

Splitting the Sea: Take Two

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The Jewish people's freedom from Pharaoh reaches near finality at the moment of the splitting of the Yam Suf. The image is a familiar one to us - the people escape through the opening of the river while Pharaoh's men drown in the water. Through this miracle, the Jewish people are finally free from Egypt's rule over them. The Jews recognize God's power and they fear and believe in Him and in Moshe, thus reaffirming this event to be a pivotal one in Jewish history (שמות יד:לא).

Given the importance of this event, it is not surprising that we find other strikingly similar episodes in our history. Referencing imagery or actions with powerful associations is a common technique in Tanach. However, it's surprising to note just how soon after the initial splitting of the sea that this episode reappears. Just one generation later, when Yehoshua leads the Jewish people over the Yarden into Israel for the first time, the waters of the Yarden split.

Moshe extended his hand over the sea and God drove back the sea with a strong east wind for the entire night, which turned the sea into dry land and the water divided.

Shemot 14:21

The waters which came down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan; and those that came down toward the sea of Arava, the salt sea, failed, and were cut off, and the people passed over opposite Jericho

Yehoshua 3:16

ויט משה את ידו על הים ויולך ה' את הים
ברוח קדים עזה כל הלילה וישם את הים
לחרבה ויבקעו המים:
שמות פרק יד פסוק כא

ויעמדו המים הירדים מלמעלה קמו נד אחד
הרחק מאד [באדם] מאדם העיר אשר מצד
צרתן והירדים על ים הערבה ים המלח תמו
נכרתו והעם עברו נגד יריחו:
יהושע פרק ג פסוק טז

Why did this miracle happen at that time to Yehoshua? Further, it doesn't even seem that it was necessary this time, as they were not running away from an enemy with no place else to go but into the water. In fact, they were not being pressured in any way! Why did they not just cross the sea in a location that was on dry land? Why did God need to split a sea for them in order to enter Israel? There are so many times in Tanach where armies cross back and forth over the border of Israel, in that similar location, but there is no splitting of the sea required. Why is this miracle, that is so fundamental to our escape from and victory over Egypt, used again so soon, at a time when it is seemingly unnecessary?

To begin to formulate a response to this question, recall that this is not the only story of Sefer Yehoshua that is reminiscent of the experiences of Moshe and that first generation.

In the second perek of Sefer Yehoshua, Yehoshua sends meraglim into Israel to spy before entering the land - *this* is actually our first introduction to a series of episodes and images that occur to both Moshe and Yehoshua (במדבר יג:ג, יהושע ב:א). Soon after, in the third and fourth perekim of Sefer Yehoshua, Yehoshua imitates the travel configuration of the camp that Moshe initiated, leading with the kohanim and the Aron in front of the people (במדבר יל:ג, יהושע ג:ו). Next is our episode of the splitting of the Yarden. After that, Yehoshua builds a monument of stones on the dry land of the Yarden and then another in Gilgal, just like the monument of stones built by Moshe on the other side of the Yarden in the land of Moav.⁵⁷ Immediately after entering Israel, Yehoshua instigates a mass brit mila for the Jewish people, just like Moshe did after leaving Mitzrayim (יהושע ה:ג-ה). Similarly, Yehoshua leads a public celebration of the holiday of Pesach, an obvious reminder of the original Pesach celebration that took place under Moshe's leadership.

The next episode for Yehoshua is a revelation from God, where he is visited by an angel. This meeting appears to have striking parallels to the meeting of Moshe and Hashem at the burning bush. Both Moshe and Yehoshua are told to remove their shoes because the ground that they are standing upon is holy and then given instruction of what to do (יהושע ה:טו, שמות ג:ה).

