

מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*

REB MICHA BERGER

Bemachashvah Techilah

“**A**nd the water was for them a wall, toward their right, and toward their left” (Shemos 14:29). Why does the Torah add the word “*lahem* – for them”? What does this emphasis add to the meaning of the verse?

There are those who charge that miracles imply a flaw in Hashem’s plan. If the system were perfect, would Hashem need to intervene? The Ralbag uses this argument to bolster his position that a *neis* is not an exception to nature. Rather, it is the providential occurrence of an unlikely event. For example, he writes that the miracle was not that the sun stopped in Giv’on for Yehoshua, but rather that Yehoshua knew that the battle would end before sunset.¹

The Maharal² condemns this opinion, this placement of philosophy ahead of our tradition. He writes that rather than being an exception to the rule, *nissim* follow their own rules. Indeed, miracles occur all the time, but on their own plane of reality. This is why Yehoshua requests “*shemesh be-Giv’on dom* – the sun should stand still in Giv’on.” The sun stopped for the Jews in Giv’on, who were on a plane where miracles operate, but not for anyone else. Literally two

different realities were simultaneously experienced. Not two different perceptions of the same event, but two conflicting things were real, depending upon which world one occupied.

The Maharal applies the same

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principle here. “*Lahem*”, in their world, the water stood on either side as a wall. In the Egyptians’ world, the water never split. When they saw what looked to them like the Jews emerging from the water, the Egyptians ran into the Red Sea even though they could not see how the Jews managed to cross it.

Similarly, the midrash³ that most of us learned pretty early on about *makas dam*. If a Jew and an Egyptian shared the same jug of water, the Jew would experience the liquid as water while at the same time it was blood to the Egyptian. The Jew and Egyptian experienced different realities, each obeying its own set of laws.

Last week, we explored the story of Rav Chanina ben Dosa’s daughter who accidentally poured vinegar into the Shabbos lamp instead of oil. R’ Chanina ben Dosa

told her to light the vinegar. “He who commanded oil to burn could command vinegar to burn.”⁴ Last week we explained his statement in terms of free will; the vinegar burning would not prejudice R’ Chanina toward greater faith in Hashem any more than oil burning would.⁵

The Maharal gives us another explanation. Most of us live within a world in which the laws we call “*teva*” apply. R’ Chanina ben Dosa, however, lived in a world where the laws of *neis* applied. In this world, oil and vinegar are equally flammable.

Perhaps this approach leads to the conclusion that the biblical archeologists’ enterprise is doomed to failure. The archeologist lives and explores the world of *teva*. But the *nissim* recorded in Tanach did not occur within the world of *teva*, perhaps we should not expect to see evidence of them there.

Rav Eliyahu Dessler elaborates on this principle.⁶ *Mekubalim* speak of four *olamos*, each of a higher level than the previous: *asiyah* (action), *yetzirah* (formation), *beri’ah* (creation) and *atzilul*

¹ Yehoshua 10:13

² Gevuros Hashem, second introduction

³ Shemos Rabba 9:9, Yalkut Shim’oni 182

⁴ Ta’anis 25a

⁵ Bemachashavah Techilah, Bo 5764
<<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/bo.pdf>>

⁶ Michtav Me’Eliyahu I, “*Olamos deAsiyah veYetzirah*” pp 304-312

(emanation). The Gra⁷ writes that before the sin, Adam's *olam ha'asiyah* is the world we now call *olam ha'yetzirah*. Rav Dessler notes that this makes them sound like levels that a person can be on. Why are they called *olamos*, words?

People have two sources of information that they consider absolute. The first is their senses – sight, sound, and so on. The second is their self-awareness. The senses bring us information about the physical world. Self awareness brings us concepts like truth, freedom and oppression.

Someone mired in the desires of the senses lives in the physical world. He focuses his attention on it, just as everyone focuses on that which is important to them. “Every tailor notices and looks at the

⁷ “Havayah veHasagah”, part 2

clothing of the people in the street; and similarly every shoemaker, shoes...” The man of the senses therefore perceives it as more objective and more absolute than the world of the self. Rav Dessler asks how one can have free will in a world that runs by strict cause-and-effect. This is *olam ha'asiyah*.

However, one can rise above that to the *olam ha'yetzirah*.⁸ This is not merely another level, but another world with its own laws, laws that do not conflict with free will. Those who focus on this world have no question that free will exists. To them, it is the ideals of

⁸ It would be interesting to further explore the connection between this notion of raising and lowering one's awareness between the worlds of creation and Rav Dessler's notion of one's *bechirah* point, the point at which decisions require conscious choice, moving with each decision made. See Michtav Me'Eliyahu I, “Kuntres haBechirah” pp 111-116.

this world that are more objective and absolute, and the senses, more subjective. Rav Dessler explains that this is how *nissim* can impact one person's senses and not another's. *Yetzirah* is the Maharal's plane of *nissim*, and as the Maharal noted different people will perceive the miraculous differently, or not at all. And so the sea split in *olam ha'yetzirah*, but not in *olam ha'asiyah*.

