



DISCUSSIONS BLACK MAGIC DID EGYPT HAVE IT? Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



UNDERSTANDING MEDRASH ANALYEIS Rabbi Eliezer Barany



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THE BIBLE'S MIRACLES HIDDEN MESSAGES: NOT JUST SPECTACLES

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

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Punishment

Erik: What would you say to somebody who says that the only payment for sin is death, and forgiveness is not enough? Rabbi: God's Bible, Prophets and Writings are the exclusive authoritative texts on how God operates. Studying the histories contained therein, we see God forgives, and no payment is asked of one who repents fully. This is because punishment is meant only to correct a flaw. But if one corrects himself, there is nothing left for a punishment to correct. Ezekiel (chap. 18) says God views such a penitent person as "never having sinned." Thus, no additional payment is required from that person.

Why the Praise?

Jessie: What is the big deal that the Israelites "trusted Hashem and His servant Moshe" after the splitting of the red sea? This trust didn't last very long and didn't prevent them from lacking trust, sinning with the Golden Calf, the sin of the spies, Korach's rebellion, etc.

Rabbi: Rabbi Israel Chait responded, "This is a very good question. However, man cannot know what emotions are lurking inside him. He can't anticipate how he will behave tomorrow. Today, man can be a tzaddik, and tomorrow he can give in to his most base instinctual urges. Man cannot know what emotion will overtake him down the road. Like it is stated regarding Ishmael, "Ba'ashare hu sham; man is evaluated in the moment." Torah does not look at what sins man will commit later, and taint him in the present. At the time of the splitting of the Reed Sea, the Jews were 100% supportive of God and Moses. Torah evaluates man in the moment. Torah praises man when it is due to him.

DISCUSSIONS

Tradition

Reader: Why do we keep tradition for the sake of tradition? If the reason a law was made no longer applies, why can we not annul this law?

Rabbi: In certain cases, if the law was essentially due to a current condition, if that condition no longer applies, the law is nullified. An example is washing hands after a meal, which was a precaution that the table salt (of the Sodom region) could damage one's eyes. But that salt is no longer around, so the law falls away.

In contrast, riding a horse on the sabbath was a decree against the possibility of breaking a branch off a tree to whip the horse to trot faster. Breaking a branch from a tree is a Torah prohibition. But even in the desert where there are no trees, one cannot ride a horse, as the system must remain intact in all places. Perhaps if trees stopped growing, this law too would be null.

Reader: What about cases like kitnios and not eating poultry and dairy together? Those were derabanan and nowadays we can identify wheat vs. legumes and meat vs. chicken.

Rabbi: A bet din who is superior can reverse a decree. ■

Black Magic

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Last Shabbos, my young friend Avraham Schreck was a little disappointed that the assistant Rabbi was not in shul to give a learning class after davening at kiddush. It was nice to see his value of Torah. As we sat and enjoyed some chulent, I said, "We can learn together instead." Avraham and I then shared some thoughts about what he had heard on the Parsha regarding Pharaoh's astrologers' "black magic," that Lavan had powers, and other matters. So I will write this talking to you Avraham...

Avraham, I enjoyed learning with you and thought it a good idea to share what we discussed so other students like you could benefit from our Torah discussion. I mentioned to you a few ideas that are most important in Torah. The first truth, is that God created the universe, with no help from anyone else, since He did not yet create anyone else! Everything in the universe and on Earth has a certain design and follows the exact laws God designed for each creation. Nothing has the ability to change its laws. For example, a man cannot change his design so he no longer needs food. A fish cannot change its design, so that it can live outside of water.

The same is true regarding Pharaoh's astrologers. Some people read the Torah and believe they were able to duplicate God's miracles that He gave Moshe Rabbeinu. But since God alone created and controls all laws of nature, the astrologers could not have performed any miracle. How then can the Torah state that the astrologers created blood and frogs like Moshe? Rabbi Saadia Gaon explained[1] that they must have used red dye to imitate blood, and they must have poured chemicals into the river to cause the frogs to jump out of the river. We also learn that the astrologers could not imitate hail falling from the heavens, or bring locusts to Egypt, or darkness, or any other plague. Furthermore, isn't it interesting that Pharaoh always asked Moshe to end the plagues? Why didn't Pharaoh ask the astrologers, if they really had "black magic" powers? The answer is that the astrologers had no more power than you and I. Black magic is not a truth.