Later in the sefer, in the second battle against the people of Ai, we are once again reminded of Moshe and his tactics. In Moshe's famous battle against Amalek, Moshe stands on a mountain holding up his hands in the air. As long as his hands are raised, the Jewish people are successful (שמות יז:יא-יב). In the second battle against Ai, Yehoshua's strategy also involves raising his hands to effect change (in this case, it was a call for the Jewish soldiers waiting in ambush to enter the battle). Just like Moshe did not put his hands down until the war was won, so too, Yehoshua was told to keep his hand up in the air (יהושע ח:יח, כו). Finally, in Yehoshua's battle against those attacking Givon, Hashem sends hail on the enemy, clearly drawing on our recollection of the plague of hail in Egypt (יהושע י:יא, שמות ט:כג).

With these episodes as backdrop, we should revisit our original question. Now the question is not specifically why the splitting of the sea occurs again, but rather why do so many events that first happened during Moshe's leadership recur again one generation later with Yehoshua?

To begin to answer this question, it's important to understand Yehoshua's role; it is not simply to lead the Jewish people, but to continue the mantle of leadership and further the agenda established by his mentor, Moshe. Moshe died prior to the Jews entering Israel; therefore, this becomes the main responsibility of Yehoshua. We see this continuity of leadership highlighted in the language of the pesukim. Prior to the Jews' mistakes of the middle of Sefer Bemidbar, the pesukim culminate with the following:

And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moshe | **ויהי בנסע הארץ ויאמר משה קומה ה'**

⁵⁷ This parallel is highlighted in the Gemara: גמרא סוטה לה: שלשה מיני אבנים היו; אחד שהקים משה בארץ מואב, שנאמר: (דברים א) בעבר הירדן בארץ מואב הואיל משה באר וגו', ולהלן הוא אומר: (דברים כז) וכתבת עליהן את כל דברי התורה הזאת וגו', ואתיא באר באר; ואחד שהקים יהושע בתוך הירדן, שנאמר: (יהושע ד) ושתים עשרה אבנים הקים יהושע בתוך הירדן; ואחד שהקים בגלגל, שנאמר: (יהושע ד) ואת שתים עשרה האבנים האלה אשר לקחו וגו'.

said, rise up, Hashem, and let our enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you.

Bemidbar 10:35

ויפצו איביך וינסו משנאיך מפניך:
במדבר פרק י פסוק לה

However, immediately after this pasuk, the Jewish people do and say things that prevent that generation from being worthy of entering the land of Israel.⁵⁸ Amazingly, one generation later, when the time finally arrives for the people to enter the land and Yehoshua is ready to lead them in, similar words are used to describe the travel:

And it came to pass, when the people removed from the tents, to pass over the Yarden, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people.

Yehoshua 3:14

ויהי בנסע העם מאהליהם לעבר את הירדן
והכהנים נשאי הארון הברית לפני העם:
יהושע פרק ג פסוק יד

This highlights the continuity of nationalistic agendas that began with Moshe and continued with Yehoshua. Further, once bringing the Jews into Israel, Yehoshua performs all the same tasks that God has originally commanded Moshe.

As God commanded Moshe his servant, so did Moshe command Yehoshua, and so did Yehoshua; he left nothing undone of all that God had commanded Moshe.

Yehoshua 11:15

כאשר צוה ה' את משה עבדו כן צוה משה את יהושע וכן עשה יהושע לא הסיר דבר מכל אשר צוה ה' את משה:
יהושע פרק יא פסוק טו

This refers to his political leadership, which included giving out the nachalot and dealing with the tribes of Reuven, Gad and Menashe to ensure they comply with the deal that Moshe made with them (במדבר לב:כ-כב, יהושע א:יג-יח, יג:ח). Similarly, Yehoshua was to continue Moshe's role as chief teacher/educator, teaching the Torah and brachot and klalot in Israel, information already taught by Moshe to the Jewish people (יהושע ח:לד-לה). Yehoshua establishes a new covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people in Israel, even though one was already formed between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael by Moshe (יהושע כד:כד-כו) (שמות יט:כ, כד:ד-ה).

