

MAGNETIC ATTRACTION

“Hashem is a Master of war; Hashem is His Name.” (15:3)

Rashi explains that Hashem wages war, not with weapons, but with His Name. How is Rashi enlightening us with this comment? Did we really think that Hashem has an armament factory?

When Moshe killed the Egyptian in Parshas Shemos, our Sages teach us that he ‘laid his eyes’ on him and the Egyptian was transformed into a pile of bones (Berachos 55a).

Every living thing in this world stays alive only because inside it is a spark of holiness. When Moshe ‘laid his eyes’ on the Egyptian, the spark of holiness that maintained the existence of that Egyptian was inexorably drawn to Moshe’s eyes, and the Egyptian was left as a mere pile of bones.

Something similar happened at the splitting of the sea, but on an infinitely greater scale.

At the sea there was a revelation of G-dliness which drew all the fragments of holiness enmeshed in the bodies of the Egyptians back to the Source of all life.

Thus, the Egyptians were left devoid of the life-force that sustained them.

There is a mystical principle that the left hand corresponds to Din — strict justice — and the right hand corresponds to Rachamim — mercy.

Our Sages teach us that the left hand pushes away, while the right hand brings close. When a person is punished for his wrong-doing, it is referred to as the left hand — strict justice — pushing him away. However, Egypt was different. Their downfall came not at the hands of the messengers of justice, but totally the reverse. The Egyptians were punished by the right-hand of G-d bringing close all the fragments of holiness that were embedded within them.

Now we can understand what Rashi meant when he said that Hashem doesn’t wage war with weapons.

Hashem’s ultimate weapon is His Great Name — the Name of Mercy, which represents His Essence. When this is revealed, all life must flock to It like metal to a magnet.

This also is the explanation of the verse “Your Right Hand, Hashem, is exalted in power; Your Right Hand, Hashem, smashes the enemy.” The Right Hand draws close all the sparks of holiness.

(Shem MiShmuel)

Haftorah: Judges 4:4 - 5:31

SILENCING ‘THE SILENCER’

Just as the subject of this week’s Parsha is the Song at the sea, so the subject of the Haftorah is the Song of Devorah the Prophetess.

Both the Parsha and the Haftorah depict the holiness of the Jewish Woman: In Egypt, Yocheved and Miriam were instrumental in saving Moshe who was the agent of the redemption.

After crossing the sea, the Jewish women, led by Miriam, wanted to voice their total trust in Hashem, with their own song of praise.

The Jewish People had completely forgotten its mission, and “taken the daughters of the Canaanite population among whom they lived, for wives, and given their own daughters to their (the Canaanite) sons, and served their gods.”

Hashem decrees that they should undergo suffering as a result of this. Part of this suffering comes in the form of an immensely cruel Canaanite general whose name is Sisera, literally “The Pacifier” or “The Silencer.”

However, in this extremity, Yisrael turns its heart to Hashem.

In the glorious Song of Devorah we see this change in heart of the people, brought about by the awakening and purifying power of suffering.

All was due to the unforgettable merit of a glorious woman, borne up by the Spirit of Hashem, fired through and through with enthusiasm for His

Word, who put the men to shame, who with her “flaming words” inflamed the courage and steeled their powers of action.

Not the sword of Barak, but the spirit of Devorah, the words of Devorah, won the victory.

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch and Artscroll Stone Chumash)

WOMAN OF FLAMES

“Devorah was a prophetess, a fiery woman;” (4:4)

We usually find that women are not permitted to act as Biblical Judges. The reason being that a Biblical Judge has to have a certain harshness, and “Women are naturally merciful.”

Devorah, however, was an exception. She was like a ‘torch,’ able to overcome her natural feminine softness, and searing like a fire, judge the wicked.

(Ahavas Yonason in Mayana shel Torah)

INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.



EISHES CHAYIL - khj `at “A WOMAN OF VALOR...”

