

GIFTS FROM THE SEA

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Gifts From the Sea¹

"Israel saw the Great Hand that G-d used upon Egypt. The people feared Hashem, and they believed in Hashem and in Moses His servant." [2]

The Torah's ordering of the two phrases suggests cause and effect. The people believed, because they saw. But do we really need to believe in what we know and have directly experienced? Belief usually fills in when its object is hidden or obscured. What need is there to speak of the people's belief, after Hashem made His existence open and manifest to them, through the miracles at the Sea?

There is another reason why the Torah should not speak here of the people's *emunah*. They were hardly new to steadfast belief in G-d! Well before the crossing of the Sea they had believed. It was, in fact "in the merit of belief that our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt." [3] Having already believed at an earlier time, why does the Torah take note of it here?

Belief, we must begin to realize, is not a simple response to a yes-or-no question. It is complex, variegated, nuanced. It knows many levels, each of which is an important accomplishment.

Two of these are fairly apparent to us. We can easily understand the difference between believing something with one's mind, and believing it in one's heart. (*Yesod Hoavodah* (cites a disciple of the *Magid*) of Mezerizh, who claimed that the distance between belief of the mind and of the heart is greater than the distance between Heaven and earth!)

We should add to these a third kind of *emunah* - believing with one's body. "All my limbs will proclaim, Hashem - who is like You?" [4] When *emunah* matures, it penetrates all parts of a person's body. Every fiber of him understands that there is nothing besides Hashem.

Picture in your mind's eye a person you know has great belief in Hashem. Now imagine him overcome by an unexpected terror, thrust instantly into a life-threatening situation. Does he not act troubled? Does he not tremble and shake? He would not if belief thoroughly suffused all his body. He would remain calm and unperturbed. [5]

In his first dialogue with Hashem, Moses challenged G-d. "What if the Jews will not believe me?" [6] Hashem reassured him that they would show themselves to be believers. *Emunah* is firmly rooted in the Jewish soul, a dependable legacy from our ancestors. Its presence within us can be relied upon

with confidence. (Rav Noach of Leuchovitz had this advice for a Jew who claimed that he could not feel *emunah* working within him. "You should believe that you believe! Clouds cover the light of your *emunah*, and darken your world.") This belief, this birthright from our ancestors, while powerful and cherished, is still incomplete.

A nation of believers left Egypt. Their belief was of the usual varieties, belief of the mind and the heart. The Egyptians were still able, therefore, to pursue them with all their terror - their chariots and hordes. Pharaoh himself was able to "draw close,"^[7] i.e., his impending attack disoriented and confounded them. They reacted with fear, and cried out to Hashem.

All this changed at the sea. When the Jews saw their persecutors lying dead before them, when they saw that Great Hand outstretched mightily against their enemy, they grew immeasurably in their belief. "There remained of them [the Egyptians], not a single one."^[8] This does not just mean that all the soldiers died, but alludes to the complete devastation of Egypt in a spiritual sense. It means that the *kelipah* of Egypt had been shattered and smashed. When this happened, *Klal Yisrael* was able to traverse the distance to the far end of the *emunah* -continuum.

How did they achieve this elevation? Belief in mind and heart were all that was necessary for them to escape the Egyptian borders. Standing at the edge of the sea, the ground rumbling as the fastest chariots approached, they cried out to Hashem. Moses took their cry to G-d, and He offered only one route. They were told to move on, to jump into the water.

The miracles at the Sea began only when their bodies and minds acted in concert. *Emunah* needed to enter their physical being, not just their psychic space. They rose to the level of belief with their bodies.

We can explain the difference in their belief - before and after the splitting of the Sea - in yet other terms. The Baal Shem Tov once said, "After all the levels I have achieved, after all the things I have comprehended, I am but a simple youngster in belief." We are mystified by this declaration. What room is left for "belief" after reaching the clarity of the Baal Shem Tov? He understood - he surely did not need to believe!

This is an error. The mitzvah of *emunah* relates to everyone. It applied to the Baal Shem Tov, and it applied to Moses, who encountered, as it were, the true countenance of Hashem, and understood more than other human beings.

G-d is called *Ein Sof* - without end. Whenever we think that we have grasped some new insight into what He is, we realize how much more there is that we do not understand. This process is endless.

Emunah transcends all levels of comprehension. It applies precisely to that which is beyond our grasp, to that which we cannot comprehend. Moses, the Baal Shem Tov, grasped much. But much of what Hashem is eluded them. They - and we - need *Emunah* to relate to what we sense is remote and unattained.

While still in Egypt, the Jews believed. They believed within the context of an arena they had entered earlier, and with which they were familiar. At the sea, their understanding soared. But at the same time, they were able to believe in levels they knew nothing of at all.