With this as backdrop, and understanding Yehoshua's role as Moshe's successor, it's likely that Yehoshua was frightful of the challenge of the responsibilities that lay ahead of him. In fact, the Chumash and the Navi bespeak this fear by highlighting each time somebody tries to calm him with a blessing of strength - "חזק ואמץ".

Moshe tells him to calm down in Devarim (דברים לא:ז). Hashem tells Moshe in Devarim to remind Yehoshua to be strong (דברים לא:כג). In fact, there are three distinct points near the very beginning of Sefer Yehoshua where Hashem tells him to calm down and be strong (יהושע א:ו-ז). Further, in Devarim, Moshe tells the Jews to say חזק to Yehoshua (דברים א:לה) and then again in

⁵⁸ Bemidbar perek 11 tells the stories of the מתאוננים (complainers) and the אספסופי (complainers for meat). Bemidbar perek 13-14 tells the story of the Meraglim. Bemidbar perek 16-17 tells the story of the Korach rebellion. Bemidbar perek 20 tells the story of מריבה מי where the Jews complain for water. In Bemidbar perek 21, the Jews complain for food and water again. Bemidbar perek 25 tells the story of the sin of בעל פעור when the Jews commit adultery with the women of Moav.

the first perek of Sefer Yehoshua, Reuven, Gad and half of the tribe of Menashe tell Yehoshua (יהושע א:יח) חזק ואמץ. In sum, Yehoshua is told to be strong seven times! Only a new leader suffering from the fear of his new role could be so apprehensive as to require the message of strength from so many others.

It is not solely Yehoshua's fears and insecurities, though, that manifest themselves, but the same is true for the Jewish people. Simply, they are afraid of not having a leader as able as Moshe. How can anybody aptly serve in Moshe's role!? When Yehoshua speaks to Reuven, Gad and half of shevet Menashe to remind them of their promise to lead the Jewish people in battle, they answer him that they will listen to him **on condition** that he proves to them that God is with him like God was with Moshe.⁵⁹

And they answered Yehoshua, saying, All that you commanded us we will do, and wherever you send us, we will go. As we listened to Moshe in all things, so we will listen to you, only if Hashem is with you as He was with Moshe.

Yehoshua 1:16-17

ויענו את יהושע לאמר כל אשר צויתנו נעשה ואל כל אשר תשלחנו נלך: ככל אשר שמענו אל משה כן נשמע אליך רק יהיה ה' אלהיך עמך כאשר היה עם משה:
יהושע א:טז-יז

Of course, this creates a spiral effect, adding even more pressure on Yehoshua to prove himself worthy to follow in Moshe's footsteps as the leader with God's support. With this backdrop, we can appreciate specifically why God gives Yehoshua similar miracles to those that are given to Moshe - to affirm Yehoshua's leadership in the eyes of the Jewish people and Yehoshua himself. For that matter, from this perspective, we can clearly understand why Yehoshua mimics the miracles and actions of Moshe (to add to the authority of his leadership).

It is true that Yehoshua didn't need the sea to split - no one was chasing them and there were dry sections they could have crossed. But this, as with the other miracles, serves a completely different role: to validate Yehoshua as the successor of Moshe in the eyes of God and the people. Just as God split the sea for Moshe, reaffirming God to be the savior of the Jewish people and revalidating Moshe as their leader, so too, here it confirms God's continued providence over His people and validates Yehoshua as their leader. This is evident in the pesukim, as before the sea splits Hashem tells Yehoshua:

And God said to Yehoshua, This day I will begin to magnify you in the eyes of the Jewish people, that they may know that, as I was with Moshe, so I will be with you.

