

*The
"Daf HaShavua"
Parsha Paper
Beshalach, 5781*



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In Memory of Shalom Tzvi ben Husni, Malkiel ben ImaShalom, Esther bat Sara, Penina bat Devorah, Aharon ben Esther, Moshe HaCohen Ben Burcho



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"SPLIT IN HALF"

The world's greatest superpower lay in ruins. The elite country of Egypt was ravaged and devastated. Even more pronounced was the decimation of Egyptian pride. The infallible became vulnerable; the unconquerable was vanquished. Still the redemption was not complete. The burgeoning nation of Klal Yisroel proudly marched out of Egypt unhindered by their former captors into the vast and desolate desert. It didn't take long before the stubborn Egyptians led by Pharaoh himself took up the final pursuit, cornering the hapless nation at the banks of the raging sea.

In one of the greatest candid displays of Divine Might this world has ever witnessed the sea split. But the sea bed isn't flat and the terrain beneath the surface is treacherous, deep, and vast. Not only did the sea split but it leveled evenly so that the Jews hardly had to descend at all. The entire nation walked across the dry river bank of the sea as if it were a botanical garden, with beautiful sights and gifts along the way.

As soon as the Egyptians pursued, the waves crashed down upon them. At the same time, the smooth pathway gave way from underneath them and the ground boiled, scalding their chariots, and thrusting them into the bowels of the sea. Final retribution had been served and mighty Egypt was no longer. In the vernacular of Chazal this epic event is referred to as "K'rias Yam Suf". It is an event that is very much at the fore of our national consciousness and we refer to it constantly by that well-known title. However, it is difficult to understand why that is the title of choice. No where in any of the twenty-four Sifrei Tanach (Holy Scriptures) do we ever find that terminology used. When the Torah speaks of the event it states, "*Vayibuku hamayim* – And the waters split.[2]" In our daily morning prayers we utilize this terminology too[3]. In Tehillim[4], King David wrote, "*L'gozer Yam Suf ligzarim* – To Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds into parts." But the miracle is never referred to as a 'k'riah'[5].

Why did 'K'rias Yam Suf', which literally means 'the ripping of the sea' become the de-facto title for that seminal event? Rabbi Asher Weiss shlita relates the following story[6]: A father was once sitting with his son on the night of the Seder discussing the fifty miracles that occurred during the splitting of the sea[7]. At one point the son asked his father, "Why are we so amazed by the splitting of the sea? Isn't it obvious that the G-d Who created the world could split the sea?"

The father replied with a parable: *An expert sculpture once sculpted a horse that was so lifelike, no one could tell that it was not real. The sculptor erected his work where everyone could admire it. But, to his chagrin, no one even stopped to look at it. Days passed and the sculptor became increasingly dejected. Finally he stopped a passerby and asked him, "Why aren't you interested in seeing this work of art?" The man shrugged, "I've seen many horses. What's so good about that one?" The sculptor was confused, "But that is a sculpted horse." The man stopped and stared at the horse for a few moments, "Why that's incredible! Do you know why no one has stopped to marvel at it? Because you did such an impeccable job in creating it that people assume it's real, so they don't even bother to look at it." The sculptor began rebuking himself for creating such a perfect model. If only he wouldn't have made it*

so perfect, at least people would realize his work. A wise friend heard of his situation and gave him an idea. “Cut your horse in half, and then place it outside. A horse that looks lifelike and is split in half is sure to attract everyone’s attention.” The father explained to his son, “You see if we were all on a proper spiritual level we would be inspired by the very existence of the sea, and by the miracles of nature that are omnipresent every day of our lives. We would be awestruck by the augustness of a sunrise and sunset, and by the miracles of our daily bodily functioning. We would not require miracles or unusual events to make us recognize G-d’s Hand. But because we are so accustomed to the ‘hidden miracles’ within nature we are no longer inspired by them and we take them for granted. So G-d performs miracles – and we recount those miracles – to remind us that every aspect of our lives is a miracle.

When we recount the epic miracle of the splitting of the sea it reminds us that the very existence of the sea, and all of its underwater landscape, and the marine life contained in it, is all miraculous. This is the meaning of the verse[8], “The earth will be filled with knowledge of G-d as water covering the seabed.” When the final redemption occurs, all will see G-d’s Hand clearly in every aspect of nature and world events. At that point we will no longer require the splitting of the sea to realize the wonders of the sea. We will be sufficiently inspired by the sea itself.

