

God could have taken the thirsty Jews directly to Elimah, hosting 12 springs and 70 date palms. But instead, He led them to Mara's bitter waters. Why?

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Weekly Parsha

Beshalach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“It came to pass when Paroh sent forth the people, that G-d did not lead them [by] way of the land of the Philistines for it was near, because G-d said, “Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt.” (Shemot 13:17)

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“I am God
your healer”

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I dedicate this issue to HaRav Aryeh Leib: “May you have a speedy and complete recovery. Rav Aryeh, you should know that your Torah and leadership has made a profound and far reaching impact, and I am sure this is not the first time you hear this...this week! In Forest Hills, my friend and your congregant Danny Samuels speaks of you with such admiration and respect. And the Torah I have received is due to you. I hope these words offer some ease and amplify your health and strength. We all have you in our tefilos three times daily. I look forward to seeing you back on the boardwalk, and listening to another Torah insight from you, as in years past.”

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Weekly Parsha

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Hashem leads Bnai Yisrael from Egypt. He will now guide the people to the Land of Israel. Our passage explains that Hashem did not lead the people to the land of Israel by the shortest, most direct route. The most direct route would have brought the people to the Land of the Pelishtim – the Philistines. In our passage, the Torah explains Hashem's reasoning for foregoing this more direct route and selecting a circuitous path. However, the exact meaning of this passage is disputed among the commentaries.

The above translation of the passage is based upon Rashi's commentary. He explains that the passage indicates two considerations that influenced Hashem's decision to select the more circuitous route. First, the route leading through the territory of the Pelishtim was more direct. Second, Hashem reasoned that when faced with war, the people might panic and attempt to return to Egypt. This second element is easily understood. However, the first factor – the directness of the route leading through the territory of the Pelishtim – does not seem to be a liability. On the contrary, the directness of the route would seem to favor its selection. Rashi explains that a direct route is more easily retraced. In contrast, a more circuitous route cannot be easily retraced. According to Rashi, these two elements are related. If Bnai Yisrael panicked when confronted with battle, the people would consider retreat back to Egypt. A direct route could easily be retraced. This option would encourage the people to surrender to their panic and return to Egypt. A more circuitous route cannot be easily retraced. Faced with war, the option to return to Egypt would be closed. Bnai Yisrael would be forced to confront their fears and go to battle; they simply would not have the option of retreat.[1]

Nachmanides rejects Rashi's interpretation of the passage. He raises an obvious objection: According to Rashi's interpretation, the passage is disjointed. Hashem's decision was based upon two related factors – the ease of retreat along the more direct route and the possibility of panic. If this is the intention of the passage, then it should group these two factors together

and present both as Hashem's considerations. The passage should read: G-d did not lead them [by] way of the land of the Philistines because G-d said, "It was near. Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt." Instead, the passage tells us that the route through the territory of the Pelishtim was more direct, and then the passage introduces Hashem's reasoning with the phrase "because G-d said."

Nachmanides offers an alternative translation for the passage: According to Nachmanides, the proper translation is: G-d did not lead them [by] way of the land of the Philistines, although it was near, because G-d said, "Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt."

The passage provides a single reason for forsaking the direct route: The people might panic when confronted by war and attempt to return to Egypt.

According to Nachmanides' interpretation, the more direct route was not abandoned because it would facilitate retreat. The route was forsaken because it would more quickly bring the nation into conflict with the inhabitants of the Land of Canaan – the land Bnai Yisrael must conquer. Hashem wished to delay this inevitable battle. Bnai Yisrael were not prepared to face the terror of an armed conflict. Therefore, a circuitous route that would delay this inevitable conflict was preferable.

Nachmanides recognizes that his interpretation of the passage presents a problem: Bnai Yisrael did enter into battle soon after

leaving Egypt. The nation was attacked by Amalek. According to Nachmanides' interpretation of the passage, it seems that Hashem's plan was not completely successful! Although the route selected by Hashem delayed the inevitable battle with the inhabitants of Canaan, the Land of Israel, Bnai Yisrael was not shielded from an immediate confrontation with Amalek.

Nachmanides offers an interesting response to this problem: He explains that Hashem was not concerned with the response of Bnai Yisrael to this confrontation with Amalek. Nachmanides notes a fundamental difference between Amalek and the nations of Canaan: The nations of Canaan fought Bnai Yisrael in order to

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Weekly Parsha

protect themselves from conquest and to retain possession of their land. They responded to a threat posed by Bnai Yisrael. Their war was defensive. Amalek was not motivated by these considerations -- it waged a war of aggression. Although Bnai Yisrael did not pose a threat to its security, Amalek attacked Bnai Yisrael out of hatred.

Based on this distinction, Nachmanides resolves the difficulty in his position. Hashem knew that Bnai Yisrael would fight Amalek. But, in this battle, retreat would not be a reasonable option. Bnai Yisrael would recognize the character of Amalek's attack. They would understand that Amalek was waging a war of aggression. Retreat would not save Bnai Yisrael. Amalek would continue to pursue the nation even as it retreated.

