



More than meets the eye.

There were more than Ten Acts (Plagues) of God: God created a "hand" which smote the Egyptians, and as our Haggadah teaches, there were great plagues at the Red Sea. The Oral Torah and the words of our Rabbis are essential for obtaining a complete picture.

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Weekly Parsha

Beshalach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Then Moshe and Bnai Yisrael sang this song to Hashem. And they said, "I will sing to Hashem for he is beyond all praise. The horse and its rider He threw into the sea." (Shemot 15:1)

Bnai Yisrael emerge from the Reed Sea. They have safely

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GOD'S "HAND"

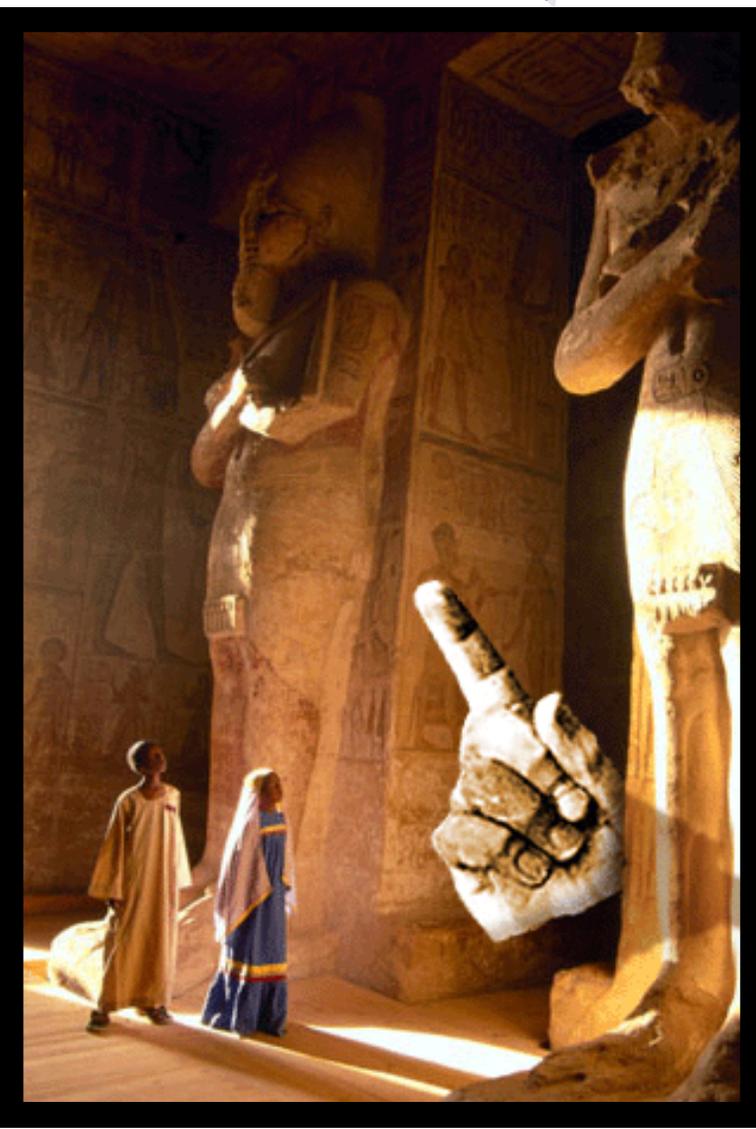
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The title of this article usually connotes 'participation', as opposed to exclusive responsibility. Of course we know that God was the sole cause for all Ten Plagues, and every miracle which ever occurred.

To "have a hand in something" refers to man's actions, as only man has a "hand". God created the physical universe and all that is in it. Therefore, He does not partake of His creations – He has no physicality, and certainly no "hand". So why did I title this article as "God's Hand in the 10 Plagues"? Am I being misleading? The reason is quite startling.

Exodus 7:5 reads, "And Egypt will know that I am God as I stretch forth My hand on Egypt and take the Israelites from their midst." Rashi comments on this verse as follows, "Yad mamash lahacos bahem". This translates as, "A literal hand to smite them." Rashi suggests that God "stretching forth His hand" as stated in the Torah verse, refers to a real, physical hand! God will smite Egypt with a literal "hand". Based on Judaism's fundamentals, the fundamentals of reality itself, this is impossible! There is only one way to understand this statement. But before reading further, think a moment what it might be.

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*“It’s not God’s hand,
He has no hands.
Rather, God created a
physical hand as a
separate miracle.”*



*Baleshaatzar frightened as he witnessed
a “hand” writing on the wall.*

This statement took me back when I first came across it. I asked a wise Rabbi who responded: “It’s not God’s hand, He has no hands. Rather, God created a physical hand as a separate miracle.” Then I understood: God created a hand to smite Egypt, just as He created the first man. God can create what He wishes. This hand was a creation, not part of God, as God has no parts or physicality.

Yet, it disturbed me why this quite, literal hand was required as a response to Egypt. Weren’t the Ten Plagues sufficient?

However rare this miracle is, it is not unprecedented. Later, Baleshaatzar, the grandson of Nevuchadnetzar also experienced a “hand” miracle. Daniel 5:1-6 reads as follows:

“King Baleshaatzar made a great feast for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine before the thousand guests. While under the influence of wine, Baleshaatzar gave an order to bring the golden and silver vessels that Nevuchadnetzar his grandfather had removed from the Sanctuary in Jerusalem, for the king and his nobles, his consorts and his concubines to drink from them. So they brought the golden vessels they had removed from the Sanctuary of the Temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king, his nobles, his consorts and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, copper, iron, wood, and stone. Just then, fingers of a human hand came forth and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace, facing the candelabrum; and the king saw the palm of the hand that was writing. The king’s appearance thereupon changed, and his thoughts bewildered him; the belt around his waist opened, and his knees knocked one against the other.”

