider" is a reference to "thought." Here, the "rider," i.e., the thought behind the prayer, was the forces of Pharaoh who were chasing Bnei Yisrael; therefore, the prayers were not desired by Hashem, and He silenced them (in our verse). (Divrei Chaim)

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"The 'Oyev' / enemy declared, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide plunder. I will satisfy my lust with them. I will unsheathe my sword; my hand will impoverish them'." (15:9)

The Gemara (Bava Batra 16a) relates that, in the midst of his suffering, Iyov said to Hashem, "Perhaps You became confused between 'Iyov' and 'Oyev'." R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l (Maharsha; Poland; 1555-1631) explains Iyov's comment in light of the Gemara (Sotah 11a) which says that Pharaoh consulted three advisers regarding Bnei Yisrael: Bil'am, Iyov and Yitro. Bil'am advised Pharaoh to oppress Bnei Yisrael; therefore, Hashem killed him (Bemidbar 31:8). Iyov remained silent; therefore, he was punished with suffering. Yitro fled; therefore, he was rewarded that his descendants sat on the Sanhedrin. Iyov said to Hashem, writes Maharsha: Did You get confused? The Oyev / enemy was Pharaoh, as our verse indicates. I was not the enemy! Don't You remember that I did not support the enemy's plan?!

Hashem responded that, of course, He could never make a mistake. (See Bava Batra 16a-b for Hashem's arguments.) Why, then, did Iyov suffer as if he were the enemy? Maharsha explains: We read (Iyov 2:10), "Even so [despite his suffering], Iyov did not sin with his lips." The Sage Rava comments (Bava Batra 16a), "With his lips he did not sin, but in his heart he sinned." Maharsha explains: Although Iyov did not advise Pharaoh to harm Bnei Yisrael, in his heart, he hated them. And, our Sages teach that gentiles are judged for evil thoughts just as they are judged for their actions. Therefore, Iyov deserved to suffer. (Chiddushei Aggadot)

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"Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances. Miriam spoke up la'hem / to them, 'Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea'." (15:20-21)

R' Yaakov Hagiz z"l (Morocco and Eretz Yisrael; 1620-1672) asks: At first glance, Miriam was addressing the women. Why, then, does the verse use the masculine form of "to them" ("la'hem") rather than the feminine form ("la'hen")?

R' Hagiz explains: The Gemara (Arachin 11a) records a dispute whether the Levi'im fulfilled their Mitzvah to "sing" in the Bet Hamikdash using their voices, while their musical instruments were mere "backup," or--the opposite--the primary Mitzvah was with musical instruments and the Levi'im's voices were "backup." At the Yam Suf, writes R' Hagiz, Bnei Yisrael sang with their voices, with no instruments, seemingly taking the side of the opinion that the primary mode of "singing" is with the voice. Disagreeing, "Miriam the prophetess . . . took her drum in her hand . . . spoke up lahem," to the men, telling them that they should have used instruments. This, concludes, R' Hagiz, is the meaning of the verse (Tehilim 68:26), "First went singers, then musicians." Why? The verse concludes, "In the midst (i.e., because) of timbrel-playing maidens." (Korban Mincha no.1)

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"He said, 'For the hand is on the kais / throne of Kah; Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation'." (17:16)

Rashi z"l writes: What is the implication of "kais" instead of the usual word for throne, "kisai"? Likewise, why is the Divine Name divided in half [i.e., yud-heh (pronounced "Kah") instead of yud-keh-vav-keh]? He answers: The Holy One, blessed be He, swears that His Name will not be perfect nor His throne perfect until the name of Amalek is entirely blotted out.

What does this mean? R' Moshe Alsheich z"l (1508-1593; Turkey, Greece and Eretz Yisrael; author of a popular Tanach commentary) writes: Do not think that Amalek is powerful enough to be the nemesis of G-d! No, he is like straw blowing in the wind before Him! Rather, Amalek symbolizes the yetzer hara, whose destruction is a precondition to the full revelation of G-d's Name (i.e., His Glory). And, since man is tasked with taking the initiative to destroy the yetzer hara, albeit with assistance from G-d, it is as if Hashem Himself is helpless to overcome this enemy until the end of time. (Torat Moshe)

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A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

R' Yechiel Michel Tikochinski z"l (1871-1955; editor for 51 years of an annual calendar documenting the customs of Eretz Yisrael and Yerushalayim) writes: Tu B'Shevat begins the new year for trees for purposes of terumah and ma'asrot / tithes, and for orlah / the prohibition on eating the fruits of a tree in its first three years. This day is the dividing line for determining whether one separates

ma'aser sheni (which is taken in the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the shemittah cycle and eaten in Yerushalayim) or ma'aser ani (which is taken in the third and sixth years of the shemittah cycle and given to the poor). If, before Tu B'Shevat, fruits reached the stage of development where tithing is required, they are considered produce of the old year. But, fruits that reach that stage after Tu B'Shevat are produce of the new year. For fruits, that defining stage is chanatah (approximately, when the blossom appears), except for the etrog, for which the defining stage is picking. One is forbidden to mix fruits of different years when tithing.

R' Tikochinski writes further: In Eretz Yisrael, where these laws apply, Tu B'Shevat is observed as a minor holiday. The Ashkenazim are content to observe the day by eating the fruits of the Land and distributing fruit packages to children. In contrast, R' Tikochinski writes, the Sephardim gather to eat fruit in groups, amidst joy and song. Over every fruit, they recite chapters of Tehilim, poems, and songs that praise the Land and its fruit. The wise men of the Sephardim remain awake on the night of Tu B'Shevat and recite "Tikkunim" which are composed of verses from Torah and Ketuvim, and from the words of our Sages, especially from the Zohar, which relate to the fruits of the Land. They also take pains to eat many types of fruits, both tree fruits and produce of the ground. For kabbalistic reasons, they eat 30 types of fruits. They also honor each other with reciting the blessings over the fruit. (R' Tikochinski adds that the reason for these rituals is that each species of fruit has a different "root" in Heaven and requires a separate "tikkun.") (Ir Ha'kodesh Ve'ha'mikdash, III ch.25)