In contrast, Bnai Yisrael might be tempted to consider retreat when confronted with the battle over the Land of Israel. In this instance, retreat would be an option. The nations of Canaan would be fighting a defensive battle. They would be unlikely to pursue Bnai Yisrael once they felt they were no longer threatened.[2]

Of course, Rashi disagrees with this distinction. He explains that the circuitous route selected by Hashem was designed to discourage retreat when attacked by Amalek. According to Rashi, Hashem was concerned that Bnai Yisrael might panic when attacked by Amalek. In their panic, they might make the foolish decision to attempt a retreat. The circuitous route discouraged this choice.[3]

How might Rashi respond to Nachmanides' objection to his interpretation of the passage? According to Rashi's interpretation, the wording of the passage is somewhat disjointed. One of the most interesting responses to this objection is offered by Gur Aryeh. He suggests that Rashi was aware of the objection posed by Nachmanides and provided a response. Gur Aryeh notes that Rashi adds to his interpretation of the passage an enigmatic statement. Rashi comments that there are numerous interpretations of the phrase "for it was near" in the midrash.[4] Rashi does not quote any of the interpretations. Why does Rashi alert us to the existence of these interpretations?

Gur Aryeh suggests that Rashi's reference to the midrash is a response to Nachmanides' objection. Rashi is acknowledging that the passage's wording is not completely consistent with his interpretation. However, Rashi is explaining that the wording is designed to accommodate an allusion to the various insights provided by the midrash.

Gur Aryeh offers an illustration that clarifies his comments. Avraham made a covenant of peace with the Pelishtim. This covenant was to extend a number of generations. According to the midrash, the phrase "for it was near" refers to this covenant. Bnai Yisrael could not enter into battle with the Pelishtim because of Avraham's covenant. It was "too near" -- too recent. The period of the covenant had not yet passed. [5],[6] The passage's odd construction provides an allusion to

this and similar interpretations. The passage describes Hashem attributing his decision to two factors: One is clearly related to the insecurities of Bnai Yisrael -- they may retreat when confronted by battle. According to Rashi, the other factor, "for it was near," is an amplification of this concern. A direct route would facilitate retreat. Rashi maintains that this is the simple meaning of the passage. However, the disjointed phrasing in the passage alludes to an additional interpretation. The wording implies that an additional factor -- separate and independent of Bnai Yisrael's insecurities -- influenced the selection of this route. In short, the passage is constructed so as to communicate an overt message and to allude to the additional messages suggested by the midrash.

It is important to note that there are two fundamental differences between Rashi and Nachmanides' interpretations. First, according to Rashi, Hashem was concerned that Bnai Yisrael's response to an attack by Amalek. He was concerned that Bnai Yisrael would panic and attempt a foolish retreat. This would be a foolish response. Amalek would not break off its attack. Even as Bnai Yisrael fled, Amalek would press the attack. Hashem selected a circuitous route in order to discourage this panicked reaction. According to Nachmanides, Hashem's decision was not directed towards addressing the challenge posed by Amalek. It was designed to prepare the nation for its inevitable confrontation with the nations of Canaan. In this confrontation, retreat would be a practical option. Bnai Yisrael could avoid war through retreat. Hashem's plan was designed to create an interlude between the escape from Egypt and the conquest of the land. During the interlude, the nation would mature and develop the confidence to face battle. Rashi and Nachmanides do not necessarily differ on Bnai Yisrael's likely response to Amalek's attack. But, they

do differ on whether Hashem's plan was designed to address this issue.

Second, according to Rashi, Hashem's decision was an extension of the redemption from Egypt. It was designed to assure that the redemption would not falter. Hashem wished to prevent a negation of the redemption. He had redeemed Bnai Yisrael from Egypt. They were not to return. However, according to Nachmanides, Hashem's decision was designed to prepare the nation for the conquest of the Land of Israel. In other words, the travels in the wilderness provided an interlude between the redemption from Egypt and the conquest of the Land of Israel. This interlude had a purpose. It was designed to prepare the nation for the conquest of the land. Also, it was essential that during this interlude the redemption remain intact. It was essential that the redemption not be negated by the return to Egypt. Rashi and Nachmanides differ on which aspect of this interlude dictated the selection of a circuitous route. According to Rashi, the selection of this route was designed to assure the preservation of the redemption. According to Nachmanides, the route was selected in order to facilitate the conquest of the Land of Israel.

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 13:17.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 13:17.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 13:17.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 13:17.

[5] Rav Yehuda Loew of Prague (Maharal), Gur Aryeh Commentary on Sefer Shemot 13:17.

[6] Michilta, Parshat BeShalach, Chapter 1.

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Join us online this Sunday Feb. 4th
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God

"I am God"

(continued from page 1)

In this week's Parsha Beshalach, we read of the famous splitting of the Red Sea. Subsequent to this miracle, the Jews are without water for three days. They arrive at Mara, and find undrinkable, bitter water. (Exod. 15:23) The Jews murmur against Moses. Moses cries to God, and God shows Moses a wood, which, when thrown into the bitter waters, sweetens them. The Jews are informed that if they follow the Torah, they will avoid all the disease inflicted upon Egypt, "For I am God your Healer" God says.