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*God created a real,
physical hand passing
through Egypt, which
smote the Egyptians.*

*Their reaction was
one of feeling
“disapproval” by a
deity – disapproval
in “their” terms.*

*This hand in no way
was meant to reinforce
any corporeality of
God. It merely acted
as a reference to God’s
disapproval.*

What took place here? King Baleshaatzar was evil. He too desired to mock the Jews and God by abusing the Temple’s vessels in service to his gods of metal, stone and wood. His sin was clear: “They drank wine and praised the gods of gold and silver, copper, iron, wood, and stone.” Immediately following we read, “Just then, fingers of a human hand came forth and wrote on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace...” Meaning, this miracle was a direct response to Baleshaatzar’s praises of idolatry, as it says, “Just then...” (In Egypt’s case too, a hand was a response to their idolatrous culture.)

But let us understand Baleshaatzar: He created a feast for a thousand of his subjects. He was king, yet he serviced those below him. The Prophet repeats this number of 1000 to teach that Baleshaatzar’s desire was these many people – he sought their approval. This is why he celebrated and drank before them. Baleshaatzar was a man whose reality revolved around “people”. Now, as he was sinning against God, to the point of denying God in favor of idolatry, God desired to respond to Baleshaatzar’s sin. His idolatrous inclinations could not go without rebuke, perhaps because he had so many people present as well. God responded by creating a hand, writing on the wall in plain sight, thus, God placed this hand in a well-lit area, near the candelabrum. (Baleshaatzar sought the approval of others, so he would have denied seeing such a miracle had God manifested it to Baleshaatzar while he was alone.) Why was such a miracle needed? It would seem that this miracle was in direct response to idolatry, but it took the form of a ‘hand’ for another reason.

Baleshaatzar valued “people”. This was his value system. Thus, God created a miracle which satisfied Baleshaatzar’s sense of what is real...a human hand. Some other force of nature, even miraculous, might not have struck Baleshaatzar’s subjective sense of reality. So God reached Baleshaatzar’s heart using the very emotion Baleshaatzar worshipped. Since he desired human approval, a miracle of ‘human’ disapproval would alert him, and alert him indeed: “and the king saw the palm of the hand that was writing. The king’s appearance thereupon changed, and his thoughts bewildered him; the belt around his waist opened, and his knees knocked one against the other.” Baleshaatzar was frightened. God’s plan worked.

Similarly, the Egyptians projected some human qualities onto their gods. From the myriad of recovered artifacts and ancient Egyptian idols, we see human forms throughout most of them. How would God reach such people who only thought of gods in terms of human qualities? They even responded to the plague of Lice with the words, “It is the finger of God.” (Exod. 8:15) The Ten Plagues were intended to teach them that God controls all realms: heaven, Earth and all in between. But that was insufficient. They also required a “hand”. Why?

On Exodus 11:4, Daas Zikanim M’Baalie Tosafos explain that God waged a war on Egypt as human king wars. When a human king wars, he first cuts off the water supply, he confuses the enemy with loud trumpets, and he shoots arrows. So too, God cut off the water supply with Blood, He confused the Egyptians with loud Frogs, and shot arrows in the form of Lice. (The parallel continues through all Ten Plagues) But the question is, why does God desire to act, as would human king against Egypt? I believe the answer to be the same reason why God created this “hand”.

As stated, Egypt projected human qualities onto their understanding of deities. To them, any superpower was understood somewhat in human terms. If a claimed power was not expressed in human terms, they would dismiss it. Therefore, in order that God reach them, making them understand that there is a “Superpower” who does not approve of their culture, God first had to speak in their language. Within, or maybe even before the Ten Plagues, God created a real, physical hand passing through Egypt, which smote the Egyptians. Their reaction was one of feeling “disapproval” by a deity – disapproval in “their” terms. This hand in no way was meant to reinforce any corporeality of God. It merely acted as a reference to God’s disapproval. Had the plagues ensued with no presence of a human quality, the element of “disapproval” would have been absent, and the Egyptians would not have viewed their culture as “unacceptable” by Moses’ God. They would certainly continue in their idolatry. To offer Egypt the best chance at repentance, God desired to relate to them in their terms. The message that a “deity disapproved” of Egypt could only be made known in the manner that Egypt understood.

God saw it necessary that man be related to in his ‘language’: a hand was necessary to appeal to Baleshaatzar’s world of “human” approval, and to also appeal to Egypt’s view of “humanoid” deities.

God desires the best for man, be he a sinner or not, and therefore God uses the appropriate vehicle to reach each man’s set of emotions. ■

emerged and the Egyptians have drowned. Moshe leads Bnai Yisrael in a song of praise. Our pasuk is the opening passage of Shirat HaYam – the Song of the Sea. The translation above is based on the comments of Rashi.[1] According to this interpretation, Moshe begins with the pronouncement that Hashem is beyond all praise. This is a rather amazing introduction to his shira – his praise of Hashem. Essentially, Moshe is announcing that his praise is inadequate. But yet, this does not discourage Moshe from engaging in the praise!

“My strength and song is G-d. And this will be my deliverance. This is my G-d and I will glorify Him. He is the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him.” (Shemot 15:2)

Many of the passages in the shira – this song of praise – are difficult to translate. The exact meaning of numerous phrases is debated by the commentaries. The above translation of the later the part of the passage is based upon the commentary of Rashbam.[2] Gershonides expands on this translation. He explains that this passage is a continuation of Moshe’s introduction. In the previous passage, Moshe acknowledges that Hashem is above all praise. In this passage Moshe is acknowledging that in his praises he will resort to material characterizations of Hashem.[3]

If the first passage of Moshe’s introduction seems odd, this passage is amazing. One of the fundamental principles of the Torah is that Hashem is not material and that no material characteristics can be ascribed to Him.[4] Nonetheless, Moshe acknowledges that he will employ material imagery in his praise of Hashem. After this introduction Moshe uses various material images to describe Hashem. He refers to Hashem as a “man of war.” He discusses the “right hand” of Hashem. In fact virtually every praise that Moshe formulates ascribes some material characteristic to Hashem.

