

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

MARK'VOT PAR'O...

V'CHEILO YARA BAYAM

Par'o's chariots and army He threw (YARA) in the sea.

In AZ YASHIR which Moshe and B'nei Yisrael sing after the splitting of the sea, they say the above words. The word YARA is used in a different form again a short while later when, after three days of traveling, the Jews couldn't find water. When they finally reach Mara, the water they found was undrinkable because of its bitterness. As a result of the complaints of the people, HaShem directs Moshe: VAYOREIHU HASHEM... and HaShem showed him a tree, he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. In the first usage, the root YUD-REISH-HEI clearly means to 'throw', while here, that same root is used to mean something completely different. It means to 'show', or 'direct'. We use that form of the word to refer to a teacher - MOREH, a parent - HOREH, indicating the essence of their job: to show, instruct, and teach. (The verb used here to refer to 'throwing' is VAYASHLEICH.)

The Concordance differentiates between the meaning of the root YUD-REISH-HEI as throwing or

shooting and its meaning as teaching and directing. It points out the relationship between these two usages. It explains that one who teaches is "as if 'shooting' the cornerstone of wisdom into the heart of the student". The same word is used in terms of shooting arrows: ...the arrow which Yehonatan shot (YARA). (Shmuel Alef 20:37) Similarly, we use this word to describe the rain we receive: I will provide rain for your land in its proper time, the early rain (YOREH) and late rains (MALKOSH)... for this describes rain that comes down like an arrow.

Chazal tell us that the inability to find water was because they had gone three days without learning Torah. I never understood this because not only had they not received the Torah yet, but the very verse that tells of Moshe sweetening the water, finishes with "there He established for the nation a statute and a judgement", which is understood as having been taught then about certain mitzvot, among them: laws of Shabbat, honoring parents, monetary laws.

In addressing this difficulty, the Kli Yakar explains the "lack of Torah" differently. The verse that tells of there being no water, begins with - Moshe caused the people to travel. They didn't do it on their own. They were more interested in collecting the vast amount of spoils of silver,

gold, and gems that had come from the Egyptian chariots and horses. They weren't in a hurry to proceed to where they were to receive the Torah. It was this attitude that caused 'measure for measure' response, given that MAYIM - water - often refers to Torah. If they weren't so involved in seeking Torah (MAYIM), then, indeed, they would not find it. The solution to the problem was for Moshe to throw this EITZ into the bitter water.

If it is, indeed, true that the lack of water was a result of the lack of learning Torah, then using the root YUD-REISH-HEI to mean 'to teach' as well as 'to show', I thought that maybe the verse is teaching us something else as well. How about VAYOREIHU HA'ETZ - meaning He taught him Torah - since Torah is EITZ CHAYIM? And if the water was bitter because of the lack of Torah, this would be the cure. The end of the verse seems to support this because it immediately says: This is where they were first instructed about the laws of the Torah; hence, the water became sweet. ❀