Ironically, immediately following their encampment at Mara, they arrive; apparently close by, to Elimah where they find twelve springs and seventy date palms. Why does God not take them directly to Elimah? It is clear that God desired that the Jews first arrive at Mara, and experience the lesson that God is a "healer". The purposeful nature of their arrival at Mara is derived from the close proximity of the plentiful Elimah. God avoided taking the Jews there first. Why was God's capacity as a healer an essential lesson...and why now?

What had the Jews experienced about God until this point? They witnessed ten

plagues...ten negative experiences. Even the splitting of the sea, although saving them, was a destructive nature, as the corpses of the Egyptians were washed up on the shore. Perhaps, the Jews might have harbored some view of God as an "afflicting" God. There was a balance that needed to be struck. God purposefully brought the Jews to Mara, so as to unveil His ability to perform "positive" miracles as well. This is why God concludes this lesson with the words, "I am God your Healer". This lesson will now neutralize the Jews' perception of God's acts.

However, this healing quality is inextricably bound up with the Jews' upholding of the Torah. This is clearly embodied in the fact that both ideas – the sweetened water and the Torah – are in a single Torah verse. And we know by tradition that all ideas connected in a single verse, by definition, are related. This is the very concept of a verse or "pasuk". Pasuk means to end, or conclude. So we may state that each Torah verse ends one idea.

Perhaps there is another, deeper idea here as well...

Let us examine God's words: "I am God your Healer". God could have said, "God is your Healer"...why include "I am God"? Don't the Jews know this point already?

We immediately associate to the numerous times in Parshas Kedoshim where God concludes all of those commands with the words "I am God". The reason God says "I am God", is to oppose the opposite sentiment: that one does NOT accept God, for various reasons.

Here are some examples:

"Observe my Sabbath, I am God." This lesson is that we must not ignore God as Creator, so God reminds us in the command of Sabbath, "I am God", meaning, "I am the Creator", the very core idea of Sabbath.

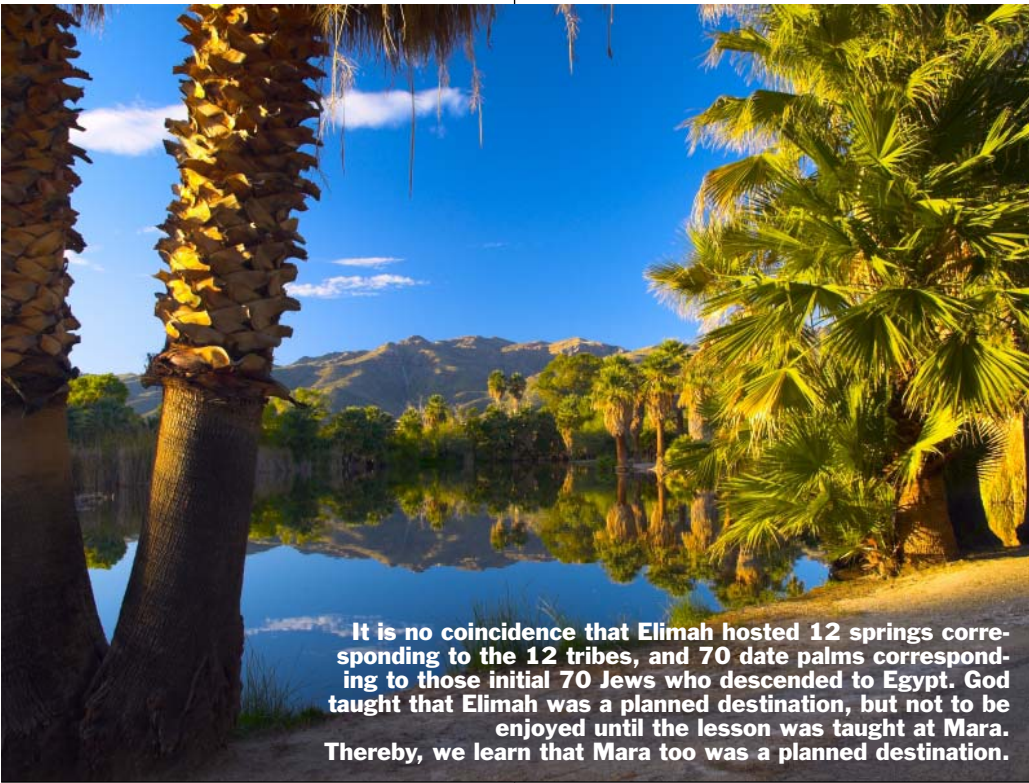
"Don't use faulty weights, I am God." Here, we are reminded that God sees all. Our attempt to steal covertly with false weights is a denial of God's omniscience. God therefore warns us, "I am God"...who sees all.

"Don't perform idolatry, I am God". Clearly, idolatry is a denial of the true, One God, so God reminds us that He alone is the only God.