Perhaps we can also use the Maharal's principle to explain the Gemara (Sanhedrin 22a): “Rabba the grandson of Chana said in the name of R. Yochanan: ‘Arranging couples is as difficult as the dividing of the Red Sea.’” Just as splitting the Red Sea involved the coexistence of two conflicting realities. So does a marriage require two people with different perceptions of the world to form a single life together.

RABBI GIL STUDENT

Bakeish Shalom

After witnessing the miracle of the splitting of the Sea of Reeds and the harsh punishment of the chasing Egyptians, the Jewish people reached a new level in their relationship with G-d. The Torah tells us, “On that day, G-d saved Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore. Israel saw the great hand that G-d inflicted on Egypt; and the people feared G-d, and they believed in G-d and in Moshe, His servant” (Shemos 14:30-31). What at first seems like a perfectly reasonable description of the Jewish people's elevation is actually quite puzzling upon further consideration.

Only now, after the splitting of the sea and the final destruction of the Egyptian army, do the Jews fear G-d. What about the ten plagues? Did the

repeated public punishing of the sinful Egyptians instill no fear into Jewish hearts? What was so different about the drowning of the Egyptians that it had more of an impact than, for example, the killing of the firstborns? Indeed, this inference is spelled out in the midrash. The Mechilta on the above verses states, “And the people feared G-d: In the past, in Egypt, they did not fear G-d but now, ‘And the people feared G-d.’” However, the question remains why specifically now and not earlier, during the ten plagues?

A possible answer can be offered by distinguishing between different types of fear of G-d. One type of fearing G-d, a very basic level, is the fear of being punished by G-d. This type of fear – *Yiras HaOnesh* – is a combination of believing that G-d

will punish transgressors and remaining aware of that fact throughout the day. Through this combination of belief and awareness, one is driven to obedience out of raw fear. The One who commanded is the Master of all forces and must, therefore, be obeyed because the alternative to complying is being punished. *Yiras HaOnesh* is a very potent behavioral tool. However, it is also very basic. This is a concept that children and even animals can understand. One trains dogs by both enticing them to comply and threatening them with punishments for disobedience. Just like a dog can understand the need to obey rather than be punished, so too a child understands this obligation and, even more so, an adult should comprehend.

There is, however, a higher level of fearing G-d. Rather than fearing anything that G-d might do to us, this level is the recognition of G-d's power and the awe of a being with so much control. *Yiras HaRomimus* is the overwhelmed perception of G-d's omnipotence. One can only fear such a powerful being in whose hands our fates lie. Ramchal explains:

Yiras HaOnesh is as it simply implies, that a person fears transgressing G-d's command because of the physical and spiritual punishments for sins. This is certainly a light matter because all people love themselves and fear for their lives... The second type is Yiras HaRomimus, that a person should distance himself from sins and avoid them because of the great honor of G-d. How can a person of mere flesh and blood consider doing something against the will of the Creator? This fear is not as easy to acquire because it only comes from knowledge and contemplation of G-d's greatness and the lowliness of man.¹

Ramchal tells us that the lofty level of *Yiras HaRomimus* can only be reached through study, through deep thought about G-d and man's relation to Him. Only after carefully pondering this topic and acquiring the requisite understanding can a person hope to achieve this type of fear. There is, however, one way other than philosophical study to reach this level.

When the Jews witnessed the ten plagues what they saw was sinners

¹ Messilas Yesharim, ch. 24

being punished. The Egyptians had sinned² and, in return, were being harshly punished. This certainly would induce *Yiras HaOnesh*, fear of punishment. Anyone who had not yet recognized the severity of sinning and the punishments it entails learned a clear lesson from the plagues. However, the plagues did not necessarily instill an awe of G-d's greatness, *Yiras HaRomimus*.

At the Sea of Reeds, however, the Jews witnessed more than a miraculous saving of G-d's people and a punishment of their oppressors.

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They saw a prophetic vision of G-d with such clarity that they could say, "This is my G-d" (Shemos 15:2). Regarding this statement, Rashi, basing himself on the Mechilta, writes: "[G-d] revealed Himself to them in His glory and they pointed to Him with their fingers. A maid-servant saw at the sea what even the prophets did not see."³ This vision achieved for the Jews what would normally take years of careful contemplation. They prophetically reached a state of recognition of G-d's greatness and, due to this gift, gained an awe for G-d, *Yiras HaRomimus*. Thus, when the Torah tells us that at the Sea of Reeds the Jews attained a fear of G-d, it means that they

² Cf. Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuvah 6:5; Ra'avad, ad loc.; Ramban, Commentary to Shemos 18:11.

³ Rashi and Mechilta, ad loc.

acquired a higher level of fear than previously achieved. They rose from the *Yiras HaOnesh* of the plagues to the *Yiras HaRomimus* of the Sea.

