



Parashat Beshalach 5771 - #171

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On the Parashah... Where did the splitting of the Red Sea occur?

[Commentary on Haggadah of Pesach]

It is difficult to specify the site of the sea, where Mt. Sinai is, and exactly where the children of Israel traveled. The beginning of the journey was certainly in the land of Goshen and the end was in Yericho. In any event, they traveled along the length of the shore of the sea. "G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near, for G-d said, 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt' (Shemot 13:17). The path of the shore of the sea, from Suez to Gaza, had many traps, like "Migdol" and "Ba'al Tzefon" (ibid. 14:2). The Nation of Israel would clash with the enemies, and they therefore traveled on an unusual path. Thus, Pharaoh said: "They are imprisoned in the land and the Wilderness has locked them in." Regarding the location of this sea, there are two opinions among researchers. The southern school of thought claims that the sea is what is called "The Red Sea" in Greek and other European languages, because it has plants and grasses which give it this shade or because it is close to the land of Edom (which also means "red"). This sea is an offshoot of the Indian Ocean, which is narrow and long and has two gulfs which fork at the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Eilat (Aqaba), and encloses half of the Sinai Peninsula. According to this interpretation, we can understand the verse which deals with the borders of the Land: "I will set your border from the 'Red Sea' to the Sea of the Philistines," which is the western border, "and from the Wilderness to the River," referring to the Euphrates River, which is the eastern border. This interpretation is also implied by a verse in the Book of Melachim: "And King Shlomo made a ship in Etzyon Gever, which is beside Eilat, on the shore of the 'Red Sea' in the land of Edom" (Melachim 1 9:26). This is also the opinion of Josephus. Accordingly, the splitting of the Sea occurred in the area of the large, bitter seas which are a northern continuation of the same south-western offshoot, and they were connected until the Suez during that period. Our Rabbis also mention that the Sea was connected to the Nile River (Shemot Rabbah 1:21). Pharaoh dug, Darius completed it, the Arabs filled it in, and Laspas of France opened it again. There are various difficulties with this opinion: There is no eastern wind there all night, the central Sinai is not tranquil, and there are no reeds – since the waters are bitter – which would justify the name "Yam Suf" which literally means the "Sea of Reeds."

The northern school of thought suggests a different possibility. They claim that the spot was on one of the shallow lagoons on the Shore of the Mediterranean Sea, at a place called the Sirbonic Lake, which has a length of seventy-eight kilometers and a width of twenty kilometers. The two dry "tongues" stretch out on two sides in the form of a bow with a two kilometer width and enter into the Mediterranean. The locust were hurled there by a western wind, "And hurled it towards the 'Red Sea'" (Shemot 10:19). This spot is located across from fortresses, like Migdol and Ba'al Tzefon; and it is also close to the land of Goshen, because the Children of Israel – which was a Nation with elderly, women and children – certainly could not travel too far. They would not have been able to travel more than five kilometers a day. According to this opinion, the Sea did not split from one side to the other, but returned to its side. Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra wrote: "Do not think that since the Torah says "into the sea" that they went half-way into the Sea. Even if they went only half a Persian mile (two kilometers) into the Sea, it is called "into the Sea" (Shemot 14:22). The Chizkuni also wrote that the Children of Israel did not pass through the entire width of the Sea, but only went into a part in which Pharaoh would follow after them and drown, adding that they went into a "half-circle" (ibid.). The Rambam agreed that they went into a part, "similar to a circular bow," and a picture of this bow is included in his commentary to Mishnah Avot (5:4). The Gemara in Arachin (15a) also says: "Israel was rebelling at that moment and saying: Just as we go on this side, the Egyptians will go on the other side. The Tosafot asked, how could Israel of that generation be of such little faith to think that Hashem would perform a miracle like that, bringing them to the Land of Israel, while leaving the Egyptians to attack them again? They answered that Israel did not pass through the entire width of the Sea, but through one strip along the length of the Sea, like a circular threshing floor, and a picture appears there (ibid.).