The combined message of these two first passages is completely confusing. Moshe first acknowledges that no praise of Hashem is accurate; it cannot begin to capture Hashem’s greatness. In the second passage Moshe excuses himself for ignoring one of our most fundamental convictions regarding Hashem – that He is not material. Instead of providing an appropriate introduction to the shira, these two passages seem to argue that the entire endeavor is not only futile but is an act of blasphemy!

“I shall relate Your glory, though I do not see You. I shall allegorize You, I shall describe You though I do not know You. Through the hand of Your prophets,

through the counsel of Your servants, You allegorized the splendid glory of Your power. Your greatness and Your strength, they described the might of Your works. They allegorized You but not according to Your reality. And they portrayed You according to Your actions. The symbolized You in many visions. You are a unity in all of these allegories.”

(Shir HaKavod)

Our liturgy contains many profound insights. Unfortunately, sometimes, we do not carefully consider the meaning of the words. In many synagogues the Shir HaKavod – composed by Rav Yehuda HaChassid – is recited every Shabbat at the closing of services. The Shir HaKavod deals with the same issues that Moshe is discussing in his introduction to the Shirat HaYam. Let us carefully consider these lines.

We begin by acknowledging that we cannot see Hashem. In fact, we cannot truly know Hashem. Human understanding is limited. We cannot begin to conceptualize the nature of Hashem. This creates a paradox. How can we praise of even relate to Hashem? How can we relate to a G-d that is beyond the boundaries of human understanding? We respond that we will employ allegories.

But the use of allegories creates its own problems. If we do not know or understand Hashem’s nature, then on what basis will we form these allegories? What allegory can we formulate for a G-d so completely beyond the ken of human understanding? We respond that we will rely on the allegories provided by the prophets. We do not trust ourselves to create our own allegories. Instead, we must employ the allegories that are provided to us by Moshe and the other prophets.

Of course, this does not completely answer the question. Even Moshe was unable to achieve an understanding of the fundamental nature of Hashem. So, how can he help us? What allegory can Moshe provide for that which even he could not comprehend? The answer is that we never attempt to describe Hashem’s nature. No allegory can be adequate. All of our allegories are designed to describe Hashem’s actions and deeds. In other words, our allegories do not describe what Hashem is, only what He does.

Yet, at the same time that we employ the allegories of the prophets, we are required to acknowledge the limitation of these descriptions. We cannot – even for a moment – delude ourselves as to the accuracy of the terms we use when referring to Hashem. The allegorical terms are not in any way a description of Hashem’s reality. This means these terms are not a true description of

Hashem’s real nature.

Finally, we acknowledge Hashem’s unity. Hashem is a perfect unity. This means He has no parts or characteristics. The multitude of allegories that we employ cannot lead us to err on this issue of unity. All of the various allegories that we employ relate back to a G-d that in fact is one. He does not have various characteristics or any characteristics. He is the perfect unity. Even when we refer to Hashem as kind or omniscient, we must recognize the limitation of this reference. Hashem does not truly have the characteristic of being kind or the quality of omniscience. These are allegorical characterizations.

The Shir HaKavod provides a fundamental insight. It attempts to resolve an important paradox. We need to relate to Hashem. Yet, we cannot truly comprehend His exalted nature. How can we form a relationship with that which we cannot know? In response to our human need, the Torah allows us to employ allegorical terms in reference to Hashem. But we must recognize that this is an accommodation. We are permitted to use allegorical terms and phrases. We are not permitted to accept these allegories as being accurate depictions of Hashem’s nature.

We can now understand Moshe’s introduction to Shirat HaYam. At the Reed Sea Bnai Yisrael experienced salvation. The people needed to respond. They needed to express their outpouring of thanks to Hashem. Moshe formulated Shirat HaYam in response to this need. But Moshe’s shira – like all praise of Hashem – is a not an accurate portrayal of Hashem. Instead, it is an accommodation to the human need to relate to Hashem. We are permitted this accommodation. But there is a precondition. We must first recognize that it is an accommodation. Our praise cannot capture the true greatness of Hashem – who is above all praise. And we must recognize that all of our praises rely on allegories but that are not true depictions of Hashem. This is Moshe’s introduction. Before he led Bnai Yisrael in song, he explains the limitations of our praises. They are incomplete and are merely allegories and not accurate descriptions of Hashem. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 15:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Shemot 15:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), pp. 111-112.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 10:1.

Tsunami Relief

Jewish Tsunami Relief

RABBI ZEV MEIR FRIEDMAN

An excerpt from Shmuel Sackett, International Director, Manhigut Yehudit:

“When will we learn that Jewish money must remain in Jewish hands until every Jew has what to eat, where to go to school and receiving proper medical care? Does every Jewish bride have a nice dress? Are our elderly being cared for? Are the security needs of those Jews living on “the front lines” attended to adequately? Are the “outreach” programs properly funded?

Until every one of those questions is answered in the affirmative, I am not giving a penny to the Tsunami relief effort. The only exception to this rule would be to the Chabad of Thailand that has been assisting Jewish families in their search for missing loved ones. Other than that, forget it.

I am a proud Jew who gives exclusively to Jewish causes. Above all, I will never give a penny to the “Jewish Enemy Club” of which Sri Lanka is an honored member. Actually, there is one thing the people of Sri Lanka and I have in common. They hate me and I feel the exact same way about them!!!”

This is the sense of Shmuel Sackett’s article. Rabbi Friedman wrote the following position.

The Torah Value of Mercy

Rabbi Zev Meir Friedman
Rosh HaMesivta, Rambam Mesivta

I read Shmuel Sackett’s article “No Tsunami Money From Me” with great interest. I welcome it because it affords us the opportunity to consider the Torah value of mercy, based upon the Gemara and Chazzal.