But there may be another form of veering from God, and perhaps that was one matter God wishes to underline here. The Jews approached Moses with their complaint about having no water. They could have prayed to God, just as Moses did in response to their murmuring. And perhaps Moses prayed to God with a loud "cry", so as to capture the attention of the Jews. The lesson is that when in need, God alone is the one to whom we must direct our requests. We must not approach man, not even Moses. This explains why God says, "I am God" your Healer. God could have simply stated that He was their healer. But He emphasizes, "I am God"...to Me alone should you direct all your requests."

This has much bearing on the theme of our recent articles, where we have addressed the popular practice of baking keys in challas, wearing red bendels, and barren women following pregnant women into the mikva with the hopes of some cure, or segula, as these prohibited practices are called. Not only do such practices have no basis in natural law, but also the Talmud prohibits such acts under the heading of Nichush, or magic. This is an Issur D'Oraissa, a Torah Prohibition. Maimonides teaches that the only ideas we are to accept are truths we witness, matters that we reason to be true, or the words of the Rabbis. Certainly, if a notion opposes God's words, like magical beliefs, we are not to follow it...certainly, if the idea goes against all reason.

God teaches the Jews "He is God". The universe has a Creator. There is a "Source" of our existence and our fate to whom we may approach. Let us abandon what is useless, when we can voice our needs directly to the only One who can answer. ■



It is no coincidence that Elimah hosted 12 springs corresponding to the 12 tribes, and 70 date palms corresponding to those initial 70 Jews who descended to Egypt. God taught that Elimah was a planned destination, but not to be enjoyed until the lesson was taught at Mara. Thereby, we learn that Mara too was a planned destination.



GOD'S SPLITTING OF THE RED SEA

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Parshas Bishalach commences with the Jews' journey immediately following their Egyptian exodus, (Exod. 13:17) "God did not guide them via the path of the land of the Philistines, as it was near, lest the people repent when they see war and return to Egypt." As Maimonides teaches in his great work, *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Book III. Chap. 32), God's initial plan was not to lead the Jews towards the Red Sea, but towards the Philistines. A separate consideration demanded this route be avoided. But I ask, why would the Jews return to the very place they were now fleeing? Nonetheless, we are taught to prevent the Jews' return to Egypt, God circumvented their route.

We then read that God clearly orchestrated events to make the Jews appear as easy prey for Pharaoh, enticing him to recapture his fled slaves. God told Moses to encamp by the sea. What was the purpose? (Exod. 4:3) "And Pharaoh will say about the Children of Israel that they are confused in the land, the desert has closed around them." The purpose of traveling not by way of the Philistines, but towards the Red Sea now appears to have a different objective: to lure Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea, ultimately to be drowned. But it does not appear this was the plan from the outset. Had it been, God would not have taught of His consideration regarding the Philistines. That nation's war would not have entered into the equation.

The ultimate purpose in the death of Pharaoh and his army is stated in Exodus 14:4, "And I will strengthen Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them, and I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army, and Egypt will know that I am God..." God sought to gain honor by leading the Jews to the Red Sea, luring in Pharaoh, and creating the miraculous partition of waters. We are confused; did God lead the Jews to the Red Sea to circumvent the Philistines, or to lure Egypt to their death and gain honor? Furthermore, why does God seek to "gain honor" for Himself?

Upon their arrival at the Red Sea, the Jews soon see Pharaoh and his army in pursuit. Moses prays to God, and God responds, "Why do you cry unto me?" This is a surprising response. A basic principle in Judaism is the beseeching of God's help when in need, and the Jews most certainly were. So why does God seem to oppose such a principle at this specific juncture?

Another question apropos of this section is what the goal was of the Ten Plagues, in contrast to the parting of the Red Sea? If the Red Sea parting was merely to save the Jews and kill Pharaoh and his army, God could have easily spared this miracle and wiped out the Egyptians during one of the Ten Plagues. God prefers fewer

miracles; this is why there is 'nature'. Our question suggests that the destruction of Pharaoh and his army had a different objective, other than the simple destruction of the Egyptians. What was that objective?

There is also an interesting Rashi, which states a metaphor taken from *Medrash Tanchumah*. Rashi cites that when the Jews "lifted their eyes and saw the Egyptian army traveling after them, they saw the 'officer of Egypt' traveling from heaven to strengthen Egypt." (Exod. 14:10) What is the meaning of this metaphor?

Looking deeper into the actual miracle of the Red Sea splitting (Exodus 14:28-29) we read, "And the waters returned and they covered the chariots and the horsemen and the entire army of Pharaoh coming after him in the sea, and there was not left of them even one. And the Children of Israel traveled on dry land in the midst of the sea and the water was to them walls on their right and on their left." Ibn Ezra states that Pharaoh and his army were being drowned, simultaneously as the Jews crossed through on dry land. This is derived from the Torah first stating that Pharaoh was drowned, followed by a statement that the Jews traveled on dry land. Although one section of the sea turbulently tossed and submerged the Egyptian army, "...and God churned Egypt in the midst of the sea", the adjoining section contained waters parted into two calm walls on either side of the Jews, bearing the dry seabed. Ibn Ezra calls this a "wonder inside a wonder".

