

BITACHON IN REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, "Tell the Children of Israel to reverse direction before Pi-HaChiros, between Migdol and the sea . . ." (Shemos 14:1-2)

The splitting of the sea was the coup d'etat. Apparently, the 10 plagues back in Egypt, as spectacular as they had been, were just the warm up for this. Watching the sea split, and then the Egyptians drown in the sea, was the main point of the exodus, which was necessary to get if Kabbalas HaTorah at Mt. Sinai was going to be worth the while.

So then, what was the main point of exodus? As we already said previously, if it was only about freeing the Jewish people, it could have been done in a far less spectacular manner. And, even though we already said that God wished to show the Jewish people that His love for them even broke the boundaries He set for Creation, was that the only point of Yetzias Mitzrayim?

There is one very important detail about the splitting of the sea that is either unknown or unappreciated, which changes the direction of the entire story. That is too bad, both personally and nationally, because it was, and is, the entire point of the redemption from Egypt, and because it is also the key to every subsequent redemption, including the final one for which we are still waiting. Not knowing, or sufficiently appreciating it, is, in fact, the reason that we are still waiting for it.

The Children of Israel walked into the midst of the sea upon dry ground, and the water was a wall for them on their right and on their left. (Shemos 14:22)

Even though the Jewish people had no choice but to enter the sea in order to escape the approaching Egyptian army, it still must have been a nerve-wracking experience walking between two massive walls of water that, at a moment's notice, could return to their natural positions. It almost happened, and as the Vilna Gaon points out, there is even a hint to this in the verses:

The water returned and covered the chariots and the riders, and all of Pharaoh's forces that entered the sea after them; not one remained. The Children of Israel, however, walked on dry land in the sea, and the water was a wall—chomah—for them on their right and on their left. (Shemos 14:28-29)

The hint emerges from the slightly different spelling of the word chomah—wall—that appears in both accounts. The first time chomah is used, it appears with all four of its letters—Ches-Vav-Mem-Heh—whereas the second time it is used, the Vav is missing: Ches-Mem-Heh.

Though the hidden Vav does not change the reading or meaning of the word on the Pshat-level, on

the level of Remez—Hint—it does allow for both the reading and meaning to be changed. Without the Vav, the three letters of Chet-Mem-Heh can be read as cheimah, which means "anger."

This not a coincidence, explained the GR"A. The Torah is hinting to us through this slight change of spelling that there was reason for God to be angry at the Jewish people who crossed the sea on dry land, a very dangerous situation. The question is, what happened all of a sudden to change the mood of God at this most precarious moment in the redemption process?

Michah. According to the Midrash, Michah, who belonged to the Tribe of Dan, had brought along with him an idol from Egypt. Being the last tribe to leave the sea, there came a point when he was the only tribe to remain between the walls of water, at which point the Attribute of Justice began to accuse him before God.

For, as long as the rest of the Jewish nation were still crossing the sea, the miracle was justified in their merit. However, once only the Tribe of Dan remained in the sea, the Attribute of Justice complained before God that the miracle should not be upheld on their account, because of the idol of Michah (Likutei Torah, Derech Avos). Hence the word cheimah, alluding to the anger God had towards the tribe of Dan for Michah's idol.

Anger, yes. Destruction of the tribe, no. The question, is what stayed God's hand of strict justice? Why did He not carry through with the demand of the angels to take Michah and his tribe to task for the idol worship they still perpetrated? The answer to this question is here:

It says in Shir HaShirim Rabbah (2:8:2): When Moshe came and told the Jewish people: "In this month you will be redeemed," they asked him, "Moshe Rabbeinu, how can we be redeemed? All of Egypt is steeped in our idol worship!" He answered them, "Since He wants you to be redeemed, He does not look at your idol worship but instead 'skips over mountains' (Shir HaShirim 2:8)" . . . He explained to the Jewish people that The Holy One, Blessed is He, was dealing with them on the level of the light of Arich Anpin called Ayin, which works above any measure; it does not depend upon merit or demerit. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 5, Siman 4)

The midrash is a play on a verse from Shir HaShirim about God "skipping over mountains," the mountain this time being the grave sin of idol worship. Incredibly, when a keitz comes, that is, a destined time for redemption that cannot be pushed off, God is prepared to even overlook a sin such as idol worship, which is considered to be a rejection of the entire Torah, just to redeem His people.

That is the reason why God did not exact punishment on the Tribe of Dan; His desire to redeem the Jewish people overcame His desire to punish them, and therefore, they were allowed to survive. The time would come in the future, in the episode of the Concubine of Givah, when the nation would pay for Michah's idol, but not now, not while redemption was in the process.

However, there is another reason as to why God let the Tribe of Dan off the hook at this time:

Nothing stands in the way of bitachon, as it says in the Midrash: "One who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness (Tehillim 32:10)—even an evil person who trusts in God will be surrounded by kindness. (Midrash Tehillim 32:10). It further says: "Many are the agonies of the wicked, because they do not place their trust in The Holy One, Blessed is He" . . . The Ramban says something similar: "This is why it says, 'Trust in God and do good' (Tehillim 37:3), and it does not say, 'Do good and trust in God,' to teach that trust in God does not depend upon good deeds at all. Rather, one should trust in God whether he is righteous or evil (Sefer Emunah v'Bitachon, Ch. 1). (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 5, Siman 4)

As the Nefesh HaChaim explains:

At the time of the splitting of the sea, God told Moshe, "Why are you crying out to Me? Tell the Children of Israel to travel forward!" (Shemos 14:15). This means that their salvation was dependent upon them: If they had enough faith and trust and traveled toward the sea, with confidence and without fear, then this alone would cause the sea to split before them. It would have prompted a response from above which would have led to the necessary miracle to split the sea. (Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 9)

In other words, the bitachon that the Tribe of Dan exhibited by walking into the sea saved their lives while in the sea, in spite of the idol in their possession. Bitachon does not wipe the slate clean of past sins; only teshuvah or punishment can do that. However, in the meantime, it can save a person from a certain disaster during a time of crisis, as was the crossing of the sea. It is that powerful a trait. It is that important to God.

So, instead of running and trying to solve our problems and crises pragmatically, we ought to spend a fair bit of time increasing our level of bitachon. Not only can it help us more during those times of crises, but it is necessary if God is going to overlook all of our shortcomings, the not so serious ones and the serious ones, especially when the time for redemption finally comes.

Text

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