Many of us are familiar with the Talmudic dictum (Tractate Yevamos 79a) that the defining Jewish characteristics are mercy (rahamim), modesty (bayshanim) and good works (gmilus hasadim). These stem from the Torah’s commandment viHalachta biDrachav, our duty to emulate the ways of Hashem. Ma Hu nikra rachum, af atah heyeh rachum, just as Hashem is referred to as merciful so should you be merciful (Tractate Shabbos 133b and Rambam, Hilchos Dayos). Hashem’s goodness and kindness are directed to all His creatures. In this, there is no distinction between different categories of people. Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, Jews and Gentiles and, yes, even Jews and idolaters. All are beneficiaries of Hashem’s goodness and kindness. Tov Hashem laKol viRahamav al kol ma’asav. Thus, the Talmud in Tractate Gittin (61a) instructs us to “provide sustenance to poor idolaters together with the poor of Israel”. This

obligation notably extends to idolaters (Aqum) not only to Gentiles. The Metsudat David makes an important point on this subject: that unlike kings and popular leaders, whose kindness is typically reserved for their loyalists, Hashem’s kindness - which we highlight and glorify through emulation - is extended to all creatures, even those who violate His will.

Support for the victims of the tsunami disaster is therefore entirely consistent with the core values of every Torah Jew. Moreover, one who does not aid the victims of this horrible event is failing to live up to his obligation to demonstrate mercy to all of Hashem’s creations thereby foregoing an opportunity to highlight and glorify Hashem’s fundamental kindness, an act of Kiddush Hashem.

But what about some of the issues that Shmuel raises in his article, such as the notion that aniyey ircha kodmim, the poor of one’s city come first. Should a Jew not support Jewish causes before supporting non-Jewish causes? At first blush, this strikes us as an almost rhetorical “motherhood and apple pie” question, one that puts at issue our core sense of Jewish loyalty and community. But Torah and Halakha are not rooted in instinctive responses or political correctness but rather seek to perfect and elevate the individual on a spiritual scale. The answer is: it depends on the scope of the need. If the needs are the same - then communal needs take priority. However, if a situation of extraordinary need arises outside of the community that transcends the immediate needs of the community - then the non-communal needs take priority. This is an application of the Torah Temimah’s notion of prioritization in charitable giving - that it should be based on the scope of relative need and suffering. Prioritization also means giving more to communal rather than non-communal needs (see Orach HaShulhan, Yoreh Deah 251:4), but it does not mean excluding non-communal needs from the focus of our concerns.

Shmuel’s insistence that Jewish money be directed exclusively to Jewish causes flies squarely in the face of the express Talmudic and rabbinic obligation, discussed previously, that the poor among non-Jews are to be supported together with the Jewish poor. The Yerushalmi, Tosefta, Ran, Shach, Gra, Rashba and many other Rishonim and Acharonim all support this principle. And since the Torah notes ki lo yechdal evyon miKerev haAretz - that Jewish poverty will, alas, always be with us - Shmuel’s construct would bring us to the unavoidable conclusion that a Jew must never give charity to non-Jewish causes. (Indeed, under Shmuel’s construct, a Jew would never give charity outside of his own community!) I cannot help

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(Tsunami continued from previous page)

Tsunami Relief



but wonder how Shmuel would react to an advocate of the reverse notion: that non-Jews should never provide support for Jewish causes like the State of Israel.

The Torah encourages us to live lives of moderation, not extremism. As Jews, it is entirely appropriate that we direct our charitable giving first and predominantly to our fellow Jews, to our communal organizations and, of course, to Eretz Yisroel. That's why, for example, Rambam - like many other yeshivas - each year donates tens of thousands of dollars to these causes, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of dollars of scholarship money that we and our supporters provide to help the less fortunate among us. The issue here is not one of loyalty, but rather of sensitivity to human suffering. Aniyey ircha indeed, but not to the exclusion of others.

Which leads us to Shmuel's second question: what about the political issue? Sri Lanka has a significant Moslem minority and has consistently voted against Israel in the U.N. So why should we support it?

Once again, I would advocate not doing what is perhaps 'politically correct' or emotionally satisfying but instead what is 'halakhically correct'. Halakha often mandates that we act in ways that run contrary to our most basic human instincts. For example, the Talmud (Tractate Bava Metzia 32b) instructs that if one is confronted with two donkeys buckling under their load, one accompanied by a dear friend and the other by an avowed enemy - he should help the enemy first, clearly an unpopular suggestion. This is obviously not based on any fanciful notion of "turning the other cheek" to a dangerous adversary but, rather, suggests that our notions of friendship and enmity need to be examined carefully to see if they are truly based on substance. The Torah compels us to rise above non-substantive differences in the pursuit of our ultimate Jewish mission to bring Torah values - like the notion of peace among people - to the world.