We must ask why God deemed it essential to combine salvation and destruction in one fell swoop. God could have exited the Jews completely, prior to allowing the Egyptians entrance into the sea. What is learned from God's planned simultaneity of Jewish salvation with Egyptian destruction?

Now we must ask an unavoidable and basic question which Moses pondered: why were the Jews subjected to Egyptian bondage? To recap, Moses once saved the life of a Jew, beaten by an Egyptian. Moses carefully investigated the scene, he saw no one present, and killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried him in the sand. The next day, Moses sought to settle an argument between the infamous, rebellious duo, Dathan and Aviram. They responded to Moses, "will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses feared the matter was known. But how was this matter made public? The Torah described the scene just before Moses killed the taskmaster (Exod. 2:12), "And he turned this way and that way, and there was no man (present)..." So if there was clearly no one present, who informed on Moses? A Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer; the Jew who Moses saved was there, he

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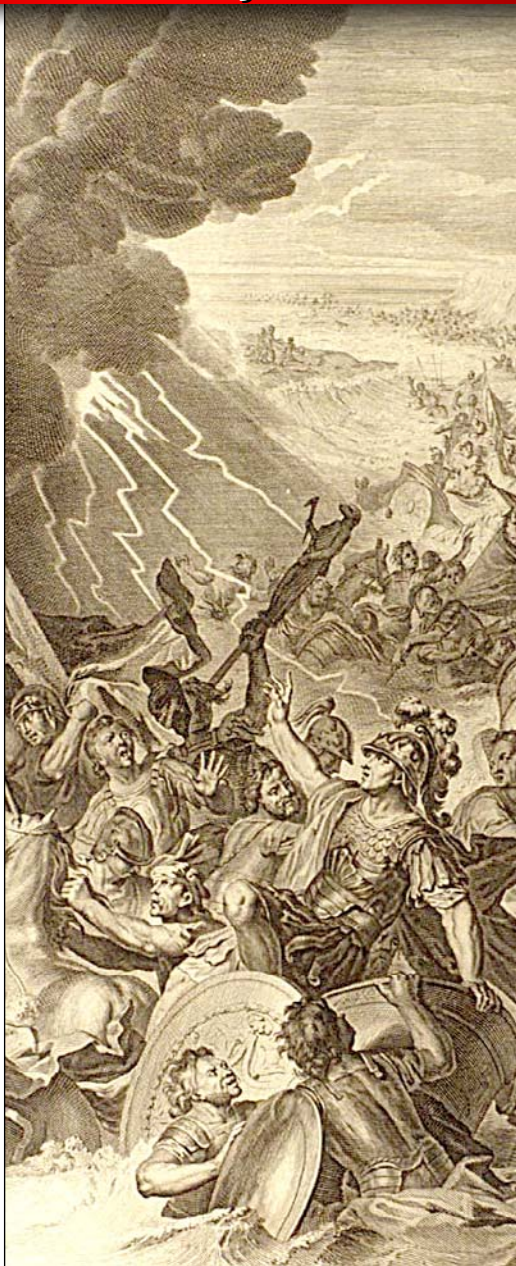
(Red Sea continued from page 5)

Weekly Parsha

turned in Moses. We are astounded that one, whose life was saved, would inform on his savior. What causes such unappreciative behavior? The Torah's literal words describing Moses' astonishment are "(Moses said) therefore the matter is known", referring to the disclosure of Moses' murder of the Egyptian. Rashi quotes a Medrash on the words "the matter was known", paraphrasing Moses' own thoughts, (Rashi on Exod. 2:14) "The matter has been made known to me on which I used to ponder; 'What is the sin of the Jews from all the seventy nations that they should be subjugated to back-breaking labor? But now I see they are fit for this.'"

Moses now understood why the Jews were deserving of Egyptian bondage. This ungrateful Jew's backstabbing act answered Moses' question. But this ungrateful nature is not its own trait, but a result of another trait: The act of informing on Moses displays an inability to question Egyptian authority; "Even if my brother Jew saves me, Egypt is still the authority who I must respect". It wasn't aggression against Moses, but an unconditional allegiance to Egypt. The Jews' minds were emotionally crippled by their decades as slaves. The famous Patty Hearst case teaches us of the Stockholm Syndrome, where victims sympathize with their captors. Israel too sympathized with Egypt. Such identification would cause one to inform on his own friend, even on his own savior Moses. Moses witnessed this corrupt character trait firsthand and realized that Israel justly received the Egyptian bondage as a response. But how does the punishment fit the crime? (You may ask that this is reverse reasoning, as this ungrateful nature came subsequent to bondage, not before. But I answer that Moses too knew this, yet Moses saw something in this ungrateful act which he knew predated Egyptian bondage, answering Moses' question why Israel deserved this punishment.) So what was Moses' understanding of the justice behind Israel's bondage? Seeing that the Jew informed on him even after saving his life, Moses said, "the matter is known", meaning, I understand why the Jews deserve bondage.