But I think the strongest proof against the belief in black magic, was the plague of boils. Read this pasuk:

"And the astrologers could not stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boils were on the astrologers and all of Egypt (Shmos 9:11)."

Why mention that "all Egyptians" had boils, if the message concerns only the astrologers' inability to stand? This pasuk makes a comparison. Both, the astrologers and the Egyptians possessed boils. Why was their "equal" status to all other Egyptians an embarrassment to them? We see the answer quite readily! They were no better! They could not defend themselves from boils. What type of powerful astrologer - claiming to have magic - allows painful boils to stay on their skin many days? It is the liar who allows this to happen, since in fact, the astrologers had no more defense from boils than any other Egyptian. Their embarrassment is why they could not "appear" before Moses. In other words, God gave boils to Egypt, in order that the astrologers would be shown to be liars. God teaches us not to believe in magic. And in truth, magic has never been proved. Why? Because it is a false belief.

When Rashi or any other Rabbis talk in a way that seems they say the astrologers could do magic or predict the future, we must follow what our great Rabbis and Prophets teach: they are talking in riddles. But remember this most important Torah idea: God is the only one who controls the universe and everything in it, since He alone created the universe and gave each thing its laws. As God is the only Creator, nothing else has His powers.

In the introduction to Ein Yaakov, a sefer (book) of all the Gemara's Aggadata (stories), Rambam's son Avraham taught an important lesson. As King Solomon said, "The Rabbis speak in riddles." Avraham ben Rambam and many other Rabbis taught that we cannot accept amazing Gemara stories as real: they are metaphors. For example, when the Gemara teaches that Rava created a man, we know this is impossible, so there is a deeper lesson. (See "Talmudic Metaphors" following this reply to you, which addresses that Gemara)

Many times when the Rabbis wish to teach, they will use a metaphor in order to create a powerful image in our mind. It's like when your friend says he is hungry enough "to eat a horse." We know he cant eat that much, but the picture this metaphor creates in our minds has a stronger affect on us, than if he just said, "I am very hungry." Seeing a picture in your mind of your friend eating a horse will really get his message to you! The Rabbis too used metaphor, exaggeration, repetition and many other forms of speech to teach their lessons.

For example, in his book of metaphors (Mishley 1:9), King Solomon said that Torah is like necklaces on our neck and a crown on our head. Now, you and I both know that when anyone speaks Torah, there is no necklace or crown that suddenly appears! So we must study this metaphor to uncover its meaning. We realize that "head" refers to our mind, and "neck" refers to our throat or our speech. When one learns Torah, his mind (head) is "crowned," or rather, improved. Like a crown on a king's head shows his importance, when we learn it's like we are more important, as if we are wearing a crown. And our speech is also improved, like we were wearing a necklace around our throat.

So Avraham, I hope this lesson is clear. During our life, we will talk to many teachers, friends and family. Sometimes will hear different views about Torah. We wonder how so many religious people can argue on Torah. Yet, the Gemara is full of disagreements. And the Rabbis say they were not all correct. How do we decide what is true?

God gave each of us a mind, because He wants each of us to think about what we learn, and not just agree with anyone. God wants us all to use our minds to decide what we think is true. We know God is always correct. So to find out what view is right and which view is wrong, we look at God's words in the Torah. That's why I quoted pasukim above. God's words teach that black magic is false, and that Pharaoh's astrologers were liars. I hope you will follow God's will, and use your own mind to think about what you hear, on any topic, to reject what you think is false, and accept only what you can prove is true, either through your senses, your mind, or by finding it in the Torah. A teacher can be wrong, and your younger brother can be right. It doesn't matter who says something; it only matters if what was said. is something that God also said, or something we can prove through reason, or through nature[2].

Thank you for learning with me last Shabbos.

[1] The Book of Beliefs and Opinion (Emunos v'Dayos) p 153

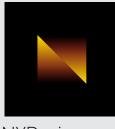
[2] Rambam, "Letter to Marseilles"

Talmudic Metaphors

"Rava said, 'If one is righteous, he could create worlds [like God].' As it says, 'For your sins separate you from your God'[1]. Rava thereby created a man, and sent him to Rav Zeira. He spoke to him but he did not answer. Rav Zeira said, 'You are from the chavrei [sorcerers], return to your dust'. On each Friday evening Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah would indulge in Sefer Yetzira [book of Creation] and would create a third-grown calf and eat it."[2] Websites that are not "responsive" to mobile screen sizes, lose Google ranking, and business. We can help.

