

In this week's *Parashah*, we read about the splitting of the *Yam Suf*. The Torah relates (*Shmot* 14:31), "*Yisrael* saw the great hand that *Hashem* inflicted upon Egypt, and the people revered *Hashem*; and they believed in *Hashem* and in Moshe, His servant." Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven Gerondi *z"l* (Spain; 1320-1376) asks: Didn't *Bnei Yisrael* believe earlier, as we read (4:31), "And the people believed, and they heard that *Hashem* had remembered *Bnei Yisrael* and that He saw their affliction, and they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves"?

He explains: When Moshe first told *Bnei Yisrael* that *Hashem* was ready to redeem them, they did, indeed, believe Moshe, and they did believe in *Hashem*. However, that belief was immediately challenged when Moshe said to Pharaoh (5:3), "Let us now go for a three-day journey in the wilderness and we shall bring offerings to *Hashem*." "A three-day journey"?! Whatever happened to *Hashem's* promise (3:8), "I shall descend to rescue [*Yisrael*] from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey"? *Bnei Yisrael* also were confused by the instruction (3:22), "Each woman shall borrow from her neighbor . . . silver vessels, golden vessels, and garments." "Borrowing" implied that *Bnei Yisrael* would not be leaving Egypt permanently! After this, *Bnei Yisrael* did not believe until they saw the splitting of the *Yam Suf*.

Why did *Hashem* confuse *Bnei Yisrael*, and how did the Splitting of the Sea restore their belief? R' Nissim explains:

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Shabbat

"And it shall be that on the sixth day when they prepare what they bring . . ." (16:5)

R' Yosef Karo *z"l* (1488-1575; Greece and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: One should get up early on Friday and prepare what is needed for *Shabbat*. Even if one has many servants to serve him, he should try to do something himself in honor of *Shabbat*. (*Shulchan Aruch O.C.* 250:1)

R' Yosef Gikatilla *z"l* (1248-1310; Spain; author of *Sha'arei Orah*) writes: Look at how the pillars of the world, kings and princes, would humble themselves before *Hashem* when they performed *Mitzvot* and how they accepted upon themselves the yoke of Heaven with joy and awe. For example, we read about the occasion when the *Aron Ha'kodesh* was brought to Yerushalayim for the first time (*Shmuel II* 6:14), "David danced with all his strength before *Hashem*." How much more so should everyone else humble themselves and approach *Mitzvot* with this attitude!

R' Gikatilla continues: The greatest wise men and *Roshei Yeshivot* would perform some of the *Shabbat* preparations themselves in honor of *Shabbat*, like servants serving a king in menial ways. For example, Rav Safra would roast the head of a lamb, Rava would salt a fish, Rav Huna would light candles, Rav Pappa would roll wicks, Rav Chisda would clean vegetables, etc. (*Shabbat* 119a). All of these sages were among the most important in their generations and some were *Roshei Yeshivot*; certainly, they could have had servants perform these tasks. However, in order to accept the yoke of *Mitzvot* on themselves, they behaved like servants of a king.

(*Klalei Ha'mitzvot*)

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“The people complained against Moshe, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” (15:24)

R’ Shlomo Wolbe z”l (1914-2005; Israel) observes: *Bnei Yisrael* reached a very high level at the *Yam Suf*, but they could not maintain that level. The manner in which they complained to Moshe when they did not find water may be compared to a person who prays with great intensity on *Yom Kippur*, and even in *Ma’ariv* after *Yom Kippur*, but then reacts with anger when his post-fast meal is not ready on time. (Shiurei Chumash)

“Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim.” (17:8)

In *Sefer Devarim* (25:17-18) we read, “Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt. ‘*Asher karcha*’ on the way . . .” R’ Srayah Deblitzki z”l (1926-2018; Bnei Brak, Israel) notes that some commentaries understand “*Karcha*” as coming from “*Kar*” / “cold.” Thus, “*Asher karcha*” means, “That they cooled you off”--i.e., that Amalek lessened *Bnei Yisrael*’s enthusiasm for serving *Hashem*.

R’ Deblitzki elaborates: *Hashem* imbues every person with the ability to feel enthusiasm (literally, “to get heated up”). He did this so that we will apply this enthusiasm to our study of Torah and performance of *Mitzvot*. If, instead, we apply our enthusiasm to other things--especially to actions that should not be done--then we are left studying Torah and performing *Mitzvot* in a cold, sterile way, doing them by rote with little or no enthusiasm. One who performs *Mitzvot* by rote will never inquire or take any interest in how he can improve his actions and serve *Hashem* better. And, since a person’s spiritual level can never remain stationary, failing to improve the quality of one’s Divine service necessarily means that its quality will fall. This is precisely the goal of the *Yetzer Ha’ra* who, say our Sages, is one and the same as the guardian angel of Amalek.