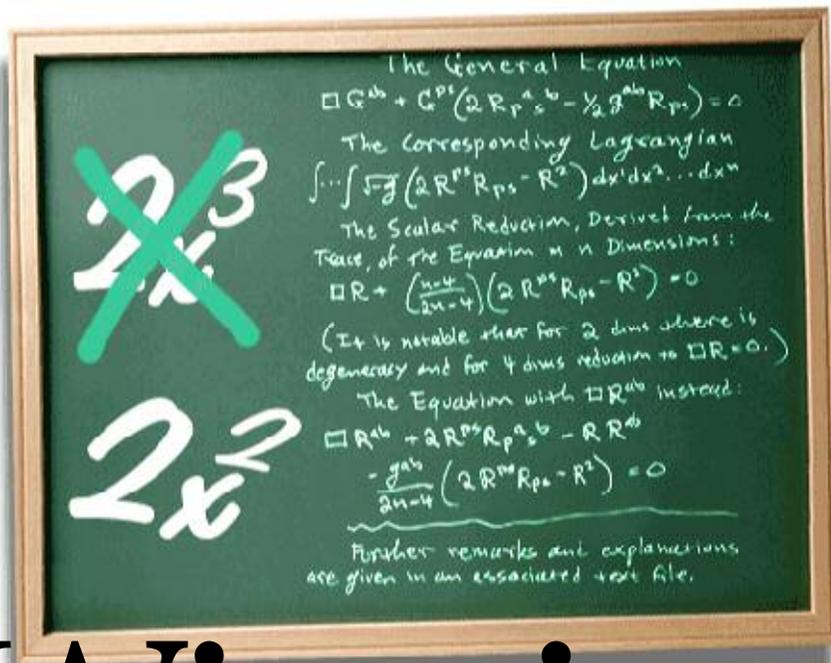
Shlomo HaMelekh cautions us in Kohelet that there is a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time for love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. A wise and cautious person, a halakhic Jew who seeks peace among people as an important value, must carefully calibrate his responses to different situations. He knows that one response is not appropriate for all circumstances. And so he must approach each situation with wisdom. That's the message that we teach our students at Rambam: we should always be active on behalf of Jewish causes, but we must also be extremely discerning in the form of activism to be undertaken. There is a time to fight, a time to

demonstrate - and, as Shmuel acknowledges, we at Rambam do all of these things - but there is also a time for extending one's hand in peace.

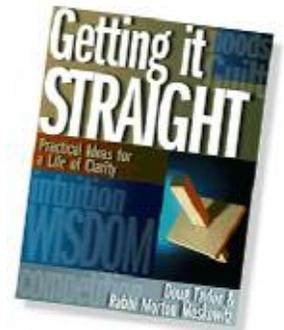
When we heard of the tsunami disaster and made our initial contact to the Sri Lankan U.N. Ambassador, we were aware of Sri Lanka's anti-Israel U.N. voting record. But we were also aware that Israel has important military and economic ties to many countries that consistently vote against it in the U.N. So we raised the issue of Sri Lanka's voting record with the Ambassador and suggested that we use our student's fund raising effort on behalf of young tsunami victims and Israel's humanitarian efforts in Sri Lanka to "clear the air" on the relations between the two countries. The Ambassador was happy to comply and the Israeli Ambassador was delighted with the suggestion. (The Sri Lankan Ambassador even noted, "despite what is said in the media, we know the true relations that exist between us and the State of Israel".) Thus was the opportunity created for the Sri Lankan U.N. Ambassador to thank a group of Jewish students and the State of Israel for their humanitarian support on television and in the print media of the United States and Sri Lanka. It was an opportunity for everyone to see that Jewish students with yarmulkes and the Jewish State put political differences aside and reached across the globe to help alleviate the suffering of children in the wake of a monstrous tragedy. In fact, the Sri Lankan Ambassador publicly acknowledged the sense of support that his country's children would feel as a result of the efforts of a group of Jewish kids halfway across the world. And the Torah's message could be seen by all: tov Hashem laKol viRahamav al kol ma'asav.

Shmuel would have us attach the following appendage to the Torah message of Jewish mercy for all of Hashem's creations: "(but not to Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems and political opponents of the State of Israel)". That is not a part of the Torah's catechism. As witnesses to the Holocaust, Israel's wars against its enemies, the cruel terrorism being directed against Israeli citizens, we may all understand the source of Shmuel's anger but we must recognize that Torah directs us along a very different path. I am proud of what our students did for Sri Lankan tsunami victims, not because they "jumped on the bandwagon" as Shmuel suggests, but precisely because they did the opposite: because they acted like halakhic Jews, not angry Jews. Because they put the Torah value of mercy before the emotional rush of temperament. They may only be high school students, but they have taught us all an important lesson about how Jews should behave. ■

Books



Taken from "Getting It Straight"
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity



"Uh, yeah."

"Do you remember working out complex calculus problems on a blackboard with other students?"

"Yes."

"Do you ever remember anyone getting into a fight about the answer? Did one student shout to another, 'no, you idiot, it's not two-x-squared, it's two-x-cubed!'"

I laughed. "No. We were too interested in finding the correct answer. Besides, we had a well-established set of mathematical principles to follow."

"Exactly," he said. "Rational thinking is the same way. It's not about winning, but about exploring all possible aspects of a concept until the correct answer becomes obvious. Besides, just engaging our minds in the study of an idea can be very satisfying. Tell me, do you enjoy these discussions?"

"Yes."

"More than, say, watching a soap opera?"

I laughed again. "Double yes."

"There you are. Involvement in the world of ideas can be very enjoyable, regardless of the outcome. In this case," he said, holding up the letters, "two people have explored a difficult concept and come up with different conclusions than ours. That's great. Everyone wins. They've obviously involved themselves in the world of ideas, and they've been kind enough to share some additional ideas with us. How could I be anything but pleased?"

I both saw his point and marveled at it at the same time. I'd learned to avoid disagreement, yet he welcomed it. I saw disagreement as a threat to my credibility. He saw it as no threat at all. Maybe I needed to rethink a few things.

"Still bothered?" he asked.

"No," I said, finding myself smiling. "No, I'm not."

"That's good," he said, as the waiter brought the check. "Because I wouldn't want you to be emotionally unprepared for some challenging news."

"What's that?"

"It's your turn to buy." □

Winning

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"You sure created a stir."

I sipped my tea, looked across the table, and waited for his reaction. But, as usual, the King of Rational Thought didn't react. He just responded calmly.

"What do you mean?"

"I wrote up the conversation we had about evolution last month, and look what happened," I said, sliding the newspaper clips over to him. "Several of my readers didn't exactly agree with you."

"Does that bother you?" he asked, picking up the clips.

"Of course it bothers me," I said, slightly exasperated as I watched him read the two letters, each of which took issue with his statements about evolution and abstract thinking. "Doesn't it bother you?"