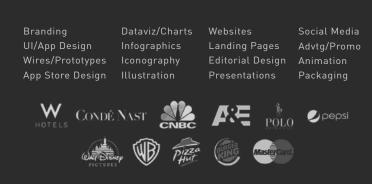


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THE BIBLE'S MIRACLES HIDDEN MESSAGES: NOT JUST SPECTACLES

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 Reed Sea, but towards the Philistines. A separate consideration demanded this route be avoided. But 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 Reed Sea now appears to have a different objective: to lure Pharaoh and his army into the Reed 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 Reed Sea, luring in Pharaoh and creating the miraculous partition of waters. We are confused; did God lead the Jews to the Reed 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 Reed 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 in need. So why does God seem to oppose such a principle at this specific juncture?

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PARSHA

Another question apropos of this section is what the goal was of the Ten Plagues, in contrast to the parting of the Reed Sea? If the Reed 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 Reed Sea splitting 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 (Exod. 14:28-29)." 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, 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)..." 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 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."

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MIDAS

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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 Reed 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 drowned 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 Reed Sea, for many objectives, but primarily to remove the security Eqypt 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 Reed 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 God. This dual "motive" is displayed in a specific formulation of the Reed 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 their respect for Egypt as an authority. 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)

+ he 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 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 Equpt survived. Respecting God's exclusive authority is also a prerequisite for the Jews' impending acceptance of the Torah on Sinai. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)





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 intended 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 Reed 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

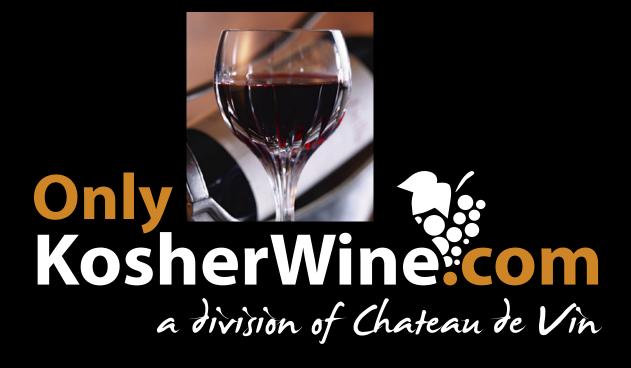
the parting of the sea, the Jews in fact attested to God's success in His plan, as it is said, "and they believed in God and in Moses His servant."

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.

n 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 Reed 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 takes notice of man and manages his affairs. (Ramban, Exod. 13:16) The Reed 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 Philistines to the Reed 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's mindset 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.

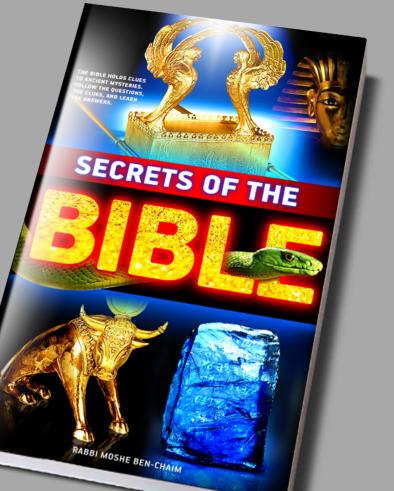
In all honesty, the Jews do revert to "fond" recollections of Egypt not too long after these events, and in the Book of Numbers. However, we cannot judge any acts of God's as failures, if His subjects subsequently err. God's method and perfection — is to offer man the best solution at a given time. This 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.



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WEEKLY PARSHA DECEPTION RABBI REUVEN MANN

> "PHARAOH HARDENED HIS HEART AND DID NOT LISTEN." AFTER THE NINTH PLAGUE, WHEN HE CUT OFF CONTACT WITH MOSHE, THE OFFER WAS NO LONGER ON THE TABLE. PHARAOH WOULD HAVE TO BE PAINFULLY COERCED TO RELEASE HIS SLAVES. THUS, THE JEWS WERE NOT OBLIGATED TO RETURN TO EGYPT. OUR FOREFATHERS DID NOT DISSIMULATE IN PURSUING THEIR FREEDOM.

This week's parsha, Beshalach, describes one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history, the Exodus from Egypt. Pharaoh acted, not for humane considerations, but because he was coerced by nationwide hysteria after the slaying of the firstborn ("for there was no house in which there was no death").

