



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

## Moshe's Hands

When Amalek made war against Israel, Moshe stood with his hands aloft supported by Aharon and Chur (Sh'mot 17:11-12).

The Midrash wonders what benefit this brought the Israelites, and it answers that when the people saw Moshe in a posture of prayer they realised that victory would only be possible with the help of God.

Does this mean that any time that people stretch out their hands to heaven there will be a miracle and everything will turn out all right?

There are two ways of responding to the question. One: if you know you are fighting for God you will make a superhuman effort of will, and that in itself is a Divine miracle. Two: prayer is a secret weapon that strengthens human hands.

When someone is ill, they need the best possible doctors, the most skilful possible nurses. But prayer - on the part of the patient and their family, as well as from the doctors and nurses - improves the quality of the treatment and care.

It brings into the case the highest Doctor of all. As the sidra says in the name of God, ANI HASHEM ROF'ECHA - "I the Lord am Your Healer" (Sh'mot 15:26).

## A Time to Sing

"One of the finest products of Hebrew poetry, remarkable for poetic fire and spirit, picturesque description, vivid imagery, quick movement, affective parallelism, and bright, sonorous diction" - that is Professor Driver's tribute to the Song of the Red Sea.

The stirring melody in which the song is chanted, especially the S'fardi version, is full of excitement and vigour.

The words carry you along with them - "I will sing to the Lord, for He has gloriously triumphed: the horse and its rider has He cast into the sea". The song is one of the high points of the year's Torah readings.

Nonetheless, the sages mounted a protest against it. Here are the people of Israel expressing their natural relief and joy at escaping from the nation that oppressed them for so long, and yet, say the rabbis, God objected.

"The work of My hands is drowning in the sea", He said, "and you would sing a song to Me?"

This is amazing Jewish ethics. The Egyptian tyrants were wicked and inhumane, and they deserved punishment - yet they were still God's creatures, and the rule is, "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice" (Mishlei 24:17).

This principle is given as the explanation of our custom of spilling a drop of wine on Pesach at the mention of each of the ten plagues.

It also enables us to understand why we shorten the Hallel on the six days of Pesach after the first day, because our joy is tempered by the thought that human beings, however wicked, had to suffer so we could survive.

From this we learn that there are times not to sing. But there are times for singing too.

The Baal Shem Tov used to say that we recognise God in the words of the Torah, in the themes of the prayer book - but also in the singing of the birds, the whispering of the trees and the grandeur of creation.

Life is full of moments of joy that should make us want to sing. True, there are days of disappointment, disillusionment and despair when nothing seems to go right. But one must have faith in tomorrow and say, "Tomorrow I will sing!"

Even today, in the very midst of its anxiety and worry, there is a reminder

in the Psalms, "I lift up my eyes to the hills: whence comes my help? My help is from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (T'hilim 121). And ADON OLAM says, "The Lord is with me: I shall not fear".

So even in the midst of one's tears it is still possible to sing. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**