Yehoshua 3:7

ויאמר ה' אל יהושע היום הזה אחל גדלך בעיני כל ישראל אשר ידעון כי כאשר הייתי עם משה אהיה עמך:
יהושע פרק ג פסוק ז

And then, after the sea is split, this proves true:

On that day, God magnified Yehoshua in the eyes | ביום ההוא גדל ה' את יהושע בעיני כל ישראל ויראו

⁵⁹ Mesudat David reads this pasuk as a conditional statement. Only if G-d is with you, will we listen to you; if not, we will not listen to you. מצודת דוד שם א:יז רק וכו' - ר"ל לא נשמע אליך רק כשיהיה ה' עמך וכו' אבל לא בזולת זה.

of all the Jewish people, and they feared him, as they feared Moshe, all the days of his life.

Yehoshua 4:14

אתו כאשר יראו את משה כל ימי חייו:
יהושע פרק ד פסוק יד

On this first pasuk, Radak observes that by specifically copying the miracle first performed by Moshe, the Jewish people realize that God was with Yehoshua just as He was with Moshe:

Just like I split the sea before Moshe, so too I will split the sea before you, because with this they will know that just like I was with Moshe, so too I am with you.

Radak 3:7

כי כאשר הייתי עם משה - כמו שבקעתי הים לפני משה כן אבקע הירדן לפניך ובזה ידעו כי כאשר הייתי עם משה אהיה עמך.
רד"ק ג:ז

This episode highlights the growth of Yehoshua's leadership, both from the people's perspective (of Yehoshua) and also in his belief in himself as the new leader. As noted earlier, Yehoshua needs an extraordinary amount of chizuk and is told "חזק ואמץ" seven times. However, years later, after some successes in conquering much of the land and acquiring confidence, Yehoshua is the one to give chizuk to others about their continued success in conquering the land.

And Yehoshua said to them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage; for God will do this to all your enemies against whom you fight.

Yehoshua 10:25

ויאמר אליהם יהושע אל תיראו ואל תחתו חזקו ואמצו כי ככה יעשה ה' לכל איביכם אשר אתם נלחמים אותם:
יהושע פרק י פסוק כה

Yehoshua doesn't just continue in Moshe's mission, but grows into his "title". He begins his tenure as the משרת משה, helper of Moshe (in fact, the sefer's opening pasuk uses this term), while Moshe is called עבד ה' twelve times in Sefer Yehoshua. However by the end of the Sefer, Yehoshua has earned the title עבד ה' as well.

And it was after these things, and Yehoshua the son of Nun died, servant of Hashem, at the age of 110.

Yehoshua 24:29

ויהי אחרי הדברים האלה וימת יהושע בן נון עבד ה' בן מאה ועשר שנים:
יהושע פרק כד פסוק כט

And Yehoshua the son of Nun died, servant of Hashem at the age of 110.

Shoftim 2:8

וימת יהושע בן נון עבד ה' בן מאה ועשר שנים:
שופטים פרק ב פסוק ח

Yehoshua's reign as the leader of the Jewish people ends up being one of the most successful in Jewish History and is remembered as such:

And Yisrael served God all the days of Yehoshua and all the days of the elders that outlived Yehoshua and who had known all the deeds of God, which He had done for Yisrael.

Yehoshua 24:31

ויעבד ישראל את ה' כל ימי יהושע וכל ימי הזקנים אשר האריכו ימים אחרי יהושע ואשר ידעו את כל מעשה ה' אשר עשה לישראל:
יהושע פרק כד פסוק לא

Establishing this leadership entailed extending Moshe's leadership beyond his own lifetime - something Yehoshua succeeded at by establishing himself as the leader to fit that role. Interestingly, the concluding episodes of Yehoshua's life also mimic Moshe's experiences. Before his death, Yehoshua gathers the Jewish people to give them a long farewell address packed with stories about the past and forebodings for the future (ספר דברים, יהושע פרקים כג-כד). After he dies, he is also buried and mourned by the entire Jewish people. So, at the end, Yehoshua is given the same respect given to Moshe. Yehoshua is proven to be the successful leader to succeed Moshe. In fact, his leadership successes validate those initial miracles. Clearly, the miracles performed at the beginning of Yehoshua's leadership to establish his validity, both to the people and to himself, were effective in helping to transform him into this great leader.