His submission did not last long. He soon realized that the Jews were not coming back and that Egypt no longer had a massive source of free labor. He regretted releasing them and mobilized his army to chase them, thinking that his former slaves would be easily conquered and returned to their labor.

Pharaoh did not realize that the Jews were not his true enemy. He discounted Hashem's protection, despite all the plagues he had suffered at His hand. With great fanfare, he embarked on the journey to his destruction.

Why did Pharaoh not see that his mission was hopeless? To explain his strange behavior, both Jews and gentiles assume that Moshe's demand to "Let my people go!" meant freeing them from slavery. That is simply not true. Moshe's request was exceedingly modest: that Pharaoh allow the Jews to travel 3 days' distance in the wilderness to serve Hashem, as He had commanded. This implied that they would return to Egypt and resume their labor after their worship.Weren't the Jews obliged to keep their word? Pharaoh had finally allowed them to leave. Did our ancestors resort to deception to free themselves?

One can certainly justify this. Someone who is kidnapped or subjected to enslavement has every right to do whatever is necessary to free himself, including lying to his captor. Thus, the Jews were entitled to employ deception to terminate their servitude. But the Jews were not acting on their own. Hashem orchestrated their extrication from slavery. G-d had no need to deceive or cause His nation to resort to trickery.

To resolve this question, we must understand the true purpose of the plagues. They were not intended to inflict pain, for G-d is merciful to all His creatures. The verse states that Hashem brought His "signs and wonders" so "Egypt will know that I am the Lord." G-d wanted Pharaoh and all Egypt to recognize His existence and dominion and to freely submit to His will, so He did not set the bar too high. To demand an end to the enslavement would have been beyond the capacity of Paroh's free will.

Hashem's request was more modest: Just give your slaves a brief vacation to serve Me, not by coercion, but because you recognize Me as the Almighty and agree to do My will. Had Pharaoh acceded, the Jews would have returned to Egypt. Pharaoh would have continued to obey Hashem and eventually would have voluntarily terminated the enslavement.

However, "Pharaoh hardened his heart and did not listen." After the ninth plague, when he cut off contact with Moshe, the offer was no longer on the table. Pharaoh would have to be painfully coerced to release his slaves. Thus, the Jews were not obligated to return to Egypt. Our forefathers did not dissimulate in pursuing their freedom.

We can now understand why Pharaoh chased them, leading his army to destruction. He was not afraid of G-d, because he simply denied that Hashem caused the plagues, even the slaying of the firstborn. He was never able to repudiate his original sinful proclamation: "I do not know Hashem, and I, also, will not send out Israel."

Fortunate is the person who does not harden his heart, but keeps it open to hear the truth. ■



POLITICS



BY ALAN SKORSKI

Charges of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism against Trump are the same that have been made against all Republicans in previous campaigns.

To ve been politically active for over 30 years, going back to my college days at Wayne State University, when I became the first pro-Israel activist on a campus that was flush with pro-PLO, Muslim, and communist student organizations.

With the recent victory of Donald Trump as our 45th president, the first ever outsider to win the highest office, we have seen a flurry of violence opposing his administration. If you listen to his adversaries in Democratic the Partv and liberal/Left wing group activists, they would have you believe that they are fighting for justice and "American values," and had the GOP nominated anyone else but Trump, they would have accepted the outcome of the elections.

As I have told my many Republican and Conservative friends, no matter who our candidate would have been, they would have attacked him/her as being a racist, anti-semite, sexist...and what ever new phobic and "ist" name they could come up with.

That's right; Had our nominee been Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, Carly Fiorina, Ben Carson, or any of the other candidates, the same attacks of racism, sexism, etc. would have been forthcoming.

In November of 2016, left wing comedian Bill Maher reprimanded his political peers, accusing them of



having "cried wolf" for so many years against Bush, McCain, and Romney, that nobody is listening to them when they attack Trump.

This was an anti-GOP ad from Democratic groups in 1998: "When you don't vote, you let another church explode. When you don't vote, you allow another cross to burn. Vote smart."

When Rudy Giuliani became mayor of NYC, one of the most broken major cities in the country, his policies of cleaning up the city brought charges of Nazism and comparisons to Hitler. His police department was compared to the KKK. In 2002 President George W. Bush, a very mild mannered good Christian family man was called a racist, and shortly into his administration was attacked by the left wing National Jewish Democratic Council of being "out of touch" with American Jewish values. Other groups compared him to - you guessed it – Hitler.

