

Divine Therapy at the Reed Sea
Parshat Beshalach
Melton Gesher at Shearith Israel, January 30, 2012
JSI at Akiba Academy, January 31, 2012

A) Introduction

- 1) Shmot chapter 13, verses 17 – 18
 - a) God is aware of and deals with the psychological state of the Israelites; they are still emotionally enslaved to Egypt

B) Divine Deception

- 1) The facts on the ground
 - a) Shmot chapter 3, verses 16 – 18
 - b) Shmot chapter 4, verse 29 – chapter 5, verse 3
 - c) Shmot chapter 7, verses 14 – 16
 - d) Shmot chapter 7, verse 26
 - e) Shmot chapter 8, verse 4
 - f) Shmot chapter 8, verse 16
 - g) Shmot chapter 8, verses 21 – 24
 - h) Shmot chapter 9, verse 1
 - i) Shmot chapter 9, verse 13
 - j) Shmot chapter 10, verse 3
 - k) Shmot chapter 10, verses 7 – 11
 - l) Shmot chapter 10, verses 24 – 26
 - m) Shmot chapter 12, verses 30 – 32
- 2) Why the deception?
 - a) Accommodation to what Pharaoh to reasonably been expected to acquiescence to. Had they demanded complete freedom Pharaoh could never have agreed. It would not have been fair to demand and it would not have been fair to punish him for refusing.
 - b) In order to make an even greater mockery of Pharaoh when God hardens his heart and he sacrifices everything in order not to allow this relatively minor request.
 - c) In order to ensure that the Egyptians would be inclined to agree to the request to give up gold and silver and other valuables. They would give them if they thought that they were only loaning their things and would get them back within a few days.
 - (I) Breishit chapter 15, verses 12 – 14
 - (II) Shmot chapter 3, verses 20 – 22
 - (III) Shmot chapter 11, verses 1 – 2
 - (IV) Shmot chapter 12, verses 33 – 36
 - (V) Shmot chapter 25, verses 1 - 8
 - d) In order to engineer to stupendous event of the splitting of the Reed Sea and the death of the Egyptian soldiers within it. This is the direction that we will pursue.

C) Shmot chapter 14 - Read the whole chapter.

- 1) The engineering of the lead up to the event
 - a) Shmot chapter 14, verses 1- 2
 - (I) Make it appear as if they are not worshipping but rather trying to escape but can't find the way
 - b) Shmot chapter 14, verses 5 – 6
 - (I) The appointed time passes and the Israelites do not begin to return
 - (II) The change of heart is from satisfaction and anticipation of their return, to consternation and anger that Egypt has been duped
- 2) The purpose of the events connected to the splitting of the sea
 - a) Shmot chapter 14, verses 17 – 18
 - (I) That the Egyptians will know God
 - (II) That God will be honored

- either in the eyes of the Egyptians, thus this being a repetition of the previous point
 - or in the eyes of Israel
 - or in the eyes of the rest of the world
- (III) If these be the only purpose, then the events at the sea add nothing that we have not already found concerning the Ten Plagues. There must be some further need or rationale that we have yet to understand.
- b) A deeper understanding of these events
- (I) Shmot chapter 14, verses 1 – 4
- It is God's plan that the Egyptians pursue, but God does not reveal to Moshe how the salvation will take place.
 - The Israelites are not told that the Egyptians will be pursuing them, and are certainly not told of any plan for their salvation. They are kept completely in the dark.
 - (i) Only verse 2 was told to the Israelites, not verses 3 and 4.
 - (ii) We know this because had they known the content of verses 3 and 4, the radical reversal of emotions highlighted later in verse 8b and verse 10 would not have occurred.
 - God is setting up the psychological reactions – the radical reversal of emotions - that follow.
- (II) Shmot chapter 14, verse 8b
- They are not defiant because they know that they will be saved, but rather because they have no idea of any danger. The reader knows that their defiance is superficial, unfounded and uninternalized.
- (III) Shmot chapter 14, verses 10 – 12
- Complete psychological reversal
 - Their defiance had been completely misplaced
 - They suddenly would be happy to be slaves again
 - They greatly outnumber the Egyptians; why don't they contemplate fighting back? – Slave mentality
 - Ibn Ezra, Long Commentary on Exodus, chapter 14, verse 13
- "We may ask: how could a great camp of six hundred thousand people fear their pursuers? Why would they not fight for their lives and for their children? The answer [is that] the Egyptians were masters to Bnei Yisrael; this generation which had just left Egypt had grown up under the yoke of Egyptian slavery, and their spirit was downtrodden. How could they now fight against their masters, with Bnei Yisrael lowly and untrained in war?"
- (IV) This is actually a well known psychological phenomenon in our day, in which prisoners and captives come to identify with their captors.
- (V) Note the preponderance of two related verbs – seeing and fearing - ראה and ראייה
- Verse 10 (2x)
 - Verse 13 (4x)
 - Verses 30 - 31 (3x)
- (VI) Note as well that in this whole chapter, the references are not to the 'Egyptians' but rather to 'Egypt'. It is not about individual Egyptians but about the collective embodiment of the enslavement.

D) Conclusion

- 1) Israelite had been taken out of Egypt, but now Egypt had to be taken out of Israel
 - a) The process had begun with the Korban Pesach, but that was only a beginning and only on the religious level
- 2) The Israelites had to have their fear of the Egyptians and their sense of servitude to them, completely exorcised. They have to be healed of their psychological enslavement to Egypt.

- a) For this to happen it had to be brought to expression in the most visceral sense, and then it had to be targeted. Events had to be staged so that catharsis could ensue.
- 3) Fear /awe of Egypt is replaced by fear/awe of God, by way of the vehicle of seeing
 - a) Seeing Egypt actualizes their fear, and seeing the death of Egypt and the salvation wrought by God inspires the fear/awe of God.
- 4) This is only the beginning of a process that goes on throughout the whole 40 years in the desert
 - a) It may even be the underlying reason behind the 40 years in the desert. The proximate cause is the sin of the spies, whose underlying cause may have been 'grasshopperitis', which is just another expression of the same slave mentality.
 - b) Rambam, Guide of the Perplexed, part III, chapter

It is not in the nature of man reared in slavery, in bricks and straw and the like to wash his hands, as it were, of their dirt and suddenly rise up and fight with the progeny of Anak (the giants of Canaan). God in His wisdom contrived that they wander in the wilderness till they had become schooled in courage, since it is well known that physical hardships toughen and the converse produces faintheartedness. A new generation was born which had not been accustomed to slavery and degradation.
- E) Postscript – the Torah wishes to forever eradicate the slave mentality
 - 1) Shmot chapter 14, verse 13 –
 - a) As in this whole chapter, the Hebrew word has been מצרים and not המצרים; not these specific soldiers but the concept of Egypt
 - b) may be both an aspiration, a promise, and a commandment
 - 2) Vayikra chapter 26, verse 13
 - 3) Devarim chapter 17, verses 14 – 17
 - 4) Devarim chapter 28, verse 68
 - 5) Yeshayahu chapter 30, verses 1 – 5, 16; chapter 31, verses 1 – 3
 - 6) Tractate Shabat, page 86 – The torah cannot be properly accepted except under conditions of freedom.