

TURNING THE GEARS

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"And the children of Israel entered into the sea on the dry land, and the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left... And the children of Israel went on the dry land in the sea, and the water was a wall for them, on their right and on their left." [14:22, 29]

Two verses, saying much the same thing. But they aren't identical - is there a message?

In the second verse, the word for "wall," "chomah," is written without the letter vav - in Hebrew, many words can be spelled both with and without the letters vav or yud. But as a result, this word could also be pronounced "cheimah," meaning anger. So the Daas Zekeinim explains that initially the sea was angry, until an angel came and forced the water to stand up like a wall.

The sea was being asked to perform a miracle. So it was angry! Why should it move on behalf of people just now leaving a land where they worshiped idols? The angel forced the sea to move, because these same people were going to accept the Torah.

But we still have the two verses. The first spells out "chomah" in full, and it also has another change in wording: the first of these verses says "entered into the sea on the dry land," whereas the latter reads "went on the dry land in the sea."

The Tosefes Bracha (Rabbi Baruch HaLevi Epstein of Pinsk) explains that these two differences are very much related. The first verse refers to those who saw all the miracles which HaShem had done in Egypt, and learned to trust Him. If HaShem fulfills His promises, and He has promised to take them from Egypt - then if there's a sea in the way, He'll take care of it. So they realized that no alternative existed... and they walked right into the sea... and it became dry land.

But other people were afraid to go in. They trusted only their senses - not G-d. So how could they walk into the water, and drown? They waited to see what would happen, and went into the channel only when they saw the others walking on dry land. For them, the sea was angry - if they only trust nature, let them have nature! It's natural for water to form a sea, and drown them! But the angel saved them, because of what they **would** become.

Being in touch with spirituality, with G-d, with the **supernatural**, means realizing that we can't see everything with our senses. We always need to remember whose hand is "turning the gears."

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