Throughout the Bush Administration, he was constantly being accused of employing Nazi-like policies and Nazi tactics.

In 2008, Republican war hero and moderate John McCain was vilified by the left, again by playing the race card against him. In 2012, Mitt Romney, another honorable religious family man was on the receiving end of being called a racist, sexist, etc.

Donald Trump is certainly out of the mainstream as far as how he ran his campaign and how he runs the country, but until he became a candidate, the 70-year-old New York City icon was never accused of being a racist or anti-semite. His administration has more pro-Israel Jews and non-Jews than any administration in history. The irony and ridiculousness of the scurrilous charges is that every anti-Trump rally has strong and vocal anti-Israel elements featuring Palestinian flags and other anti-Israel signs and speakers. The same self-righteous activists who accuse Trump of anti-Semitism are the same ones who are demanding that we welcome thousands of immigrants coming from the most anti-Semitic countries.

The charges and attacks against Trump are no different than the attacks that have been made against previous Republicans. The difference between Trump and the previous 2 GOP presidential candidates is that he won, so the attacks against him will only become more incessant and more deranged. ■ That is some portion of Talmud! Over the years, we hear others recite such metaphors with literal acceptance. However, we know God is the only creator, so this dismisses any literal interpretation of this specific Talmudic portion. As always, we must ask what are the questions that can unravel metaphors.

What strikes us first, is that Rava "created" a human being, and others created an animal. Such stories must be metaphoric, and perhaps the Talmud commences with the most glaring impossibility, to set the tone that the entire story is metaphoric. Why did Rava send the man he created to Rav Zeira, and what was Rav Zeira's disapproval concerning? Also, what is the flow of the quote from Isaiah? What is the connection between the two acts of creation of a man, and a calf? And why were Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah apparently successful, as they enjoyed their creation, while Rava was not?

Comparing the two creations, we notice right off the bat, that the second one is animal, not a man, and that it had a positive outcome. My understanding of this story follows.

The Talmud cites a quote from Isaiah that might be misunderstood, "For your sins separate you from your God"[3]. It appears that only our sins separate us from God, otherwise, we would not be separated, and perhaps similar. But this is not so, as we recite numerous times daily that God is "Kadosh" — distinct from all else. The Talmud then goes on to show how man cannot even understand human creation, let alone perform creation. But the Talmud does so in a metaphoric style.

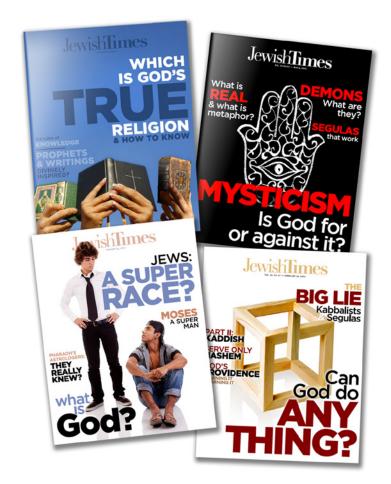
Sabbath is the day of Creation. As such, the Rabbis were accustomed to study areas of Creation, as they always studied "matters of the day". (On Succos they would study that holiday as well, etc.) On one such Sabbath eve, Rava studied man's creation, and felt he had a new understanding about how God created man, "as if" Rava could create a man himself. Rava did not send a "man" to Rav Zeira, but rather, he sent his findings from his studies, asserting he obtained a new insight. His sending must have been out of some doubt, so he desired his teacher's analysis. Rav Zeira asked a question to Rava, to which Rava had no answer. Rav Zeira said "return to the dust" meaning, return to studies about dust, and not man, an intelligent being. Rav Zeira was saying that we cannot know so much about how God created soul-filled beings like man: metaphysics is difficult. "Return to the dust" is Rav Zeira's ridicule that Rava should return to studying lower areas within his grasp, i.e., "dust". However, Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah studied matters of biology alone, well within their abilities. "Creating a calf" and "eating " it mean, "understanding biology" and "enjoying" it, respectively. But even in the more approachable area of biology, we read that Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah were only able to create a "third-grown" calf. This means that human knowledge, although grasping some amount, is still incomplete.

