

MANNERS

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

There are many miracles that our Creator performed in the Exodus from Egypt and the subsequent 40 years in the desert. One of the great kindnesses miraculously orchestrated by G-d took place at the end of the Forty Years and is not told in detail in the Torah--it is hinted to in this week's Parasha and elucidated by our Sages in the Midrash.

The verse says, "Then Israel sang this song; 'Rise up, o well, ask it to respond.' [Bemidbar 21:17] Rashi clarifies the motivating factor leading to this joyous song by all the people of Israel. The nation was traveling through the desert and passed through an area, which was a deep narrow gorge between steep cliffs. The Emorite enemies of the Jews hid high in the hills planning to kill the unsuspecting nation with stones and arrows catapulted from on high. Hashem miraculously closed the gap between the peaks and our enemies were crushed between the stonewalls of the mountainsides. The Israelites passed over the mountains totally unaware of the kindness of G- d. Then the mountains moved back to their original positions revealing the valley once again. A miraculous spring of water was created and it carried the blood and bones in view of the encampment of our people. Were it not for this second miracle the first miracle would have never been discovered.

The Siftay Hachamim asks: "Why didn't Hashem return the mountains to their original position immediately with the passage of the Jews to safety and thereby reveal the miracle to His flock without necessitating the second miracle. They respond: "It would not be proper for the maidservant [the mountain], who came forward to greet her mistress [the Children of Israel], to return to her place before her mistress had passed through."

Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz Shlit"a learns from here that Derech Eretz--manners-- is not merely a matter of etiquette; it is, he says, a "binding law [halacha] ". This law cannot be violated even if a greater sanctification of G-d's name would result. Hashem changed nature a second time to teach us the importance of propriety in our behavior.

Sometimes our greatest tests in the area of Derech Eretz--manners come when we are trying to do something right spiritually. Once a student of the great Mussar master Rabbi Yisrael Salanter was running to synagogue and he stepped on another person's toes. The Rabbi, after reproofing his student for his inconsiderate haste, ordered him to pay for the victim's shoeshine.

Every day in Heaven the Angels sing the praises of G-d. We mimic their performance when we stand and recite "Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh" in our communal prayers. Take note that the Angels, before

they begin to recite the praise of G-d, "ask permission one from another [mebaksheem reshoot zeh lazeh]". The Alter from Slobodka points out that this teaches us that no matter how "holy" the cause Derech Eretz takes precedence.

We all must strive daily to achieve ultimate spiritual perfection. What we learn from the mountains is that we can't trample on others while we make our personal climb to the top. Our show of respect to the feelings of others is what constitutes kiddush Hashem --the sanctification of G-d's name, in whose image all men and women were created.

Shabbat Shalom

DID YOU KNOW THAT: one of the reasons why we cover the bread when we say Kiddush over the wine on Shabbat and Holy Days is that we don't want to "embarrass" the bread as we show honor to the wine. Text Copyright © 2005 by [Rabbi Raymond Beyda](#) and [Torah.org](#).