(Et L’drosh: Shovavim p.13)

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We read in our *Parashah* (14:5), “It was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled.” Until three days had passed since the Exodus, Pharaoh believed that *Bnei Yisrael* would be returning. *Hashem* wanted Pharaoh to think that so that he would chase *Bnei Yisrael*, which ultimately would lead to Egypt’s demise in the *Yam Suf*. For the same reason, R’ Nissim writes, “*Hashem* moved the sea with a strong east wind all the night” (14:21). *Hashem* wanted the Splitting of the Sea to appear to be a natural phenomenon, not Divine intervention, so that Pharaoh would continue to chase *Bnei Yisrael*.

Until *Bnei Yisrael* saw the Egyptians drown in the *Yam Suf*, they did not understand *Hashem*’s plan. Perhaps, writes R’ Nissim, even Moshe did not understand until then. This is a reminder, R’ Nissim concludes, that even as we see the redemption developing, we may witness events that we cannot fit into the bigger picture until *Hashem* reveals their purpose.

(Derashot Ha’Ran #11)

“You will bring them and implant them on the mount of Your heritage, the foundation of Your dwelling-place that You, *Hashem*, have made--the Sanctuary, *Hashem*, that Your hands established.” (15:17)

Rashi z”l (to *Sukkah* 41a) writes that the future, third *Bet Hamikdash* will descend from Heaven completely built and ready for use, as our verse says, “The Sanctuary, *Hashem*, that Your hands established.” In contrast, R’ Moshe ben Maimon z”l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes that *Mashiach* will build the *Bet Hamikdash* (see *Hil. Melachim* 11:1-4).

R’ Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z”l Hy”d (1885-1945; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Piešťany, Czechoslovakia) explains these Sages’ respective sources:

Rashi notes that the word “*Mikdash*” / “Sanctuary” in our verse is read with the trop known as “*Zakef Gadol*.” A *Zakef Gadol* forces the reader to pause briefly, thus separating the word “*Mikdash*” from the next word--“*Hashem*.” Therefore, we read the verse as if it says, “The Sanctuary that Your hands established, *Hashem*.” (If not for that pause, the translation of our verse would have been, “The Sanctuary of *Hashem* that your hands established.”) *Rashi* writes further: The Temple is an object of affection to *Hashem* because the Universe was created by one hand, as we read (*Yeshayah* 48:13), “Also My hand [singular] has laid the foundation of the earth,” while the *Bet Hamikdash* is built by two hands, as our verse states, “Your hands [plural].” When will the Temple be rebuilt by *Hashem* with two hands? *Rashi* continues. At the time referred to in the verse following our verse, “*Hashem* shall reign for all eternity.” [Until here from *Rashi*, based on the *Midrash Mechilta*]

In contrast, the *Gemara* (*Ketubot* 5a) teaches: What *Tzaddikim* make is greater than Creation itself. Regarding Creation it says, “Also My hand [singular] has laid the foundation of the earth,” while regarding the Temple that *Tzaddikim* will build the verse states, “Your hands [plural].” [Until here from the *Gemara*.] According to this reading of our verse (which disregards the Trop or is based on different Trop), our verse should, indeed, be read, “The Sanctuary of *Hashem* that your hands--referring to the hands of *Tzaddikim*--established.” This reading supports *Rambam*’s understanding that *Mashiach* will build the *Bet Hamikdash*, and it will not descend from Heaven miraculously.

(She’eilot U’teshuvot Mishneh Sachir: Be’urei Sugyot No. 70)

Notably, *Rambam* writes about the events connected with the coming of *Mashiach*: “All of these matters--no one can know how they will transpire until they actually happen. The Prophets spoke obliquely, and the Sages do not have a tradition regarding this, except for what they derived from interpreting verses. Therefore, there are disagreements.” *Rambam* adds that knowing exactly how these events will transpire is not a fundamental of our faith (in contrast to believing *Mashiach* will come, which is a fundamental of our faith). Therefore, *Rambam* writes, one should not devote too much time or thought to these matters, for thinking about them does nothing to increase one’s reverence of or love for G-d. (Hil. Melachim 12:2)