She opens her palm to the poor and extends her hands to the destitute

hbgk varp vpf iuhc tk vj ka vshsu

kapoh parsah le'oni v'yodeha shilchah lo'veyvon

..The singular term ‘palm’ is followed by the plural term ‘hands’ in this tribute to the charitable nature of the Woman of Valor.

When someone has a strong desire to give charity to the poor, even when her own means are so limited that she can offer no more than a single palm’s worth of assistance, the reward she gains is the ability to give generously with two full hands.

The switch from ‘poor’ to ‘destitute’ also communicates the sensitivity of the charitable person who recognizes the varying needs of those who are dependent on others. The Eishes Chayil opens her palm to the poor man to take from it what he needs, but to the extremely needy destitute she takes the initiative of extending her hands.

Parshas Beshalach

For the week ending 17 Shevat 5757, 24 & 25 January 1997

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Parshas Beshalach

For the week ending 17 Shevat 5757
24 & 25 January 1997

Overview

Pharaoh finally sends the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Hashem leads the Jewish People towards Eretz Yisrael with pillars of clouds and fire on a circuitous route which avoids the *Plishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Bnei Yisrael are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but Hashem protects them. Moshe raises his staff, and Hashem splits the sea, enabling the Bnei Yisrael to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by Hashem, commands his army to pursue the Bnei Yisrael, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in song thanking Hashem. After traveling for three days only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people start to complain. Moshe miraculously produces potable water for them, and in Marah they receive certain *mitzvos*. The people complain to Moshe and Aaron that they had better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quails so they can have meat and provides the 'Manna' for them. It is a miraculous bread that falls from the heavens every day except on Shabbos. However, on Friday a double portion descends to supply the Sabbath needs. Nobody is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but Manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbos. Some of the Manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. After the Jews complain again about the lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Amalek then attacks the Jews. Joshua leads the battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

Insights

HELP YOURSELF!

"And Yisrael saw the great hand..." (14:31)

"A person's sustenance is as hard as splitting the Reed Sea." (The Sages)
How can anything be 'hard' for Hashem? Was splitting the Reed Sea more difficult than the Creation of the whole universe? And *that* Hashem accomplished with two letters. And how can providing a livelihood for someone be hard for He who spoke and the world came into being? A person has to make as much of an effort as he can in order to sustain himself and those who depend on him. Although everything that we receive is decreed on Rosh Hashana, nevertheless, Hashem requires us to make an effort to help ourselves as much as possible. So it was with the splitting of the sea: The Children of Israel had to go down to the sea, to go as far as possible, and only then the sea split before them. In this way the splitting of the sea and a person's livelihood can be equated. Beginnings are always hard. It's hard for a person to start to work, uncertain how things will turn out, pursued by more and more bills — an army of responsibilities which seem to want to drown him. And it was hard for the Children of Israel to plunge into the Sea of Reeds, pursued by an army of Egyptians who wanted to drown them. All we have to do is try, and Hashem will make sure that neither the Egyptians, nor the bills, will drown us.

Adapted from Ma'asei Lemelech

HANDS UP!

"It happened that when Moshe raised his hand Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand Amalek was stronger." (17:11)

There is a force in this world that seeks to imprison reality within the confines of Man's understanding; a force that defines what is beyond human reason as non-existent; a force that seeks to bind all existence within the hollow skull of man.

That force is called Amalek.

The Jewish People stand immutably in opposition to that idea. The Jewish People are eternal witnesses that existence is not limited by Man's understanding of it.

The Jewish People put action before words. We are the people who said at Sinai *'Na'aseh V'nishma'* — *"We will do and we will hear."*

We commit ourselves to Hashem before we understand or even attempt to understand the meaning of His Torah. What other option could possibly be intellectually honest? When Moshe's hands were raised above his head the Jewish People were triumphant. When action — hands — precede the head — intellect — then the Jewish People are triumphant in their battle against the force of Amalek. But when the head is above the hands, Amalek dominates.

(Adapted from 'Worldmask' by Rabbi Akiva Tatz)

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