**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Beshalach – Vol. 12, Issue 16**

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**ויבאו בני ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה והמים להם חומה מימינם ומשמאלם (14:22)**

 The focal event in Parshas Beshalach is Krias Yam Suf (the splitting of the Sea of Reeds), which enabled the trapped Jewish slaves to escape from their Egyptian pursuers. However, there is a widespread misconception that after the water miraculously divided at Moshe’s behest, the Jewish people then crossed the Yam Suf en route to the land of Israel. In reality, Tosefos writes (Arachin 15a) that the path they traveled through the Yam Suf was in the shape of a semi-circle, as they emerged on the same side that they entered, albeit further upstream. This seems quite unusual; why would they choose to exit the Yam Suf on the same banks on which they began?

 Rav Yisroel Reisman explains that Goshen was a port city in northern Egypt located on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Before the digging of the Suez Canal, the journey from Egypt to Israel was a simple overland trip that did not involve any water crossings. Had the Jewish people simply walked along the coast of the Mediterranean, they would have reached Eretz Yisroel. However, Hashem chose not to lead them along this direct path, because doing so would necessitate travel through the land of the Philistines, where they would witness war, which He was worried would frighten them into deciding to return to Egypt (13:17). Therefore, Hashem opted to guide them across the Sinai desert to Har Sinai, from which they eventually traveled to the eastern side of the Jordan River, across which Yehoshua led them into the land of Israel.

 With this geographical understanding, Rav Reisman explains that when the Jewish people left Goshen, they were already on the Israel side of the Yam Suf. After several days of travelling, Pharaoh chased after them and cornered them against the Sea of Reeds. Therefore, when the Jewish people entered the Yam Suf, they did not want to traverse the dry seabed and exit on the other side, as this would needlessly complicate their journey to Eretz Yisroel. Instead, Hashem specifically split the water in semi-circular paths, which enabled the Jews to emerge on the same side on which they entered, from where they could continue their journey to Israel, in contradiction to the widely-held popular wisdom that the Jewish people crossed the Yam Suf from one side to the other.

 In addition to correcting a widespread misconception, Rav Reisman uses this idea to shed new light on the Gemora’s well-known teaching (Sotah 2a) that shidduchim – matching up men and women for the purpose of marriage – is as difficult as splitting the Yam Suf. What is the comparison between these two seemingly unrelated topics, and why is dating equated to traversing a semi-circular path when climbing a mountain would seem like a far more appropriate comparison?

Chazal teach (Pirkei D’Rav Eliezer 42) that each of the 12 tribes had its own path through the Sea of Reeds. Had they traveled linearly across, each tribe’s path would be identical. However, when drawing 12 concentric semi-circles, the length of the innermost path is significantly shorter than the length of the outermost one. Accordingly, since they walked in a semi-circular formation, some of the tribes had much shorter and easier paths through the Yam Suf than others.

Similarly, the process of shidduchim is different for everybody. Some people are blessed with very short circles and marry the first person they date, while others have much longer and more frustrating journeys, with many more challenges along the way. When we begin the process of shidduchim, we have no way of discerning which path Hashem has selected for us and how long our trip will take. However, although there is unfortunately no way to know in advance when it will end, we must view the experience as our own personal Krias Yam Suf, trusting that Hashem has chosen the right semi-circle for us and is guiding us along the journey, and knowing that ultimately, we will emerge from it at the designated time. In the meantime, our challenge is to remain strong, so that when we do eventually find our bashert, we are able to exit the semi-circle on the same side that we entered, only further upstream, with even more accumulated wisdom, experience, and simcha than we began, as we sing a personal song of praise and gratitude to Hashem for our own Kriyas Yam Suf.

**ויט משה את ידו על הים וישב הים לפנות בקר לאיתנו ומצרים נסים לקראתו וינער ד' את מצרים בתוך הים וישבו המים ויכסו את הרכב ואת הפרשים לכל חיל פרעה הבאים אחריהם בים לא נשאר בהם עד אחד ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים והמים להם חמה מימינם ומשמאלם (14:27-29)**

 After Makkas Bechoros (the slaying of the first-born), Pharaoh relented and agreed to free the Jewish slaves. However, in the beginning of Parshas Beshalach, he quickly regretted his decision and chased after the Jews. After Pharaoh trapped them against the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds), only Hashem’s miraculous intervention to split the water enabled the Jews to escape. In his sefer Keren L’Dovid, Rav Eliezer Dovid Greenwald, a Dayan (Rabbinical judge) in pre-war Satmar, points out that there was a fundamental difference between the nissim (miracles) Hashem performed in Parshas Vaeira and Parshas Bo through the 10 makkos (plagues) and the nissim that He did in Parshas Beshalach at the Yam Suf.

 Rav Greenwald explains that all of the makkos were directed against the Egyptians, and as such, they did not conclusively prove that Hashem loved the Jews, as perhaps He was simply punishing the Egyptians for their repeated cruelty and brutality. In each of the plagues, the change in the laws of nature that represented the miraculous component was targeted at the Egyptians, while the Jews continued their daily routines in Goshen, without any clear miracles being done for them. This dynamic changed when the Jewish people arrived at the Yam Suf, where for the first time, Hashem changed the laws of nature for them, splitting the water to enable them to pass through safely, while it was Moshe stretching out his hand over the sea to cause a return to the laws of nature (14:27) that brought about the death and destruction of the Egyptians. In contrast to the makkos, where the nissim were agents of punishment for the Egyptians and the Jews were saved simply by not being impacted by them, at the Yam Suf Hashem demonstrated His love for the Jewish people for the first time, as the nissim there were performed on their behalf.