Perhaps also explained, is that Rava's independent studies resulted in errors, while Rav Chanina and Rav Oshiah who studied together were successful. This illustrates how essential it is to test one's ideas on another, removing the possibility of errors generated by overestimation of the self and personal infallibility. Gaining a critique almost always minimizes mistakes, "...in a multitude of counselors there is safety." [4] And as a Rabbi once taught, the very fist verse of Proverbs also teaches this idea: "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, King over Israel" was stated by King Solomon to teach that he had a great teacher, and the environment that fostered wisdom. The King wished to express that his work Proverbs was substantiated by great minds who influenced his thinking.

[1] Isaiah 59
[2] Talmud Sanhedrin 65b
[3] Isaiah 59
[4] Proverbs 11:14

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More Clues The 10 Plagues



Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Interesting, God describes the objective of the plague of Locusts as "devouring the remnants of all vegetation left over from the previous plague of Hail." But if this teaches that God desired all produce to be destroyed, He could have done so via Hail alone, with no need to bring the locusts. Why not economize with the plagues?

We also wonder why God mentions twice that the locusts will "cover the view of the land." Unkelos and Ibn Ezra explain this as the blocking of the sun due to the sheer magnitude of locusts. However, of what relevance is it that Locusts darkened the skies? And is it a coincidence that the following plague is Darkness?

To bring this to a point, Hail destroyed crops, and then Locusts

Interesting, God describes the followed to complete this objective bjective of the plague of Locusts as by devouring all remnants of the devouring the remnants of all crops. Locusts darkened the skies, egetation left over from the and then Darkness followed as the revious plague of Hail." But if this 9th plague.

> Let's step back and understand what the overall purpose was of the plagues in general. Egypt worshipped multiple deities. God said He would "make His fame known." Meaning, God's plan was to teach both Egypt and the Jews that there is but one Creator, who also governs His universe. There are no others. Multiple deities is a human fabrication. How would this lesson be achieved?

> To teach man that God is in control of all parts of the universes, from the skies to the Earth and all life, the

plagues affected all of these quadrants. Yet, one might argue that there are multiple forces causing these plagues. However, when we witness Hail destroying crops, and then locusts follow and address the same objective, we detect a unification, a plan; some force is using the heavens and the insects to perform the same will. We arrive at the conclusion that there is one Controller that is harnessing all parts of the universe to accomplish His singular goal. we would no longer assume Hail and Locusts operated independently. And when we again see the locusts darken the skies, followed by the plague of Darkness, this message is reiterated. We detect a plan, and this means the will of a single Planner. Thereby, the theory of multiple deities is revealed as baseless.







WEEKLY PARSHA

WHERE WAS NACHSHON?

his week's Parshah deals with the splitting of the Red sea. The Torah states:

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord led the sea with the strong east wind all night, and He made the sea into dry land and the waters split. Then the children of Israel came into the midst of the sea on dry land, and the waters were to them as a wall from their right and from their left. (Exodus 14: 10-22)

What seems difficult is that the Gemara adds in details to the splitting of the sea that we do not see in the pesukim:

R. Yehuda said to [R. Meir]: That is not what happened; but each tribe was unwilling to be the first to enter the sea. Then sprang forward Nahshon the son of Amminadav and descended first into the sea...At that time Moshe was prolonging his prayer; so the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, 'My beloved ones are drowning in the sea and you prolong your prayer to Me?' (Moshe) He said to Him, 'L-rd of the Universe, what is there in my power to do?' He replied to him, 'Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward. And lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand etc.' (Sotah 37a)

The gemara seems to put missing information into the text of the Torah and elaborates on our story. Nachshon jumps into the sea and is close to death, at that point Hashem tells Moshe to raise his staff so that He can split the sea. There must have been something in the text that lead Chazal to insert this narrative to elaborate on what is written in the Torah.

Perhaps one way to answer this question would be to attempt to unravel the primary motive of the added narrative; why did Nachshon jump? What was the motive of Nachshon that placed him in such a vastly vaunted role as Chazal attributes to him the reasoning for the splitting of the sea? The common answer given, that I am certain many have heard and would probably answer to this question, is that Nachshon jumped in to show his Emunah, or his faith, in Hashem. However, it would be against the Torah to make such a claim!

Let's attempt to examine the details of Nachshon's jump. If Nachshon jumps into the sea and Moshe lifts his staff, the sea gets split by Hashem and everyone goes home happy, and if neither Nachshon jump in nor Moshe raises his staff, the sea does not get split. However, choosing any other option is where the difficulties begin. If Moshe lifts his staff and Nachshon does not jump in, according to the Torah, the sea would split, but it seems from our understanding of the midrash, contrary to the Torah, the sea would not split. Finally, if Nachshon jumps into the sea and Moshe does not lift his staff, according to the midrash, Nachshon would not merit the exodus from Egypt. So again I ask, what was the reason for Nachshon to jump in? If it was to show his Emunah in Hashem, it seems like a futile mission. If it were not for Moshe lifting his staff, Nachshon would have been unsuccessful.