Having come this far, there is still something elusive and troublesome in the order of the verses describing Jewish reaction to the splitting of the Sea. "Israel saw Egypt dead on the seashore. Israel saw the Great Hand that G-d used against Egypt." [9] This seems to be an inversion. The Great Hand brought the sea crashing down at the right moment. They saw it churn up from the deep those Egyptians who were the most guilty, so that they could be punished longer. It was only later that the bodies of the Egyptians were cast up on the shore. Why are these two images presented out of chronological order?

Above, we posited that the essential Exodus was the escape from the Egyptian *kelipah*. So far, we have considered only one of its effects. Pharaoh's initial exchange with Moses showed him mocking the existence of Hashem. Pharaoh was an unbeliever; his disbelief was part of the *kelipah*. Jewish belief was its antidote, and for this reason, *Chazal* pointed to it as the cause of their redemption.

The Egyptian poison had another form as well. Egypt was also the "nakedness of the land." [10] It was a place of complete moral depravity, the polar opposite of Jewish *kedushah*/ holiness.

Belief and *kedushah* are a matched set. They are not only the foundational elements of Jewish life, but they are interdependent. A person's belief will be clouded and marred if he does not purify his conduct and experience personal holiness. On the other hand, it is difficult to motivate oneself to live a holier life without the impetus of clear *emunah*.

The Exodus was only the beginning of Jewish redemption. Through their *emunah*, the Jews left, having escaped the *kelipah* of rejection and disbelief. The remaining part of the Egyptian arsenal of evil was still intact.

"What did the sea observe that it split? It saw the casket of Joseph." [11] Joseph's escape from the clutches of Potiphar's wife is the symbol of the triumph of holiness over the spiritually tawdry and ugly, of personal morality over personal *tumah*. What belief was to the Exodus, *kedushah* was to the splitting of the sea. Here, the second element of the *kelipah* was humbled and destroyed. As *kedushah* triumphed, Jewish *emunah* was able to surge forward! The process of redemption, begun a week before, could now proceed.

The verses we considered are really not reversed. To be sure, the Great Hand operated before the Egyptians lay dead. What changed was how much of that Hand the Jews appreciated. Since *emunah* and *kedushah* are linked, the completeness of their belief had to await the death of the Egyptians, which we understand to mean the shattering of the *kelipah* of unholiness and *tumah*. From that point on, blinders on their belief were removed. They now not only sensed the Great Hand with their intellects, but they understood it as clearly as something manifest, obvious and visible. Looking

back, they saw the Great Hand.

Each holiday offers us easier access to something that is ordinarily harder to attain. Pesach is the holiday of *emunah*. Its first day is a Rosh Hashanah of belief. The seventh day is the holiday of advanced, perfect *emunah*.

Chazal tell us that the Jews of the Exodus enriched themselves by despoiling the Egyptian army cast up from the Sea. Surrounded by his chassidim on the last day of Pesach, the *Saba Kadisha* of Slonim asked them if they, too, would like to share in that wealth. An old chassid replied affirmatively. "We want the *emunah* that the Jews gained at the sea." The *rebbe* praised the response. There is no greater gift than the clarity of belief of *emunah* at the highest level. Nothing can make Man happier. It is the true richness that we took away from the Sea.

We emphasize on the Seder night that "in every generation, a person is obligated to see himself as if he exited Egypt." On the seventh night of Pesach, each person should see himself crossing through the Sea. He should take advantage of the treasures this day offers.

The *Bais Avraham* argued that the seventh day of Pesach holds promise for all the aspects of life that can be described as "difficult as the splitting of the Sea."^[12] Certainly, the fullness of *emunah* and *kedushah* are among those aspects.

Each year, the seventh day of Pesach allows a Jew the opportunity to burst all the barriers that divide him from his Creator. With their disappearance, we come closer to where we belong, and where all difficulties vanish.

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1. Based on Nesivos Shalom, Pesach, pgs. 281-283
 2. Exodus 14:31
 3. Yalkut Shimoni, Hoshe'a, 519
 4. Tehilim 35:10
 5. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l once recalled the time that Czarist agents scoured his village for military recruits. His parents hid him under the floorboards of their house. As he heard them approach, he began shaking - and could not stop for hours after they left. Why, then, he asked did the angel who stopped Abraham's hand at the binding of Isaac say, "Now I know that you are a G-d fearing man." Should he not have seen the fear on Abraham's face before? There are two kinds of fear, explained Rav Yaakov. One is destructive and debilitating, and plainly visible to all. A higher form, though, is satisfying and inspiring. We must visualize Abraham wearing a smile on the way to the Akeidah. His fear of Hashem did not make him tremble, or leave his brow furrowed. His outward appearance, therefore, did not evidence fear of Hashem, and the angel had to wait until his hand was poised to fulfill G-d's instruction.
 6. Exodus 4:1

7. Exodus 14:10
8. Exodus 14:28
9. Exodus 14:30-31
10. Genesis 42:9
11. Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 873.
12. Pesachim 118A

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