 This distinction between the miracles of the makkos and the miracles at the Yam Suf can help us understand why Rashi writes (18:1) that Yisro came to join the Jewish people when he heard about the splitting of the Yam Suf and the war against Amalek. Why didn’t hearing about the makkos also motivate him to convert? The makkos did not prove Hashem’s love for the Jewish people, and therefore Yisro was not yet impressed. Only when he heard about the love that Hashem displayed through the miracles that He performed at the Yam Suf was Yisro moved to convert and become Jewish.

 Similarly, Dovid writes in Tehillim (106:7) אבותינו במצרים לא השכילו נפלאותיך – Our ancestors in Egypt did not comprehend Your wonders. What was so perplexing about the miracles in Egypt that caused them such confusion? Rav Greenwald notes that Dovid stresses that their uncertainty was only במצרים – in Egypt – where they were unable to clarify whether Hashem performed the wonders out of love for them, or simply to punish their Egyptian oppressors. However, once they left Egypt, they no longer had this dilemma, because they saw clearly at the Yam Suf just how much Hashem cared for them.

 Rashi writes (15:22) that the spoils received by the Jews at the Yam Suf were even greater than those they received when leaving Egypt one week prior, which seems somewhat counterintuitive. Hashem promised Avrohom (Bereishis 15:14) that after being enslaved in a foreign land, the Jewish people would go out with great treasure, in which case the spoils they received when they were initially freed were the primary fulfillment of this promise and should have been larger. Based on Rav Greenwald’s insight, Rav Yisroel Reisman suggests that Hashem wanted to show the Jewish people that His love for them is even greater than His hatred of the wicked Egyptians, and therefore He specifically wanted the booty they received at the Yam Suf to exceed the spoils they received at the conclusion of the makkos.

 Rav Reisman adds that this concept can also help us understand why the Pesach Haggadah teaches that the Egyptians received five times as many punishments at the Yam Suf as they received through the makkos, which is difficult to understand. Weren’t the 10 makkos intended to be the primary punishment of the Egyptians? Rav Reisman explains that love is always stronger and more powerful than fear. Therefore, the punishments that were meted out in Egypt were dwarfed by those that occurred at the Yam Suf, where Hashem revealed His intense love for the Jewish people.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. How were Miriam and the women allowed to sing the Shiras HaYam (15:21) when the law is (Even HaEzer 21:1) that a man is forbidden to hear a woman outside of his immediate family singing? (Peninim MiShulchan HaGra, Tiferes Yonason, Nachal Kedumim)
2. Did the babies in the wilderness eat Manna, or did they nurse from their mothers? (Shu”t Chasam Sofer Yoreh Deah 294 and Choshen Mishpat 12, Dagan Shomayim 7)
3. Rashi writes (17:9) that for the battle against Amalek, Moshe instructed Yehoshua to select soldiers who were both strong and who possessed a fear of sin. How was Yehoshua able to discern who was truly righteous, and why did he need strong soldiers when Hashem conducted the battle for them in a miraculous fashion? (Har Tzvi)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The **Vilna Gaon** answers that for this reason the verse says that Miriam answered the men, meaning that she told them that they could sing, but the women in fact could only say the words due to the prohibition against singing in the presence of men. **Rav Yonason Eibeshutz** suggests that for this reason Miriam and the women took instruments with them, so that the din of their instruments would drown out their voices so that they could sing without being heard by the men. The **Chida** cites the Gemora in Niddah (13a), which rules that certain activities which would normally be forbidden because they could lead to forbidden thoughts are permissible when in the presence of the Shechinah. Since Chazal teach that there was a tremendous revelation of the Divine presence at the Yam Suf, the women were permitted to sing in front of the men without being concerned that it may lead to inappropriate thoughts.

2) The Gemora in Yoma (75a) teaches that the Manna was able to resolve legal disputes. For example, if a woman got divorced and immediately remarried and gave birth to a child and each of her husbands claimed paternity, Moshe would tell them to wait until the following morning, when a portion of Manna for the boy would fall at the tent of his true father. This would seem to indicate that babies ate the Manna. The **Chasam Sofer** writes that this proof is not clear, as perhaps the additional portion of Manna was so that the mother would have the ability to nurse the baby. The sefer **Dagan Shomayim** suggests that perhaps the extra portion only fell when the child was older and had stopped nursing, or perhaps it fell only once to clarify paternity, but not to feed the child. He also cites Rashi in Yoma (75a) who writes that there were 5 tastes which could not be tasted in the Manna because they were dangerous for pregnant and nursing women, which implies that they did nurse. However, he notes that the Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 5:9) teaches that the taste of the Manna changed to be appropriate for the person eating it, and one of the examples given is that for babies it tasted like mother’s milk, implying that babies did eat the Manna.

3) **Rav Yisroel Shenker** cites the Gemora in Yoma (75a), which teaches that the more righteous a person was, the closer the Manna fell to his home. For the true tzaddikim, the Manna felt on their doorsteps. As Yehoshua’s primary criterion for selecting soldiers was their piety, he could have simply observed where a potential fighter’s Manna fell. However, the Gemora adds that the Manna also fell at the doorsteps of the sick and the elderly independent of their spiritual levels in order to save them the exertion of having to travel to collect their Manna. As such, Yehoshua additionally insisted that the soldiers be strong, not because this trait was inherently necessary, but merely to demonstrate that the reason that their Manna fell at their doorsteps was because of their righteousness and not because they were weak and ill.

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