The Torah is directing our attention to the singular cause of Hashem splitting the sea by explaining that it must be immediately preceded by Moshe raising his staff. For what reason?

The Ramban, in his commentary on our Pesukim, writes that really there was no doubt in the minds of the people that (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



Hashem controlled the universe. However, him for the Egyptians chasing after them: they had a doubt in Moshe. They thought

witnessed the ten plagues, and as the pesukim point out throughout the entirety authenticate the authority of Moshe. How of the plagues, the whole purpose of these could He do that? By ensuring that when plagues was, "in order that you know that I am Hashem." How did He accomplish this that only when he lifted his staff would task through the plagues? Hashem showed Hashem split the sea. the people that there weren't many different powers that controlled different aspects of people – everything. As such, B'nei Yisrael have thought that B'nei Yisrael had a lack in Their only doubt remained by Moshe.

Pharaoh drew near, and the children of that perhaps he was there at the right place Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold! The L-rd and in Moshe, His servant." We see at the right time. Perhaps due to the Egyptians were advancing after them. They evilness of the Egyptians Hashem brought were very frightened, and the children of splitting of the sea, that not only did they plagues, or perhaps due to the merit of their Israel cried out to the L-rd. They said to verify their trust in Hashem, but they also forefathers Hashem brought these plagues, Moses, Is it because there are no graves in trusted in Moshe as the true messenger of and perhaps through trickery Moshe Egypt that you have taken us to die in the associated himself as the messenger of G-d. desert? What is this that you have done to us This is a group of people that had just to take us out of Egypt? (Shemot 14:10-11)

> As a result of these doubts, Hashem had to the entire nation will be watching Moshe,

the universe, rather, He controlled every- something we might miss without placing thing, from the ground, to the skies, to the proper attention on the Torah. We might had just witnessed the power of G-d, so they confidence in Hashem, but really that was had no doubt in the control of Hashem. not the case. So what is the reason that Nachshon jumped? To show his confidence In fact, if you look back earlier in the in Moshe as the authentic leader of B'nei Parshah, we see that B'nei Yisrael cried out Yisrael and the true messenger of Hashem. to Hashem, with the language of In fact, after the Jews crossed the Sea and to understand how an entire nation accept-"vayitzaku" is a language of prayer. Then, the Egyptians that chased after them ed the word of Moshe as true, and continued the Torah starts a new passuk, because they drowned in the sea, the people broke out in to pass on his legacy for countless generathen turned elsewhere, to Moshe, to blame praise of Hashem, or Az Yashir. The very tions.

last passuk shows us that in fact, they did trust in Moshe, "and they believed in the here that upon seeing the incident of the Hashem. Yes, it is true that their belief in Moshe is a function of their belief in Hashem, as they did not believe Moshe performed these wonders, but to associate Moshe as the leader was a separate, and necessary, step.

Chazal, through a close reading of the text, showed us the proper attention that must be paid to Moshe as the messenger of This midrash focuses our attention on Hashem. The credibility of Moshe as the leader is crucial to every aspect of our lives. Every Mitzvah we have, every aspect of both our Oral and Written Torahs stem from the authenticity Hashem placed upon Moshe. If we realize how central the leadership of Moshe is in the world of the Torah, and recognize the great care and depth Hashem gave to establish his veracity, we can begin



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NO MERE Poem

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

A highlight in this week's Torah portion is the reading of the Shirat Hayam (Song at the Sea), the song composed by Moshe and the Jewish people after their crossing through the Red Sea. The uniqueness of these verses can be seen in the actual text of the Torah itself. Rather than following a normative column format, the layout is more of a triplicate with spacing. Clearly, there is a sense of importance attached to this composition. To the uninitiated, the Shirat Havam is "merely" a majestic presentation of verse by God; such a conclusion would be a complete distortion of its objective. While the language used is incredibly powerful, critical ideas about our understanding of God lie beneath the surface, and it is up to the individual who seeks God's wisdom to uncover these concepts.