"Not at all," he replied, without looking up. "Why should it?"

"Why? WHY??" I was practically shouting. Didn't this man ever get bothered by anything????!!

He finished the letters and I calmed down enough to ask, "So what do you think?"

"Excellent," he said.

My temper flared again. "What do you mean, excellent?" I blared.

"These letters are excellent," he said. "Rather than react emotionally, they have tackled the

issue itself. This one letter in particular presents a very interesting approach to the question of abstract thinking and evolution. It could prove very fruitful to explore his idea and see where it leads."

I just stared.

"Look," he said, "at the risk of offending you, I sense that you see this as a competition. Them against us. Their ideas against our ideas. And I suspect you want to win. After all, it's the American way. In business, in school, almost everywhere. You want to beat them, put their ideas to the sword, and emerge victorious atop a heap of intellectual carnage. Yes?"

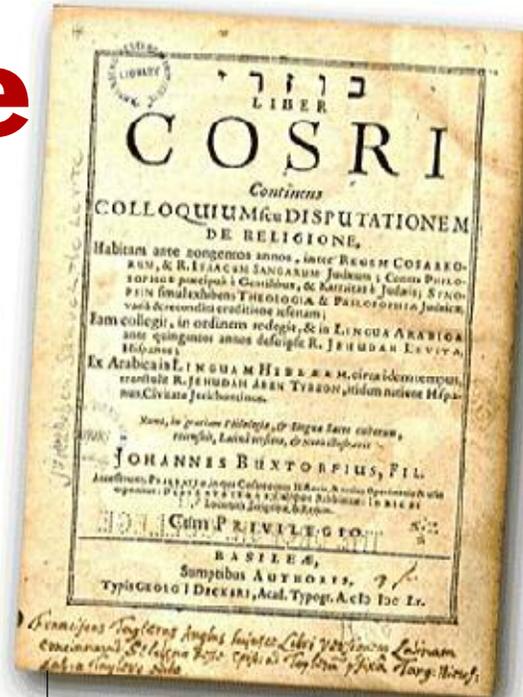
I glowered, but reluctantly agreed he was right.

"That's not what rational thinking is about," he said. "This isn't Wide World Of Sports. Rational thinking is about becoming involved in the world of ideas. There aren't winners and losers here. There are only winners and losers where the objective is to have winners and losers. By contrast, anyone who involves himself or herself in the world of ideas wins. They win by sharpening their minds, by learning how to question, by learning how to define a concept, and ultimately by learning how to determine correctly what is true.

He suddenly shifted gears. "You took a lot of math in college, right?" he asked.

Math?

Defense of the Kuzari III



Reader: In Rabbi Ben-Chaim's reply to my comments on the Kuzari argument he demonstrates that his "proof" rests upon arguments that are used inconsistently and that it is based on a method of determining the past that is completely alien to the historical methodology used by professional historians. This does not mean that the Torah's narrative false, but it does demonstrate that Ben-Chaim has provided no "proof" that it is true.

First, Ben-Chaim writes in reply to a Christian miracle, "I do not doubt that once a story is accepted on faith, that the adherents may believe all parts ... [But] these purported stories were not passed on by any supposed 'witnesses,' but were written decades later."

It is true that most historians consider the book of Matthew to have been written around 90 CE, decades after the events it describes (see the Oxford Companion to the Bible on "Matthew, The Gospel"), but it is also true that most historians believe the Torah was written between 900 BCE and 400 BCE, centuries after the claimed date of the Sinai event (ibid, "Pentateuch"). It is irrational to arbitrarily accept the judgment of historians in the case of a Christian miracle but reject it in the case of a Jewish miracle.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You suggest Torah accuracy be determined by "historians", instead of the true Torah authorities. It is inconsequential that historians claim the Torah to be written later

than it actually was. The Torah was given to a group of individuals on Sinai, and they passed it down to other Torah authorities. These initial recipients and those subsequent never doubted when the Torah was given. So whom should we accept as authoritative: the original recipients, or those historians who came thousands of years later? Additionally, historians may be accepted when they know of what they speak. But in the case of the Torah, these historians did not study all of the data, and are incomplete in their estimates. The Oral Torah provides greater information, essential to such estimations. These historians do not refer to the Oral Torah, so their conclusions are not accurate.

Reader: Ben-Chaim writes further that "once a doctrine is believed without proof, those accepting such a 'blind faith' credo, have no problem accepting other fabrications on this very same blind faith." Similarly, it is entirely plausible that centuries after the presumed date of the Sinai revelation, Jews began to believe it as a result of religious faith.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You make an "assumption" which is not an impressive argument for your position. But be consistent, and assume Caesar never existed too. Why have you never made this claim? Perhaps Sinai is attacked so much, as it obligates man in Torah adherence. Other beliefs in history place no obligation on us. We are not forced to action or to question our

morality when we accept the history of Caesar, so we accept it. It is reasonable and must have occurred. But, when our emotions and actions must be guided against our will by acceptance of Sinai, then we are suddenly quick to dismiss this history, even if our arguments are based on assumptions, or poor reasoning. Since the objective is to remove Torah obligations from ourselves, we try any argument that can justify (in our hearts) a lifestyle free from Torah laws.

Reader: Later in the article Ben-Chaim writes that "There is no breach in the Torah's accounts ..." In fact, we cannot say with certainty there is no breach in the Torah's accounts. As I demonstrated above, the claim that the Torah was written in 1312 BCE is controversial among historians (to say the least), and text in the Tanakh indicates that parts of the Torah were forgotten for long periods of time (Judges 2:8-12; 2 Kings 22:8-23:22; Nehemiah 8:13-17). One is certainly entitled to believe that "there is no breach in the Torah's accounts," but belief is neither evidence nor proof.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You suggest the Jews all forgot the Torah. But if you would read further in Judges 3:4, you will find this statement, "And they (the Canaanites, Philistines, Tzidonites, Hivites) were to test Israel to know whether they would listen to the commands of God, which He commanded their forefathers in the hand of Moses." God let loose these enemies, as He desired the Jews return to following the Torah. But I ask you, how can they return to that which they forgot, according to you? Rebuking the Jews to repent and resume Torah lives, is only possible if they had retained the Torah. What really happened was this: although the Jews knew the Torah, they sinned against God, ignoring what they knew. They did not 'forget' the Torah. They were simply disobedient. Even on the words, "And they didn't know God", the Rabbis state they did not know God "clearly".

