

Fear of Judgment

וַיִּירָאוּ הָעָם אֶת ה'

"The people feared Hashem." (14:31)

The Midrash on this Possuk comments that until this point, meaning the splitting of the sea, Klal Yisroel had not feared Hashem, however from then onwards they did. The Beis HaLevi comments on this and writes that this understanding of Klal Yisroel's relationship with Hashem is hard to fathom. He argues that it is difficult to believe, after all the miracles and revelations of Hashem's power in Egypt, that Klal Yisroel still did not fear Him.

The Beis HaLevi prefaces his explanation with the following idea. He writes that the miracles in Egypt and those which occurred at the splitting of the sea were intrinsically different. The miracles of Egypt were a means to an end; the punishment of the Egyptians for their mistreatment of the Jews. This punishment also served a secondary purpose, to allow the Jews to go free. It is well known that the Jews did not have their own merit which entitled them to redemption; however the destruction of the Egyptians served as a means via which Hashem could redeem Klal Yisroel without the need of such a merit. It was therefore the strictness of Hashem, His attribute of judgement that eventually led to Klal Yisroel being freed. In contrast, the splitting of the sea on seventh day Pesach was an entirely different approach to redemption. By the time the Jews approached the Yam Suf, they had two Mitzvos to their credit, Pesach and Bris Miloh, which made them deserving of being saved in their own right. Furthermore, the Mechilta states that the willingness of Klal Yisroel to leave Egypt and place their trust in Hashem was sufficient to warrant the splitting of the sea. As such, the sea split in order to save Klal Yisroel, not to punish the Egyptians that were pursuing them. At the same time, the outcome of the sea splitting for Klal Yisroel was that it then returned to its previous place, thereby drowning the Egyptians that followed. This miracle was therefore an example of Hashem's tremendous kindness and mercy, in contrast to the miracles Klal Yisroel had seen previously that had all illustrated His strict judgement. It was also the exact opposite of the miracles of Egypt, in that here, the miracle took place on behalf of the Jews, and the consequence was that the Egyptians were punished.

These two approaches of Hashem, His mercy and strict judgement, act very differently on a person, continues the Beis HaLevi. When a person sees Hashem's judgement, he is likely to be struck with fear, however when he sees Hashem's mercy, he is more likely to experience a feeling of love and gratitude towards Hashem for His manifold goodness. However, at the splitting of the sea, Klal Yisroel experienced both these feelings at once. They were witness to the destruction of the Egyptians which came about through an exhibition of Hashem's goodness, and were puzzled by this apparent contradiction. Based on this, they came to a new level of realization that Hashem is not like a human being, meaning that He is not limited by any particular character attributes, and can achieve anything He desires in any way He desires. To Hashem, both kindness and strictness are tools, to be used to achieve what must be achieved, and in the hands of Hashem, either one can be turned on its head and forced to achieve that which appears diametrically opposite. It was on realising this that Klal Yisroel truly feared Hashem, recognising that even His kindness, can be the cause of the strictest of judgements.

Ark Angel

וַחֲמֹשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת עֲצָמוֹת יוֹסֵף

"Bnei Yisroel went up armed from Egypt. Moshe took the bones of Yosef." (13:18-19)

The Kli Yokor questions the juxtaposition of these Pessukim. To answer, he first cites a Yalkut that Klal Yisroel carried two things through the desert both referred to as an Aron; the Ark carrying the Aseres HaDibros, and the coffin of Yosef. When non-Jews questioned the propriety of carrying dead bones along with the Ark that represented Hashem, the definition of life, Klal Yisroel would respond that Yosef, when he was alive, was a living exemplar of keeping everything that was written in the Aseres HaDibros, and it was therefore appropriate to carry them together.

The Ark which carried the Aseres HaDibros also served as the weapon of Klal Yisroel; it was carried in front of them in war, vanquishing their enemies. As such, it is difficult to understand the Possuk which says Klal Yisroel left Egypt armed, since their weapon was the Aron and they had not yet received the Aseres HaDibros to put in it. To answer this difficulty, concludes the Kli Yokor, the Torah informs us that Moshe brought Yosef's bones with them, and since Yosef was a paragon of keeping the Torah it was as though his coffin had the Aseres HaDibros written on it, and served as the weapon of Klal Yisroel.

Torah Test

לְמַעַן אֲנֹסְנוּ הַיְלֵךְ בְּתוֹרַתִי אִם לֹא

"To test them if they will follow My Torah or not." (16:4)

The Sforno writes that Hashem, through the giving of the Mon, desired to test Klal Yisroel's devotion to the learning of Torah. This would be shown through their not having to work for a living, since working is a valid excuse for not learning Torah day and night. As such, if Klal Yisroel were given their livelihoods with ease, they would be expected to devote themselves entirely to the learning of the Torah.