There are many thematic arcs in the Shirat Hayam, along with specific moments of unique praise given to God. One of these, towards the beginning of the piece, tells us (Shemot 15:6):

"Your right hand (yemincha), O Lord, is most powerful; Your right hand, O Lord, crushes the foe"

Both Rashi and Ramban (among others) are troubled by the double language used in the verse, the repetition of "your right hand". Each offers a unique insight into why the term is duplicated.

Rashi explains as follows:

"Your right hand, O Lord, is most powerful: to save Israel, and Your second right hand crushes the foe. It seems to me, however, that that very right hand [also] crushes the foe, unlike a human being, who cannot perform two kinds of work with the same hand. The simple meaning of the verse is: Your right hand, which is strengthened with might--what is its work? Your right hand, O Lord, crushes the foe."

While slightly cryptic, we can understand the basic approach Rashi is taking. First, he establishes that in order to introduce the greatness of whatever the idea of God's "right hand" is, there must be something distinctive being expressed. In this case, the "single hand" is able to perform an action that would require both if done by a human. Rashi cannot stop his explanation, as there is still the issue of the duplicated language. Therefore, he explains the first mention of "right hand" is an identification followed by a question. God's power is noted, with the question being how this power is expressed. The answer is the second reference to the right hand: that God "crushes His foe".

Ramban, while troubled by the doubling of the term, rejects Rashi's interpretation and offers a different approach. Rather than see a question/format, Ramban observes two discrete expressions of God's "right hand". The first description of His strength is its ability to lower man's haughtiness and self-importance. This second use of the term refers to His vanquishing of the enemy through His strength.

What we see are two very different approaches to understanding these praises offered God. Each commentator is offering a much deeper insight into how man perceives God. The importance of Shirat Hayam, as observed above, is something greater than wonderful literature. The various praises and thanks offer us an insight into the majesty of God and His relationship with mankind. During times of Divine Revelation, man is able to access new and astonishing ideas about the Creator. The song written by Moshe and the Jewish people, after their salvation, is one of those rare opportunities to comprehend more about this link.

The praise offered God concerning His "right hand" is language describing His strength. However, we must be cautious when offering praise to God. Any positive description we give will be lacking, as it can never accurately describe Him. Concurrently, man must engage in said praise to ensure the proper view of the relationship is present. In order for this "method" to succeed, man must see in the praise both the common starting point (the phenomenon of strength), as well as the qualitative difference between God and man in this specific trait. Such an example can be seen with this praise. Per Rashi, the first half of the verse identifies God's strength; but then the Torah asks, how is this expressed? The meaning of the question is that we can use the terminology to describe this trait of God. But if we left it with just the first half of the verse, we would not comprehend any

distinctness to the trait. Thus, the question. The answer is fascinating, stating that God crushes His enemy. One could easily ask, can't man accomplish the same end? The concept then cannot simply be referring to brute strength. It is possible, then, that Rashi is directing us to an essential idea in the understanding of God's strength. When a king rules over an empire, he is endowed with great power. Quite often, this power affects his decision making and judgment. His psychological makeup prevents him from acting in an objectively precise and just manner. While he may possess strength through rule, the application of this strength is always hampered due to his emotional framework. The stress in the above verse concerns God's destruction of the enemy. God's strength reflects His justice, and its use is one of perfection. The focus of the verse, then, is on God's use of strength in a perfect manner. It is only used on the enemy, precise and objective.

Ramban, however, has a different comprehension. Rather than the need to develop a contrast, Ramban takes it as a given that God's strength is known to be qualitatively distinct, and it of course reflects His pure justice. At this juncture, then, he takes us deeper into this overall concept. Why does he write of God's lowering of man's ego? When understanding God's manifestation of strength, it is easy to be awed by the shock and awe. One can only imagine the reactions exhibited by the Egyptians and Jews as God's power was unleashed. The essential idea, though, is not the exhibition of command. Rather, it is the effect this power has on man and his perfection. When man is able to witness this manifestation, he must understand without hesitation or question who he is in relation to the Creator. The reality of his true nature, being so insignificant, is readily apparent. It is an inescapable conclusion, and the clear result of this process. With this in mind, the sequence of Ramban is critical to understand. The normative causal chain would be the physical destruction (striking down the enemy), followed by the effect on man (reduction of ego). In the verse, though, we see an order in prominence, where the critical idea is brought forth first, followed by the actual physical destruction that comes to man.

One can therefore say with a high degree of certainty that this is no mere poem. ■

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