But allow me to point out a contradiction you are making without realizing it: Due to your assumed breach in transmission, you attempt to disprove our Torah today...but you do so by quoting parts of it as truth! You quote Judges, Nehemia and Kings as truths...the very book you say is not authentic! In one breath, you say the Torah is both false and true. Do you see what you are doing? To discredit a book like the New Testament, one rightly exposes its verses as inconsistent with reason. That would be a reasonable methodology of refutation. But you contradict yourself with your claim that the Torah is false, simultaneously deriving proof from that very Torah.

Reader: Second, Ben-Chaim writes that my

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characterization of an Irish and Christian example as myths invalidates these examples. This is not the case, however, since it is I who characterized them as myths, not the people who believed them. Similarly, the global flood in Genesis is often characterized as a myth even though many people believe it with certainty.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I apologize for making an error. I assumed you were quoting those Irishmen. If they feel their myths - as you called them - are truths, let them provide proof. As of yet, they have none. But do not feel that any condemnation of the Flood story as a mere myth succeeds in rendering history into myth. Similarly, the Holocaust does not fade into a myth because of Holocaust deniers.

Reader: Third, Ben-Chaim claims that the many thousands of witnesses to the 1968 Virgin Mary apparition above the Church in Zeitoun are nonexistent. This is an odd claim to make, considering that the event was documented by many news sources [1][2], that there are many recorded independent eyewitness accounts of the phenomena [2], and that every serious skeptic who has investigated the event (such as J. Nickell [3], J. Derr, M. Persinger [4], R. Barthomolew, and E. Goode [5]) agrees that hundreds of thousands of people witnessed an anomalous phenomenon (although they attempt to provide natural explanations for it). In contrast, we have no evidence independent of the Torah that 2.5 million Jews even existed at the time of the Sinai revelation.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I repeat myself: independent accounts are meaningless. If in truth there were 200,000 witnesses, then they would have spread it to others from that point forward, and them to us today, like all history, and there would be no doubt...but there is doubt. This lack of testimony means there were no witnesses. The story never occurred.

Reader: Fourth, Ben-Chaim argues that requiring independent sources of contemporary evidence for a historical claim to be "proven" is flawed. In fact, this is simply basic historical methodology. A single document with a controversial date and an oral tradition that corroborates this document does not constitute historical proof, at least according to the methods used by professional historians. I apologize to Ben-Chaim for misunderstanding his argument about Julius Caesar. Unfortunately, however, it is incorrect: if historians had only a single document with a controversial date and an oral tradition that

testified to the existence of Julius Caesar, they would not accept Julius Caesar's existence with certainty. (For an overview of historical methodology see *The Historian's Craft* by M. Bloch. For a case study on how historical methodology demonstrates that the Holocaust occurred see *Denying History* by M. Shermer.)

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I agree with you: a document alone is insufficient to prove history. Additionally, we require masses to transmit the story. Millions today are in receipt of an unbroken transmission concerning Sinai. So we do not rely on the document alone, but in its universal acceptance regarding the story of mass witnesses. Conversely, Christianity has a number of flaws: 1) it was not transmitted from its point of supposed origin, 2) its claim of mass witnesses is safely unclear as whom these people were, 3) it contains four conflicting accounts about one point in history, and 4) its tenets oppose reason. There are many more.

Reader: Finally, the Rambam does in fact argue that the Jews did not hear any intelligible words from God, but that they heard all the laws from Moses (*Guide to the Perplexed*, Part 2, Ch. 33). And in fact, none of the numerous records from ancient Egypt have corroborated the ten plagues or a massive exodus of 2.5 million Jews, and this indeed tells a different story than the Torah.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: True, the Jews may have heard something different than did Moses. However, does Rambam or any great thinker deny the event at Sinai, or that the Jews witnessed miracles? No one denies this. Disputing a detail as you do does not refute the story. Thereby, our proof remains intact. Additionally, "lack of evidence" as your disproof is not a rational argument: perhaps that evidence will yet surface. For example, just because I never saw your gold watch, this does not disprove its existence testified by many others.

Reader: None of this is proof that the narrative in the Torah is false, nor is it intended to be. It does demonstrate, however, that Rabbi Ben-Chaim's "proof" rests on arguments that are used inconsistently, as well as misconceptions about the methods used by historians to discover the past.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I feel I have shown otherwise.

Reader: I appreciate that the editor of JewishTimes was graciously willing to publish both of my replies. -Avi □

Misjudging God

Reader: Dear Rabbi, I have a friend whom I fear is changing before my very eyes. He once believed that God was a just, merciful, and loving God. But after the attack of the twin towers and after the tsunami that both saw a huge loss of life, he speaks differently of God. He is starting to drift towards the horrible Christian doctrine of predestination. He seems to be arguing that because God cannot change (which I agree with but not in the vicious, unjust way that he wishes to paint God) then God created creation with some kind of sinister motive. Here is what he wrote me:

"Creation IS NOT compatible with immutability (inability to change). Let me put it this way: If God is perfect, then He lacks absolutely nothing. Within Him is all actuality and potentiality realized. In order to create something, one must have an idea of creating something and then not have the idea of creating something. If you're going to build a chair, then you must think to yourself, "I'm going to build a chair". Then, having built the chair, you now lack the idea of building the chair, because the work is completed. You've changed from one state of one intention to another. God cannot change...His being perfect forbids it, because you cannot change from one state of perfection to another. If you did, then the state you were in prior wasn't really perfection."