This *Yiras HaRomimus* is not easily attained by those of us who lack prophecy. However, it is a necessary step so that we can properly recognize that, when we pray and when we perform a mitzvah, we are standing before the Creator. Ramchal⁴ offers some suggestions on how to acquire this fear:

1. To consider that when one prays he is literally standing before G-d and interacting with Him. This is a very difficult image for a person to truly believe because one's senses not only provide no help but actually contradict the idea.

2. To contemplate that G-d is so great that nothing we say can describe His greatness. No words of praise or even ideas of completeness can adequately express His eminence.

3. The lowliness, incompleteness and sheer inadequacy of humans in comparison to G-d. We falter; we sin; we are woefully imperfect.

Through contemplating these ideas we can learn to increase our sensitivities and eventually acquire a higher level of *Yiras Hashem*.

⁴ Messilas Yesharim, ch. 19

REB JONATHAN BAKER

Sefasai Tiftach

Pesukei Dezimrah, the second part of morning prayers, culminates in *Az Yashir*,

appearing in this week's sidra. How does this narrative song reinforce

the emotions of our daily encounter with G-d?

On the surface, it is the archetypal communal Song of Praise. In fact, its example obligates us to sing praises to Hashem for the miracles which have happened to our nation, on holidays, on Rosh Chodesh, etc. Its placement here, at the end of Pesukei Dezimrah, reflects the song's origin as a *neis*, according to R' Shimon Schwab. After all, how could Moshe Rabbenu, weak of voice, make himself heard by all 2,000,000+ Jews? How could all of them recite the *same* words, together as one, without Divine intervention? The Song of the Sea prefigures many aspects of communal prayer: a fixed text, heartfelt praise and thanksgiving, as well as separation of the sexes in Miriam's recitation of the song with the women. As such, its miraculous nature sets it apart as the paradigm of communal praise, which places it here.

Looking deeper, we turn to Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev for some insights into the meaning of Az Yashir in our prayers.

The Song is introduced by *Vayosha*, describing the depth of Israel's faith. It concludes "...the nation feared G-d, and believed in G-d and in Moshe His servant" Having witnessed the Plagues, having experienced the Exodus, how are the miracles of G-d at the Sea the source of Israel's faith in, and fear of G-d?

There are two kinds of *yirah*, fear. 1) of punishment. Bnei Yisrael had that in abundance. It was the texture of their existence in Egypt, and it easily transferred to G-d through witnessing the Plagues, particularly *Makas Bechoros*, which demanded explicit action, the Pesach, to avoid the general punishment.

2) Fear through love. This could only come about through crossing the Sea. The Berdichever gives an analogy: suppose you're drowning.

Suddenly, a hand comes down from the side of a boat, and hauls you up. But the sea is high, and he can't hoist you in. You feel love for your savior, because he saved you, while feeling fear that his grip may loosen, and you will be lost. Your existence completely depends on your savior.

So too here: the Jews walked through the Sea, which "hung above them as a wall, to their right and left." At any moment, the water could have come crashing down and drowned them. Their entire existence depended on G-d, who saved them by means of a miracle, a miracle that could give way at any moment. This experience gave them fear from love, fear based on knowing that our entire existence depends on G-d. Thus, when we say today *Ozi vezimras Kah*, through my effort (*oz*) in fearing G-d, He empowers us to have a proper love (*zimrah*) for Himself. Re-experiencing fear from love, enables G-d to help us integrate both.

Alternatively, we face a paradox in *Ozi vezimras Kah* – how is it *my* strength, when everything comes from Hashem? The Mezritcher Maggid tells a parable – just as a father tries to get his son to learn, even though much of the impetus comes from the father, he is proud of his son's effort. So too here, even though all strength comes from G-d, *vay'hi li liyeshuah*, G-d will bring His salvation in our name, due to our effort in properly fearing Him.

Hashem yimloch l'olam va'ed: why start with G-d's name, when David says *Yimloch Hashem l'olam*? Just as we say, when bringing a sin-offering, *chataas Hashem*, since had we said it the other way around, one could die between the words and then be guilty of saying G-d's name in vain, here we were sinless, we had

thrown off our contamination and were free men. Only later, when we sinned at the *Eigel*, did we regain that problem. We yearn for that sinless state.

We add some extra verses after the actual Shir. The first alludes to the difference between Israel and the nations. G-d is *moshel bagoyim* – ruling from strength, without consent. But *ki laHashem hameluchah* is for us, as we consciously accept Him, crown Him daily in the kedushah, as we said at the Sea, *umalchuso beratzon kib'lu aleiheim*. In the future, when saviors ascend Mt. Zion, then the nations will recognize and consent to His kingship, and He will finally be acknowledged King over all the earth.

Az Yashir fittingly concludes the Verses of Praise/Love. It brings us to re-enact the pinnacle of fear and love of G-d, leads us towards the ideal sinless state, points us towards the future Redemption when G-d will be crowned King over all the earth, and leads directly into the daily Coronation of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the first bracha before the *Shema*.

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