

The Seventh Day of Pesach: Seeing the Supernatural within Everyday Nature

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The messages of the first days of Pesach, those of redemption and freedom, are experienced through our Pesach seder as we transition, *me'avdut l'cheirut*, from servitude to freedom. In fact, we reference our redemption from Egypt every Friday night during Kiddush and twice a day at the end of *kriat Shema*. However, the seventh day of Pesach challenges us to incorporate the miracle of *kriat Yam Suf*, the splitting of the sea, into our daily lives. How is this done?

It is necessary to ask two more questions before understanding how to integrate the *kriat Yam Suf* experience into our daily lives.

First, the passuk describes the crossing of the *Yam Suf* in an interesting way:

And the Jewish people walked on dry land in the sea, and the water was a wall for them on their right and their left.

Shemot 14:29

ובני ישראל הלכו ביבשה בתוך הים והמים
להם חמה מימין ומשמאלם.
שמות יד:כט

Why does the passuk state that the *Bnei Yisrael* crossed the *Yam Suf* by walking “on dry land in the sea”? Wouldn't it be more correct to say (as it does prior in 14:22) that they traversed “in the water on dry land”?

Second, the Talmud teaches in the name of R. Yose that although one who recites the standard text of Hallel daily is considered a blasphemer, one who says *Pesukei De-Zimrah* daily is considered to have completed the Hallel every day:

R. Yose said: I wish to have my portion with those who conclude Hallel every day. Is this so? But doesn't Mar say that one who reads Hallel every day is considered a blasphemer! Rather he (R. Yose) was referring to the Pesukei De-Zimrah.

Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 118b

אמר רבי יוסי: יהא חלקי מגומרי
הלל בכל יום. איני? והאמר מר:
הקורא הלל בכל יום - הרי זה
מחרף ומגדף! - כי קאמרינן -
בפסוקי דזמרא.
תלמוד בבלי, שבת קיח:

What is wrong with reciting Hallel daily and in what way does the *Pesukei De-Zimrah* constitute a more permissible daily hallel?

An insight of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik²⁰ brings greater clarity to the nature of *Pesukei De-Zimrah* and its contrast to Hallel. The Rav explains that Hallel is recited to commemorate a spectacular miracle. As such, if one recites Hallel daily he is considered a blasphemer because:

*... One should not require the daily invocation of overt miracles to appreciate God's greatness. R. Yose thus says that he would like to be among those who recite Hallel (i.e. Pesukei De-Zimrah) every day, because they appreciate God's true greatness. When one truly appreciates that God of nature is His most magnificent possible manifestation on earth, he recites Pesukei De-Zimrah, reflecting the profound sense of awe that is experienced upon witnessing natural phenomena.*²¹

The purpose of *Pesukei De-Zimrah* is to thank God for all of the hidden daily miracles. For example we thank God for our livelihood and our health (e.g. "... פותח את ידך, You open Your hand" and "נותן לבהמה לחמה, He gives bread to the animal"). On the other hand, Hallel is recited in order to commemorate a supernatural occurrence.

However, there seems to be one exception to this rule: our recital of *Az Yashir* at the end of the *Pesukei De-Zimrah*, which celebrates the supernatural splitting of the sea. In fact, perhaps due to this difficulty, the Rambam²² cites the practice in some communities to recite *Az Yashir* after completing *Pesukei De-Zimrah*.²³

Perhaps one can suggest a rationale for the insertion of *Az Yashir* based upon the Talmud, which states that both man's ability to support his family and the fact that his digestive system functions well are no less of a miracle than the splitting of the sea of the Jewish People upon their redemption from Egypt:

R. Shizbi said in the name of R. Elazar b. Azariah: The livelihood of a person is as difficult as the splitting of the Sea of Reeds as it states "He gives bread to all flesh" and subsequently, "Who parted the Sea of Reeds into parts." R. Elazar b. Azariah said: [a blocked] digestive system of a person is as difficult as the day of death and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds as it states "the prisoner tries to free himself quickly" and that is followed by "[G-d Who] stirs the sea

אמר רב שיזבי משמיה דרבי אלעזר בן עזריה: קשין מזונותיו של אדם כקריעת ים סוף, דכתיב נתן לחם לכל בשר וסמיד ליה לגזר ים סוף לגזרים. אמר רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: קשין נקביו של אדם כיום המיתה וכקריעת ים סוף, שנאמר מהר צעה להפתח

²⁰ As cited in Arnold Lustiger's *Derashot HaRav: Selected Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (New Jersey: Ohr Publishing, 2003), 153-156. For an alternative explanation see Maharah in *Gevurot Hashem* in both the introduction and at the end of Hallel.