In approaching an answer, I feel our very first question highlights the central issue - the cause for the splitting of the Red Sea. The two reasons given for God redirecting the Jews' journey are not mutually exclusive. The latter, drowning of Pharaoh and God's gaining honor is in fact a response to the former: the Jews' security in Egypt fostered by their extended stay. I suggest the following answer: God did in fact wish to take the Jews directly to Sinai. This is His response to Moses' question as to the merit of the Jews' salvation - "they are to serve Me on this mountain". Meaning, their merit of this Exodus



is their future Torah acceptance at Sinai and their subsequent adherence. But due to a peripheral concern of the Philistines, a new route was required. And not just a route on the ground, but also a route that also addressed the underlying inclination towards an Egyptian return. God initially wanted only to bring Israel to Sinai. But now He sought to address the Jews' draw towards Egypt. God wanted to drown Pharaoh and his army to respond to the Jews' current mentality: the Jews preferred Egyptian bondage to warring with the Philistines to maintain freedom. This was unacceptable to God. God enacted the miracle of the Splitting of the Red Sea, for many objectives, but primarily to remove the security Egypt afforded these former slaves. Destruction of the Egyptian empire was a necessary step in Israel's development.

This answers why God responded to Moses' prayer when the Egyptian army drew near, "Why do you cry unto Me?" In other words, God was telling Moses that prayer is inappropriate right now. Why? Because the very act of traveling to the Red Sea was in fact the solution for what Moses prayed - the destruction of Egypt. God was informing Moses that what you pray for is already in the works, and therefore your prayer is unnecessary.

Egypt's destruction was not an end in itself. It had a greater goal - to replace Egypt's authoritative role with the True Authority - God. This dual 'motive' is displayed in a specific formulation of the Red Sea miracle. Moses tells the Jews "as you see Egypt today, you will never again see them. God will war for you, and you will be silent." There are two ideas here. The first is the termination of the Egyptians. The Jews had to be rid of the Egyptian 'crutch'. Seeing them dead on the seashore emancipated them psychologically: there were no more Egyptian taskmasters to direct their lives. The phenomena of a slave can be created by nature, or nurture. In Egypt, the Jews were nurtured into a slave mentality, a dependency on a dominating authority. This mind set actually affords some psychological comfort, despite physical pain. When one prefers slavery, he in other words prefers not to make decisions, and relies heavily on a leader. Perhaps for this reason, the very first laws given (in Parshas Mishpatim) address slavery. They outline this institution as a simple, monetary reality. One has no money, so he pays his debt via servitude. But in no way is human respect compromised when he is a slave. The master must give his slave his only pillow and suffer a loss of comfort himself to accommodate another human. The slave remains equal to the master in all areas and deserves respect as any other man. Slavery is simply an institution under the heading of monetary laws. This teaches the Jews that the slavery they experienced is not a way of life, but a temporarily state. The fact that God does not prefer slavery for man is His statement that "you are servants to Me and not to man." The Torah law of boring a slave's ear physically brands him of his corruption in not "listening" to God's command on Sinai, "servants to Me are you, and not servants to servants (man)". (Rashi on Exod. 21:6)

The second idea derived from "God will war for you, and you will be silent", is that God alone delivers salvation. Your "silence" means God alone will bring salvation. There cannot be another cause sharing God's role as the "Go'ale Yisrael" - the Redeemer of the Jews is God alone. Why is this necessary? This underlines the primary concept of the miracle of the sea. The

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goal was to instill in the Children of Israel an appreciation for God, and an acceptance of His authority. This authority would remain compromised, had Egypt survived. Respecting God's exclusive authority is also a prerequisite for the Jews' impending acceptance of the Torah on Sinai. For this reason, many of God's commands are "remembrances of the Exodus" for the goal of engendering appreciation for the Creator's kindness. When man's relationship with God is based on appreciation for Him - as guided by the commands - man is thereby reminded that God desires the good for him. As man acts to fulfill his Torah obligations, he will not view them as inexplicable burdens, but he will seek to understand God's intended perfection in each command. Man will then arrive at his true purpose, and find the most fulfillment in his life. Man will be guided in all areas by Divine, rational and pleasing laws which conform perfectly to man's mind. All conflicts will be removed.

The males and females of the Children of Israel verbalized identical, prophetic responses to God's triumph, "God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea". God's objective of not only eliminating Egypt's authority, but gaining honor for Himself was achieved. This identical song of praise (Az Yashir) of both the male and female Jews displayed the newly instilled appreciation for their victorious God. The destruction of the Egyptians and the acceptance of God were the two primary issues that were addressed successfully. This explains why the Jewish salvation and the Egyptian destruction happened simultaneously. They formed one goal. Had God desired simple destruction of the Egyptians as its own ends, He could have done so in Egypt. But it was only in response to the Jew's overestimation of Egypt, that God destroyed them in the Red Sea, together with the Jewish salvation. The death of the Egyptians was a means for the acceptance of God, not obscured by any other master. Subsequent to the parting of the sea, the Jews in fact attested to God's success in His plan, as it is said, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant."