It is obvious that we should not conclude from all of this discussion that no miracle occurred, and what happened was simply a low tide followed by a high tide. Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra already harshly responded to Chavi Ha-Balchi (a heretic during the days of Rav Sa'adia Gaon), whom he reproached by referring to him as Chavi Ha-Calbi (he transposed the letters of his name to read "Chavi, the dog"): "May the bones of Chavi Ha-Calbi be ground up, who said that Moshe knew the time that the Sea contracted, when it receded, and the time that the Sea expanded, when it rose, in its continual movement, and that he passed through it when the water contracted, as is its usual way; and Pharaoh did not know the pattern of the Sea and therefore drown. These are insane words, since the contraction of the sea does not dry out a place and leave walls of water from its right and left, since everything is dry. Furthermore, it does not make sense that the end of the contraction and the beginning of its expansion would be only a few hours. In addition, Israel would not have finished passing through before Pharaoh and his army drowned" (Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra to Shemot 14:27). It is also difficult to explain that the Egyptian did not know this information when they had temples which faced the Sea. This was certainly an unnatural miracle, a miracle of miracles! It is interesting that our Sages also describe how the Great Sea (according to this, the Mediterranean) burst into the Red Sea: "Deep waters covered them" (Shemot 5:5). Are there deep waters there? Is it not hard, dry ground? Why then does the Torah say "Deep waters covered them"? The lower depth rose to the higher depth and the waters fought with them with all types of afflictions." "They descended in the depths" (ibid.). Are there depths there? Is it not hard, dry ground? This teaches that the Great Sea burst into it and the waters

fought with them with all types of afflictions. It therefore says "They descended in the depths" (Mechilta Beshalach, Mesechta De-Shirata, parashah 5).

Rav Aviner on... Ten Commandments of the Babysitter

1. Don't be even a minute late. If you are concerned about being late, than plan to arrive a little early.
2. If you are late, apologize.
3. Don't take the kids out without prior permission. If you do have permission to take them to a certain place, don't take them elsewhere.
4. Give the children a lot to drink. Don't force them, but suggest, and make sure they also eat.
5. Don't neglect the children. If their clothing or diapers are wet, change them as quickly as possible.
6. Don't let the children become over-tired. Allow them to rest sufficiently.
7. Don't let the children cry. Hug them, kiss them, comfort them.
8. Don't enter closed rooms in the house if you were not given permission.
9. Don't read books if you were not given permission, and in general, don't use anything without permission.
10. If the mother points something out, don't respond with chutzpa or yell, rather humbly and politely listen.

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #26

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

We have already learned that one of the things that makes Ashrei so special and important is that it's in Alef-Bet order. But as everyone knows, none of the verses begins with the letter Nun. The Gemara in Berachot says that this is because Nun is the letter of "Nefilah" – falling - and David Ha-Melech didn't want to begin one of his verses with this idea. Even though there are other words that start with Nun, there is this very strong connection to this idea in the next verse and David wanted to stay away from it. In the verse which begins with Samech, we say "Hashem supports all those who have fallen and strengthens those who are bent." But what did David Ha-Melech really accomplish by this self censorship?

The truth is he accomplished a lot. He wanted to say things in the nicest possible way. He didn't want to focus on the Jewish People falling, which is negative and can cause people to give up. He wanted to focus on the fact that Hashem lifts up those who are fallen. This is a beautiful description of Hashem and gives us hope. Hashem will make everything wonderful for Klal Yisrael. David's focus on the nicest way of saying things teaches us an important lesson that we should also always find the nicest way.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Shaking a Woman's Hand

Question: In the text message responsa from last week, on the question: If a secular woman puts out her hand, can I shake it? Ha-Rav answered: No. Politely apologize: Forgive me, this is saved for my wife. I once heard that Rav Moshe Feinstein when facing the same situation would shake her hand. The reasoning being that not shaking a woman's hand is a Rabbinic prohibition but embarrassing a person is a Torah prohibition. Was this in fact the case and if not, what about applying the above reasoning and allowing the handshake?

Answer: Rav Feinstein did mention this idea in his Teshuvot (Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-Ezer 1:56) but concluded that it is difficult to rely on it. The Beit Yosef (Yoreh Deah 195) mentioned that according to the Rambam it is a Torah prohibition and one should be killed rather than transgress it! We should not embarrass anyone, but here she is causing herself embarrassment. Ha-Rav Ovadia Yosef declined to shake hands with Prime Minister Golda Meir when he received the Israel Prize. And Rav Mordechai Eliyahu did not shake hands with the Queen of England. In both cases, apologies were issued to the Rabbis that very night for putting them in that situation.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

When to Begin Education

It once happened that a father turned to an educator and asked: At what age should we begin to educate our baby?

The educator asked: How old is your son?

The joyous father looked at his watch and said: 10 minutes!

The educator responded: You're too late...

Perfecting character traits is, in fact, a long process. Parents have to work on their character traits long before the baby is born in order to be ready. They have at least nine months before the birth. In general, in order to have a happy marriage, a couple must first learn about perfecting their character traits in the "School of Friendship," with members of their own gender.

The parents' character traits influence the child not only through education but also flow into the soul the baby is given. Furthermore, the holiness of the parents at the time of conception influences the holiness of the soul of the fetus. "And you will make yourself holy and you will be holy" (Vayikra 11:44).

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