

DIVINE MULTITASKING

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"And Israel saw the great hand that G-d inflicted upon Egypt; and the people feared G-d, and they had faith in G-d and in Moshe his servant." (Shemos/Exodus 14:31) The Midrash expounds that prior to this moment in history when the Sea of Reeds came crashing down upon the Egyptian army the Jews did not truly fear G-d, but from that point forward they did. But the Jews had been eyewitness to ten miraculous and devastating plagues that wiped out the largest empire in the world. If that did not cause them to fear G-d, what was unique about the splitting of the sea that suddenly led them to change their minds?

Bais Halevi (1) explains that the miracle at the sea was completely different from anything they had witnessed until then. Since the Jews had not yet been commanded to fulfill mitzvos (Divine commands) while they were in Egypt, they had not performed these meritorious acts that would deem them worthy of miraculous salvation. Thus, the miracles that took place in Egypt were Divine retribution for the unusual cruelty they inflicted upon the Jews. Indeed, this was why they initially only asked to serve G-d in the desert for three days rather than to be set free. The Egyptian denial of such a small request was all the more rationale to punish them.

At the end of their Egyptian exile, G-d gave the Jews their first few mitzvos and, with them, the opportunity to merit their own salvation. At great personal risk, the Jews took lambs, an Egyptian deity, and offered them as sacrifices to G-d. They also demonstrated an immense trust in G-d, wandering into the desert to serve Him, and staying there with neither any natural form of protection from the elements nor sufficient food and water to last them for an extended period of time. In the merit of these acts the sea split for them. Unlike the plagues of Egypt, the splitting of the sea was an act of kindness and mercy. The water crashing down on the Egyptians was wholly consistent with nature; the miracle was that it stood up for the Jews. Previously they had seen G-d suspend nature to punish the perpetrators of evil. But now they saw, as G-d performed a miracle for them in His infinite love and benevolence, His attribute of justice used the same miraculous event to punish the Egyptians. This national epiphany for the Children of Israel was the source of their newfound fear and awe of G-d. The Oneness of the Divine dictated that they benefit from G-d's acts of Divine justice against the Egyptians while the Egyptians suffer from His mercy for the Jews.

Unlike the finite human, whose acts of kindness are simply that, G-d always maintains all of His attributes: all of His acts are multifaceted and impacting the world in more ways than we can fathom. None of His acts are simple, so even when an event appears to us to be a simple kindness or a

warranted punishment - how much more so a tragedy we cannot attempt to explain - we must remember there are other facets and ripples that we not only do not see, but cannot even begin to comprehend.

Have a Good Shabbos!

(1) Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik, 1820-1892; great grandson of Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, foremost disciple of the Vilna Gaon and founder of Yeshivas Volozhin; living during a period of great turbulence and transition, he possessed the highest level of scholarship, absolute loyalty to tradition and extraordinary sensitivity for the plight of the poor and unfortunate; renowned as Rabbi of Slutzk and, later, Brisk

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