

Walk through the Parsha

with Rabbi David Walk



B'SHALACH-SHIRAH

Sing a Song!

It's our practice to recite the Sing of the Sea every day. Why? There is no explicit Biblical demand to do so, as there is with SH'MA? The answer lies in the powerful sources which tell us that the reward for this practice is very great.

The Mishna B'rura (51:17) lists a number of extraordinary benefits granted to one who recites Shirat HaYam daily with great joy: one's sins are forgiven, it serves as a great tikun for the soul, and one merits to sing it again in the World to Come..

But why is this poetic description of the Jews' crossing so significant? One possibility is the sheer enormity of that miracle at the Sea. The WOW factor. After all, every Pesach at our Seder we read in the Hagada that the splitting of the Sea was many times greater than all of the Ten Plagues combined, because the Plagues were called the 'Finger of God', while the Splitting of the Sea was called the 'Hand of God'.

So Rebbe Akiva concludes: Thus one can deduce that the Egyptians suffered fifty plagues in Egypt but

250 plagues at the Sea. It must have been awesome!

But this year I'd like to suggest another approach to this query about our poem describing this wonder. It's not the enormity of the miracle; it's the enormity of its message!

This poem is remarkable. It is very textured, and complex. Its richness allows us to experience it differently depending on our perspective and even on the day we encounter it.

When we examine the poem we see that it falls into a number of sections. The first eight verses are a first person description of this awesome miraculous event ('My strength', 'My God', 'I will exalt'). Verses 9 and 10 describe the point of view of the Egyptians ('The foe said...'). Then we, again, praise God, Who is 'incomparable'. So, verses 11, 12, and 13 are our national take on this particular miracle and on the general power of God.

In verse 14, we turn our attention to the future. First, the near-term future: People will hear and tremble. For three verses, we discuss the universal repercussions of this immense occurrence: Nations will be petrified of the Jews. This fear persisted until the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael, forty years later. As Rachav told the two spies sent by Yehoshua: We have heard how God

dried up the waters of the Yam Suf for you when you left Egypt (Yehoshua 2:10).

However, in verse 17, we turn back to the Jewish people and their destiny: You will bring them and plant them in Your own Mountain; The place You made to dwell in, O Lord; The Sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands established!

What time frame does this statement describe? There are those who explain this declaration as a description of the building of the Temple in the time of Shlomo, a few centuries from the Crossing. In this scenario, the 'bringing' and 'planting' refer to the two miraculous crossings our ancestors experienced, the Yam Suf and the Jordan River (Maharal MiPrague in Gevurot Hashem).

That's the minority position. Most authorities focus on the implication of God's 'hands' at the end of the verse. Many of them follow the Talmudic statement (Ketuvot 5a): Greater are the deeds of the righteous than the works of heaven and earth. For heaven and earth were created with one hand (Yeshayahu 48:13). But regarding the works of the righteous, it is written (here): The Sanctuary of the Lord, Your hands established it.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that God uses two hands to

establish the Beit HaMikdash. This is because the Temple is built with both God's power and God's love; power in the left hand and love in the right hand.

Most importantly, we're discussing a Beit HaMikdash built by God. The first Temple was built by Shlomo HaMelech; the second by Ezra HaSofer. So, what Beit HaMikdash are we discussing here? Clearly, we must be discussing the Third Temple, May it be built and established speedily in our days.

As Reb Moshe Alshich explains: The Third Temple, for which our soul yearns will not be like the First and Second, which were the work of human hands. Rather, it will be the work of God. Concerning it Ya'akov said, "This is none other than the house of God" ... Thus it is said that through the Holy Spirit, in which they saw that it was possible for events to cause Israel to be exiled from His Land. Therefore Moshe and Israel entreated Him, and said: Behold, what we ask of You is that "You will bring them..." It is then that the Temple will not be built by human hands, but rather be "Your dwelling place, which Hashem has made" - namely, the Third Temple. Through it we hope to merit that we will no longer be exiled from our Land.

We allude to this future reality in our Shabbat Musaf prayer when we

declare: V'TITA'EINU BIGVULEINU! (And You will plant us within our boundaries). The Vilna Gaon explains that this declaration paraphrases our verse, and refers to the Third Temple.

Thus, the Song of the Sea concludes with its gaze firmly fixed on a distant future - on the culmination of history and the arrival of a more holy and peaceful era. This idea echoes an insight of Rav Amnon Bazak, who notes that the poem contains two central themes: the victory over the enemy and the revelation of God's infinite power.

It is this second idea, God's power, which truly interests us. The infinite power witnessed at the Sea made us aware of the ultimate goal of our Torah and Mitzvot: bringing about a better world! That vision will be fulfilled in the miraculous appearance of the Third Temple!

So, it is the power of this verse, describing the eventual and complete Redemption in the time of the third Beit HaMikdash, which gives us the strength and belief to finally raise our voices and cry out the final declaration (verse 18) of our Song and of our faith: HASHEM YIMLOCH L'OLAM VA'ED! The Eternal will rule for ever and ever! 