

Dvar Torah by Rabbi Chanoch Yeres

to his community at

Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

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B'SHALACH

In this week's parsha we read about the turning point for the Israelites as they leave the Egyptians behind. The miracle of the Crossing of the Red Sea allowed us to finally escape the treacherous grip of our Egyptian taskmasters. The Torah describes this moment in the famous words (14:31) "And Israel saw the great word. And Israel feared G-d."

VAYAR... VAYIR'U...

Why is there this duality in the terminology of the pasuk? First the Israelites are referred to as "Israel", then they are called HA'AM. This maybe the first time that the Jewish people coin themselves as an AM - a nation. The Torah seems to emphasize the transformation from simply being called "Israel" to being referred to as a free "nation".

However, in a deeper analysis, we notice that the reference to the Israelites as an AM was already used by Par'o earlier on (1:19) "Lo the people (AM BNEI YISRAEL) of the children of Israel." It is also Moshe through the command of G-d that refers to the Israelites as AM - "Send my people (AMI) free."

I read a very nice insight from my brother, Rabbi Moshe Yeres years ago. Yes, perhaps others like Par'o had been the first to call the Israelites an AM - "Nation", but it seems that the Jewish people had not yet internalized the concept until this epic moment of crossing the Red Sea. The feeling of being a nation did not transpire until this communal experience of K'riyat Yam Suf. This joint miraculous experience suddenly fused them from being a group of freed slaves into a people with nationhood and peoplehood. Perhaps this is the reference in the text after the crossing (15:16) - "Till your people (AMCHA) pass over, Oh G-d, till the people pass over that you have gotten."

AD YAAVOR AMCHA HASHEM

Only through such a communal miracle do we really understand and feel that we are all in the same situation. If one would have failed, we all would have been doomed. There was this urgency to unite the people into one AM to prepare them for the next communal experience of receiving the Torah at Mt. Sinai. We could only be successful in accepting the word of G-d if we become a unified nation. As we know, there are commandments that are befitting for individuals and there are other commandments that can only be properly kept as a community and

nation. Today, once more, as the Jewish people are more divided, we need to remember the words AM ECHAD - One Nation, our secret to our eternal survival. 🕍