Additionally, God's desire that the Jews glorify Him, is not "for" God. Nothing man can do may benefit God, nor does God share man's nature of "need", as in needing to gain honor for Himself. All that God does is to benefit man. This is most clearly witnessed in the great holiday of Passover, where the Creator of the universe educates man (both Jew and Egyptian) with the hopes of their conformity with reality, with monotheism. Only after the Egyptians displayed disobedience and ignored the fundamentals taught through the Ten Plagues, did God have no

recourse but to destroy them. God then continued His acts of mercy on man, and delivered the Jews to freedom so they could accept the Torah.

How do we explain the Medrash regarding the "officer of Egypt"? It now fits precisely with our theory: The Jews felt unconditionally bound to Egypt as inferiors. At the shores, they did not actually see any "officer of Egypt traveling from heaven." This metaphor means they looked at Egypt as invincible, as if some heavenly force defended Egypt over which they could not prevail. This is the meaning of the Medrash. It is a metaphor for Israel's vanquished state of mind.

In summary, the plagues of Egypt served to spread fame of God, "And you will speak of My name throughout the land." The splitting of the Red Sea had a different purpose, "And I will gain honor through Pharaoh and his entire army." The honor God acquired is for the good of Israel, not just Egypt. The Jews will view God, as One who is incomparable, the true Creator, and the One who take notice of man and mages his affairs. (Ramban, Exod. 13:16) The Red Sea miracle was executed as a response to the crippled mentality of the Jews, as God stated, "...lest they repent when they see war and return to Egypt." The circumvention from Philistine to the Red Sea was to avoid an inevitable return to Egypt, and to also correct that very impulse by the Jews witnessing God's triumph over Egypt, simultaneously instilling tremendous appreciation for God. In one act, the corruption in Israel was removed and a new faith in God was born, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant." This simultaneous termination of Egypt and salvation for themselves was reiterated twice in the Az Yashir song, "God is greatly exalted, the horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea". This response displayed how effected the Jews were by God's miraculous wonders and salvation.

In all honesty, the Jews do revert to "fond" recollections of Egypt not too long after these events, and in the Book of Numbers. However, we cannot judge any acts of God's as failures, if His subjects subsequently err. God's method - and perfection - is to offer man the best solution at a given time. This is a tremendous kindness of God. Man has free will and can revert back to his primitive state even after God steps in to assist him. This human reversion in no way diminishes from God's perfect actions. Our appreciation of His wisdom and His precision in His divine actions remains firm. All of God's actions displaying His perfection and honor are not for Him, as He does not need a mortal's praises. He does it for us, so we may learn new truths and perfect ourselves in our one chance here on Earth. ■



WERE THE PLAGUES CAUSED BY NATURE?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: A while ago, Time magazine published an article claiming that the plagues in Egypt were caused by natural occurrences. I am on an E-list with lost Jews and I wish to refute this. Are you aware of any site/article which I can post? I have been looking all over and cannot find what I need. I would appreciate any help you can give me. Thank you.

Mesora: If you request affirmation by plague-critics from the Biblical accounts in their own Bibles, they will not be able to explain such miracles naturally. God created hail mixed with fire. The waters of the Red Sea "piled like heaps" are also described as "walls on their right and their left". Regarding the Death of Firstborns, how can this be explained naturally,...a plague against bodies, but not based not on genetics, germs or cell damage, but on the order of one's birth? This is equivalent to saying that of a nation, only those wearing red strings will die. There is no biological connection between red strings and death. So too, there is no biological connection between one's order of birth and this sudden plague. This is certainly a Divine phenomena.

Each plague happened exactly as Moses predicted, and precisely when forecasted. How could a man predict that frogs will engulf a city, or that lice, locusts, hail, darkness, blood, beasts, boils, and all the rest will occur when he says, and as he says? The only explanation is that the Creator of all natural law intervened and altered these laws, what we refer to as a "miracle". ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Good Day

Last week, we printed a letter and response to a chaplain. To appreciate this week's follow up, we reiterate the main points of our response:

1) One need not disprove that which is unproven. Jesus did not comply with the Torah's formula for who is the messiah. Not only was Jesus never validated as messiah; Torah authorities unanimously denounce him as a fraud.

2) Christianity says Jesus died for the sins of others. Thereby, he denies God's very words: "Each man in his own sin shall be killed". (Deut. 24:16)

3) Christianity's "martyrdom" approach completely denies God's Torah, which denounces belief or salvation by a man: "Do not trust in princes, in the son of man, who offers no salvation..." (Psalm 146:3-5) "Let us search and examine our ways and return to God". (Lamentations, 3:40) Repentance is only through introspection, confession to God, and improvement in behavior.

4) Christianity conveniently selects certain parts of Isaiah and Daniel to attempt to prove Jesus, but ignores the above passages.

