

Parsha Ponders

Beshalach | February 2, 2023 | 11 Shevat 5783

Songs of praise, songs of death¹

ויבא בין מחנה מצרים ובין מחנה ישראל וגו' ולא-קרבו זה אל-זה כל-הלילה

[The Angel] went between the Egyptian camp and the Israelite camp...and they didn't get close to each other the entire night²

As the Jews were journeying towards the Reed Sea, the Egyptians were following closely in pursuit. Hashem prevented the Egyptians from reaching the Jews by sending an Angel to act as a sort of interposition between the two camps. The Torah testifies that the two camps didn't get close to each other the entire night. What's interesting to note is the expression זה אל זה, to each other, appears only twice in all of *Tanach*. One instance is here, in reference to the fact that the two camps did not get close to each other (לא קרבו זה אל זה) the whole night. The other instance appears in the *Kedusha* prayers, and is a quotation from Isaiah's description of the Angels. The verse says that the Angels call to each other (וקרא זה אל זה) and sing praises of G-d³. Is there any connection between these two instances?

In fact, there is. Our Sages tell us⁴ that at time, the Angels in heaven wanted to sing their praises to G-d. Hashem reprimanded them, by saying to them that: "My creations drowned⁵ in the sea, and you want to sing?!" Normally, the Angels would call to each other and sing, but in this instance, since it was inappropriate, they didn't. This is alluded to with the verse that says that the Egyptians and Israelites didn't come close to each other. Meaning, just like the Angels didn't call out to each other in song, so too the two camps didn't come close to each other⁶.

However, there are a couple of questions that can be asked on this teaching of our Sages. Based on what we just said, the Angels wanted to sing G-d's praises at night. However, the Egyptians didn't drown until close to daybreak⁷. Why then did G-d say to them that "my creations drowned⁸", which sounds like it happened already⁹? Furthermore, why is the Egyptians drowning not a reason to sing G-d's praise? In fact, in *Tanach* we find the opposite. There's a verse which says that with the death of the righteous, sing joyous song¹⁰. What was the problem then?

¹ Based on [Ba'al HaTurim](#) to [Exodus 14:20](#) and [Chanukas HaTorah Beshalach](#) § 71

² [Exodus loc. cit.](#)

³ [Isaiah 6:3](#)

⁴ [Megillah 10b](#). See similarly in [Shemos Rabbah 23:7](#)

⁵ See note **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

⁶ [Ba'al HaTurim loc. cit.](#), based on [Shemos Rabbah loc. cit.](#) This is also the implicit intent of [Megillah loc. cit.](#) [Chanukas HaTorah loc. cit.](#) also says this but more briefly

⁷ [Exodus 14:24](#) with [Rashi](#)

⁸ The [Chanukas HaTorah](#) quotes the *gemarra* and *Midrash* as saying טבועים, but our version of the *gemarra* says טובעים. Most manuscripts of the Talmud say this, but there happens to be two manuscripts, one known as British Library 400 and one known as Oxford 366, that say טובעים. However, there is a *Midrash* which says טובעים, namely [Midrash Aggadah](#) to [Exodus 14:20](#). Other sources that say טובעים include [Pri Chadash](#) to [Shuchan Aruch Orach Chaim 490:7](#) and [Responsa Mechtam L'Dovid Yoreh Deah](#) § 26 (by [Rav Dovid Pardo](#), who happened to write a commentary on the [Pri Chadash](#))

⁹ This is only a question according to the *gemarra*. The version that appears in [Shemos Rabbah loc. cit.](#) says "לגיונותי נתונים בצרה"

¹⁰ [Proverbs 11:10](#)

The answer is based on an interesting comment of our Sages. During the First Temple period, the Assyrian army, led by Sancheriv, was laying siege on Jerusalem. The Jews woke up one morning and found that the entire army had died overnight¹¹. What happened? There are different opinions, but one opinion is that Hashem allowed them to hear the song of praise of the Angels. Upon hearing this lofty song, they all died instantly¹². We see then that the Angel's song of praise can be deadly for humans.

Now, the Egyptians actually died through drowning. Why? This was considered measure for measure. Since they drowned the Jewish babies, they died through drowning¹³. We can suggest that the Angels had a different intent. They wanted to kill the Egyptians and were planning on doing so through song, just like in the days of Sancheriv. To this, Hashem responded that no, it's not appropriate to do so. Why? Since "my creations drowned in the sea". This isn't referring to the Egyptians. Rather, this is referring to the Jews¹⁴. Since the Egyptians drowned the Jews, it's not appropriate to kill them through "song". Rather, they should also die by drowning, measure for measure.

Good Shabbos

¹¹ See II Kings Chapter 19

¹² Sanhedrin 95b. See also Rashi to Isaiah 30:31, who says this is the explanation of that verse

¹³ Exodus 18:11, Sotah 11a, Shemos Rabbah 1:9, 22:1, Mechilta Masechta D'Vayehi § 6, Masechta D'Vayishma § 1, Midrash Tanchuma Yisro § 7, Tanchuma Yashan Yisro § 5

¹⁴ Chanukas HaTorah *loc. cit.* cites Kesubos 5a, where מעשי ידי can be a reference to the righteous (ie: the Jews). Although, I understood the *gemarra* to be saying the verse in Psalms 19:2 which says מעשה ידי is referring to the handiwork of the righteous, not that the righteous are Hashem's handiwork