The truth is that in our daily lives we fail to appreciate the bounty of blessing we are granted. Very often it takes some sort of ‘K’rias Yam Suf’, i.e. some sort of ‘tearing’ us out of our ‘banal stupor’ to realize just how fortunate we are. Not every ‘K’rias Yam Suf’ in this sense is pleasant. Sometimes it takes illness before we appreciate our health, and the loss of someone/something before we appreciate just how much that person means to us. We would be wise to appreciate our families, homes, community, being a Torah Jew, heat in our homes during a frigid evening, food to eat, friends, knowledge to understand, etc. Perhaps when we refer to the event that occurred at the sea we title it – not based on the actual miracle that transpired – but more importantly by the inner transformation that occurred within our hearts and souls. As the prophet exhorts us, “Tear your hearts and not your clothes.”

At the sea, the nation witnessed an incredible revelation that eradicated the last vestiges of faithlessness left within them. “Israel saw the great Hand that G-d inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered G-d, and they had faith in G-d and in Moshe, His servant.[9]” At that point their hearts were filled with utter and complete devotion and obedience to the Word of G-d. It was when they reached that level of inner connection that they arose and sang the Song of the Sea. It was a heartfelt song that emanated from heartfelt devotion. Whenever we refer to that event we refer to that inner transformation, the ‘Tearing – of their hearts and souls – at the Sea of the Reeds’. That spiritual mental revolution is something we must connect with every day of our lives. It reminds us to never take life for granted. We must always see the Hand of G-d and never allow the triteness of life to obscure the vivacious beauty that the world exudes.

On the words in Psalms, “The sea saw and fled”, the Medrash wonders, “What did the sea see that caused it to flee?” The Medrash answers, “It saw the coffin of Yosef.” Yosef was able to maintain his feeling of connection with G-d even in the spiritual doldrums of Egypt. He was a living daily ‘splitting of the sea’, for he did not allow the banality of life to mask the Hand of G-d. Therefore, when the sea saw the remains of Yosef it followed the example he lived, and split. The holiday of Tu B’Shtat marks the beginning of the sap’s ascension through the tree in anticipation of the coming of spring. Spring may still be many weeks away but we begin to celebrate it now.

If we truly want to appreciate the beauty of spring, we have to ponder it now when the trees are still bare, and the buds have not even begun to sprout. After a snowfall, before pulling out a shovel one should take a moment to marvel at the breathtaking beauty of a world blanketed by snow and G-d’s preparation for the resurgence that is to come. Tu B’shtat is a day to ponder and appreciate the beauty of life and the world around us. Part of the reason we recount the Song of the Sea each morning is to remind us to appreciate every aspect of life, not just when miracles occur[10]. Tu B’Shtat is inextricably bound to this same idea. The wonders that are contained in every fruit and the very process of its growth are miracles unto themselves. The not-too-distant holiday of Purim and the month of Adar are celebrations of life. The preceding holiday of Tu B’shtat is the celebration of G-d’s World and our ability to enjoy its treasures.

“Filled with knowledge of G-d as water covering the seabed.” “Israel saw the great Hand and they had faith in G-d”

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memory of:**

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Frecha
Yishmael ben Avraham
Aharon ben Ester**

Rabbi Dani Staum

[1] Based on lecture delivered at KNH on Shabbos Kodesh Beshalach 5770[2] 14:21[3] In ‘Ezras’ just prior to Shemone Esrei we state, “V’Yam Suf bakata”[4] 136:13[5] The word K’riah means to tear. If, G-d forbid, one is in mourning for one of his seven closest relative he must perform ‘k’riah’, i.e. tear his clothes not on the seam. Note: Although I propose a possible explanation, it is more of a homiletical approach. From a grammatical perspective it is a very potent question which begs explanation.[6] Introduction of Minchas Asher on Maseches Pesachim[7] See Me’am Loez[8] Yeshaya 11:9[9] 14:31 [10] As the Ramban explains at the end of parshas Bo, “From the open miracles one can recognize the hidden (daily) miracles.”



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