Mesora: This comment above is flawed, as this person equates human thought/creation with God's. He bases his understanding of God's methods of operation, on man's. He feels as follows, "Since man must pass through phases of "planning", "execution" and "removing his thoughts" from that activity, so too God must work this way. And since God cannot change (being perfect, any change would be towards less perfect), God cannot be a creator." Thus, your friend says, "Creation is incompatible with immutability." We understand your friend's error: he became victim to the very common mistake of "projection", as he projects man's methods onto God, when this is impossible. We don't know what God is. His first error of projecting man's "change of intention" onto God, is what led him to believe that God cannot be a creator. In fact, God does not follow the very methods man requires to operate. God created man, and his various behaviors. Hence, God is not controlled by His creations. So the behaviors we witness in

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Letters

man, cannot be predicated of God.

In fact, we know nothing about how God created the world. Talmud Chagiga 11b describes four areas of thought off limits to man, and what happened prior to creation is one of them. Man's knowledge is based on cause and effect and on his senses. Therefore, in an era with no physical universe - before creation - man has no capability to understand what existed, how things existed, or "how" God creates. There was nothing physical, and hence, cause and effect did no operate...our mode of thinking cannot operate there. We cannot understand how God created the universe.

Reader: He continued: "Additionally, what you have at creation is actually God choosing the worst possible scenario. Look at it this way. Before creation, there are three possible states of being: 1) God being alone with his perfection. 2) God creating a perfect universe. 3) God creating an imperfect universe. They're listed in order of perfection. Why choose the worst possible option? (That's what God did.) If you want to argue that God chose this option because he wanted to create us so that he could love us and we love him, then you're back at the idea of God experiencing emotion, which is irreconcilable with the idea of a perfect God. If you want to go that route then 'goodness' will become meaningless, simply because it would be completely arbitrary based on the actions of God. If God decided to torture small children, then that would become good. Let me ask you a question: is it wrong to kill enemy non-combatants in wartime?"

Mesora: Your friend's words are a bit incoherent, but I will address what I think he is saying. He assumes incorrectly that God had "possibilities" before Him when creating the universe. "Possibilities" exists for man, not for God; therefore, "choice" is not something predicated of God.

He also assumes God created an imperfect universe. I ask, "imperfect" according to whose standards? Your friend has selected a morality not endorsed by God, so in his subjective framework, he feels God as erred in creating an "imperfect universe." He attempts to support his view by creating impossible scenarios, like God torturing infants. From his fabricated "possibilities", he extrapolates and accuses God of injustice, suggesting it would now be considered a good to torture children if God desires so. He seems to be harboring a view that, "We just have to accept all the injustices of God, because we have no choice".

Instead of 'imagining' what is good, why doesn't he study "reality"? What he must do is be



humble enough to recognize that minds far greater than his, viewed the universe as a perfectly designed system, reflecting God's mercy and kindness, and not viciousness. If such great minds like Maimonides held such an opinion, it would behoove him to study his position, at least from the perspective of appreciating and understanding why Maimonides held this view.

I feel this is a great method to opening a person to a new view. Many times, people hold views as an expression of their ego: they feel humbled if they back down. Their ego prevents them from learning, and abandoning what is really false. Their ego emotion is what they seek to protect, even in place of continuing in falsehoods. An effective method to address this problem, is to ask the person to consider an alternate view of a great thinker. As you are not attacking his own view, but merely requesting his estimation of someone greater, you accomplish two things: 1) he does not feel he must abandon his own view so his ego remains intact, and you also bolster his ego by asking "his opinion" of Maimonides, for example, and 2) you achieve your goal of enabling him to objectively consider the merits of another view. Once he can objectively consider another view, you have set him on the path towards truth. His mind is now engaged in the reality he just observed in what Maimonides stated. And with enough exposure to precisely articulated truths, as does this master (Maimonides), those like your friend will eventually be faced with their own appreciation for brilliant ideas, and hopefully, will live a life seeking more truths, abandoning their previous lifestyle of seeking ego gratification.

There are many question humans have on God's justice, and they will not be answered

overnight. If your friend is truly interested in learning the truth, he should ask questions to those knowledgeable, read the words of those greater than us, and consider the answers he receives. If he is not doing this, then he simply wishes to remain with his own views, fooling himself that he as reached the absolute truth. One cannot become a doctor without study. And as we are discussing far more abstract ideas like God's justice, certainly, greater thought is required. The Torah addresses God's justice, as does the Talmud. Direct him to these areas. He will then understand, for example, why mudslides and tidal waves must exist, even if they kill people. He will know why free will must exist, although murderers may use it.

Understand; one asks these questions at times out of a desire to secure his own, protected fate. When he sees others subject to the forces of nature, and that they may deliver death, it threatens one's security, and exposes his vulnerabilities. It is good to ask these questions, but in doing so, one must attempt to be as objective as possible. We will never obtain all of the answers, but with patience, we may start to observe perfection in God's world.

Lastly, your friend also assumes God possesses emotions. While it is true that God created man so man may come to love God, this does not indicate that God possesses emotions. Emotions are a creation, and thus, God does not possess them. Also, God does not need anything, including not man's love of Him. God desires man to love God, for man's good. It is an act of kindness that God created man with the ability to appreciate the wisdom that the Creator made available to man in His creation. God wants man to love Him...for man's own good. ■

Weekly Parsha

THE 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?

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

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Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer; the Jew who Moses saved was there, he 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 undermine 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 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 -

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“they are to serve Me on this mountain”. Meaning, their merit 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. Their preference of Egyptian bondage over warring with the Philistines to maintain freedom 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 mentally. 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 salvation is delivered solely by God. 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 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 ultimate 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 warped, 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.”

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 didn’t 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 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. ■