5) Christians cannot educate us on what we alone received, at the only mass witnessed revelation; long before multiple, conflicting gospels were 'voted' into history.

The chaplain wrote again this week, but did not address any of these points above, but simply repeated his first position. Following is my final response:

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Chaplain, You initiated a correspondence with me, and I respectfully took my time to respond to each of your points. Now, instead of respecting my time, you ignore all of what I wrote you, and you have not replied to even one of my many refutations of Jesus as Messiah. That is compounded by the fact that the refutations I cite, are sources accepted by Christianity, i.e., the Old Testament and Prophets.

Your lack of response can only be understood as proof that you have no defense against those Biblical fundamentals that denounce Jesus as Messiah. This is because the Torah's refutations of Jesus are clear, intelligent, and undeniable.

You – as many other blind faith religionists – have demonstrated that your religion is not based on anything sensible, which can be proved. But in fact, when contradictions arise as I brought to your attention, you ignore them, and reiterate the exact same rhetoric, as if I did not hear your position the first time you uttered it.

If you will not respect my time by engaging reason, and by first; responding to each of my points...I don't see why you wrote in the first place, and I will not continue a dialogue where my words are ignored. Good day, *Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim* ■

Good Fantasies

Omphile: Greetings. I have a question regarding a lecture by Rabbi Chait on Abraham and the land he was promised. According to the Torah, Abraham was not told which land he was to be given, but was told to just leave his birthplace and the land of his father. Now I hear the Chazal say that the reason he wasn't told which land he would get was to make the land desirable in his eyes (or something to that effect). Now how is making this land "desirable in his eyes" different from encouraging him to fantasize about the land? Did not Koheles teach that man must stay away from fantasy if he is to be happy?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Yes, fantasy that originates in "man's imagination" is destructive. But that which originates with "God", meaning the land, must be a good, and man may anticipate it in his imagination. Similarly, statues originating in man's imagination are idolatrous, while God's cherubim covering the Ark are not. The reason being that what God commands is for man's good. Nothing may be added or subtracted. And if man creates something, which God has not commanded, by definition, man is deviating from the perfect system, and it must corrupt him. ■

Good Christians

Harold: This was sent as a reply to your rationalization of trying to convince Christians that Jesus was not the true messiah. I thought such efforts, while approved of by Rashi, are less appropriate today than noting and publicizing Christian support for the State of Israel. There are some 30 million Evangelicals in the US who support Israel and are actively trying to prevent the Government of Israel from giving up "land for peace". Can this be said for the 5 million American Jews? So rather than have theological arguments with such a large group of Americans who support Israel, why not publicize

such support? Look up C.U.F.I. on the Internet. I have been involved with them for years and never once have they asked me to convert.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You are keeping them in the blind by not discussing their infractions against Torah fundamentals...they must keep the Noachide laws, and Christianity violates them. You suggest an approach against what Jews are supposed to do: educate the nations on monotheism.

Harold: We are talking at cross-purposes. Is the existence of the State of Israel more important than preaching to the goyim? If the existence of the State is more important, I am right. If preaching to the goyim is more important, you are right. But if we cannot work to do both WITH those non-Jews who strongly support Israel, then I conclude that only G-d can help us as we are in mortal danger.

And what should we have done to the righteous Gentiles during the Holocaust? Try to convince them of their religious errors or thank them for their help? I personally would rather have the Evangelicals strongly opposing the madman in Iran rather than preach to them, alienate them and have them become neutral or indifferent. Better spend time preaching to the Jews here in America, they need your help more than the goyim.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: While Christians support Israel, we cannot allow those good actions to obscure falsehoods. Israel does not outweigh Torah education. Teaching Torah is the greatest mitzvah. Certainly, if the Christians do not know what the Torah says, how can you suggest their support of a Torah culture has meaning to them? You must conclude that you seek support for Israel, even if it damns the Christians to violating God's will for them. You also miss one possible scenario: a Jew will successfully explain the Torah truths to Christian, he will open his eyes, and you will have saved a single soul. I am personally involved with some impressive former Christians, who, without the education of certain virtuous Jews, would not know where to turn to live their one life in accord with OUR Maker's desires. But because certain Jews do in fact reveal the faults of Christianity to the Christians, they give them eternal life.

Let's give the Christians the benefit of the doubt that they will view our concern for them as equal to their concern for us. Let's assume that they will appreciate our care for their lives, and that they won't attack as or abandon their support for us. Let's assume, until proven wrong, that a Christian will use his and her mind to be honest, that the Old Testament refutes Christian tenets, and that they can see that with time. Taking this route, we can help other human beings, not just Jews.

God desires all flesh to recognize him. You say this three times daily in the Alaynu prayer. ■

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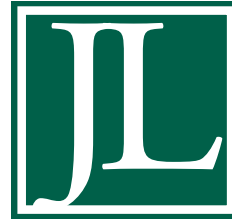


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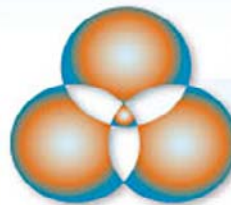
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