²¹ See *Meshech Chochma*, Bamidbar 26:4 for a similar approach: והנה על דרך נס בלתי סדור הטבעי אינו מן הפלא כמו מן וכיוצא אלה אבל הענין הנפלא בהטבע הוא ההזנה התמידית שזה קיום הנמצאים והרכבת הנפרדים ובדרך טבעי כל יום קבוע הזנה לאלפי אלפים בלי מספר נמצאים מזון אשר כל אחד יזון מן הטבע הוא פועל מורה על חכמה ושלמות וכבוד השי"ת למבין It is also appropriate to reference the Ramban, Shemot 13:16, for his general perspective on how Hashem only performs miracles in order for us to greater appreciate the daily miracles "עד שנאמין בכל דברינו ומקרינו שכולם נסים" "אין בהם טבע ומנהגו של עולם בין ברבים בין ביחיד"

²² *Hilkhot Tefillah* 7:13.

²³ See also *Arukh Ha-Shulchan, Orach Chaim*, 52:1 for another explanation of this practice.

and causes its waves to rage.”
Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 118a

וכתיב בתריה רגע הים ויהמו גליו.
תלמוד בבלי, פסחים קיה.

This new insight links our appreciation of the natural course of life with supernatural historical events. As such, when reciting the *Az Yashir* chapter, which is intentionally placed at the end of the *Pesukei De-Zimrah*, a feeling of appreciation for these “daily miracles” should be felt on a personal level as well. As such, the climax of the daily *Pesukei De-Zimra* is purposefully and precisely *Az Yashir*, an overt miracle of crossing the sea, thereby demonstrating the concept that all of *Pesukei De-Zimra*’s focus on the mundane and natural should be seen through the lens and appreciation of the supernatural.

Perhaps the theme of the seventh day of Pesach is of seeing the natural daily occurrences as supernatural, since in fact they both stem from the same source, our Creator and Sustainer. We begin the holiday of Pesach and experience the seder by commemorating the miracles of the ten plagues and our redemption from Egypt, but as we transition towards the end of Yom Tov and back to our everyday lives, we need to read about *kriat Yam Suf* and its focus of not only the supernatural but the natural daily miracles that we experience. With this keen sense of appreciation, one needs to be just as thankful if not more thankful for “ניסך שבכל יום עמנו” Your miracles that are with us every day.”²⁴

This is how the great Chassidic master, the *Noam Elimelech*,²⁵ explains the concept of Bnei Yisrael walking, “on dry land in the sea.” The higher level of faith draws not from the miraculous, but rather from viewing the mundane walking on “dry land,” as if we are walking through the depths of the sea!

In a similar vein, Rabbi Soloveitchik²⁶ offered a novel approach to explain the debate in the Talmud²⁷ as to whether the great joy and celebration experienced in the Beit Hamikdash throughout the *Simchat Beit HaShoeiva* on Sukkot, was brought about by the drawing of the water ceremony or by the aura of prophecy experienced at that time. The Rav explained that the two opinions are not mutually exclusive, but rather one builds upon the other. The celebration over the offering of the water expresses an appreciation of the mundane daily gifts we receive from G-d. One must appreciate those gifts, like the oxygen we breathe, the water we drink, and our bodily functions, and not take them for granted. No life can exist without simple plain water. Yet simultaneously, one must see and experience the miracle of the mundane. As the Talmud²⁸ teaches, the blue water of the sea reminds us of the sky, which ultimately reminds us of the *Kisei*

²⁴ My rebbe, Rabbi Michael Rosensweig explains this as part of the transition within the seder itself, since after the meal we say “Hallel Hagadol” which concludes with “נותן לחם לכל בשר כי לעולם חסדו” He gives bread to all flesh because His kindness is everlasting.”

²⁵ See last page of *Lekutei Shoshana*.

²⁶ As cited by Rabbi Joshua Hoffman

<http://yeshivasbrisk.freesevers.com/Netvort/shemos/beshalach/Netvort%20Beshalach%205774.htm>.

²⁷ Talmud Bavli, *Sukkah* 50b. See also Tosfot.

²⁸ Talmud Bavli, *Menachot* 43b.

HaKavod. Therefore, explains the Rav, the heightened appreciation of everyday life act as necessary first step before prophecy.²⁹

The seventh day of Pesach is the time to reflect upon all of our daily blessings: our family, friends, vocation, accomplishments, health—and to feel a level of appreciation and gratitude toward Hashem, **as if** he delivered us through the stormy sea with the Egyptians in close pursuit from behind! And it is this deep level of *hakarat hatov*, appreciation, that one should feel **daily** upon reciting the *Az Yashir* as the climax of the *Pesukei De-Zimrah*.

²⁹ See also Rashi Bamidbar 14:41 s.v. “*Petil Techelet*,” who suggests a connection between the eight strings on the *tzitzit* and the eight days from the time of the Exodus and the time the Jews sang praise at the Red Sea.