

Parsha Ponders

Shevii Shel Pesach | April 18, 2025 | 20 Nissan 5785

Unshakeable faith¹

ויושע יקוק ביום ההוא את-ישראל מיד מצרים וירא ישראל את-מצרים מת על-שפת הים: וירא ישראל את-
היד הגדלה אשר עשה יקוק במצרים וייראו העם את-יקוק ויאמינו ביקוק ובמשה עבדו
Hashem saved the [nation of] Israel on that day from the hand of Egypt. Israel saw the Egyptians dead
on the seashore. Israel saw the great hand that Hashem utilized against Egypt, and the nation saw
Hashem. They believed in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant²

This verse, recited daily as part of the morning prayers, is a bit astounding. It says that after the sea split, the Egyptians went into it, and then the sea collapsed onto them, the Jews believed in Hashem and in Moshe. Our Sages ask³, that after seeing the amazing ten plagues in Egypt, they didn't believe in Hashem? Only now? What changed? Furthermore, our Sages tell us⁴ that the Jews were small in faith. They were afraid that just like they emerged unscathed from the sea on this side, so too the Egyptians emerged unscathed on the other side. It was only after they saw them dead that they believed. This lack of faith is very hard to understand.

To the contrary, we can propose that one of the greatest qualities of the Jewish people is their faith. The Jews place tremendous value in what they've received from their parents, and their parents from their parents, going all the way back to Moshe at Sinai. Anything received through tradition is treated as firsthand knowledge. One example is the Torah tells us that the Omer offering is brought "the day after Shabbos"⁵. Even though there are proofs that "Shabbos" in this context means Pesach, the main reason we know this to be the correct interpretation is our tradition. Our ancestors saw the Kohen bringing the Omer offering the day after Pesach, year after year. That fact was transmitted, generation to generation, until today. With this knowledge, we have no doubts⁶.

The renowned Rabbi Meir had a student who was so smart, that he came up with 150 reasons why a certain creepy-crawly should be considered pure⁷. Nevertheless, this creature is impure, as expressed explicitly in the Torah. If so, why is this considered ingenuity to come up with ways to purify something when at the end of the day it's not correct⁸? It could be that our Sages are expressing this very idea. Despite all of our calculations, we have nothing except our tradition.

Now, the Jewish people in Egypt had a tradition going back to Avraham that the exile in Egypt would be 400 years, as the verse says⁹. Their faith in this tradition was so strong, basically nothing could break it. It

¹ Based on Sefer Shir Ma'on, by Rav Shimon Sofer (the Chasam Sofer' grandson), printed in Toras Moshe III to Exodus 14:30,31

² Exodus loc. cit.

³ See Shemos Rabbah 23:5 and Zohar II p. 53b

⁴ Pesachim 118b; Arachin 15a

⁵ Leviticus 23:15

⁶ Mishneh Torah Hilchos Temidin U'Mussafin 7:11. Rav Shimon Sofer writes that first the Rambam presents a proof that the Omer was brought the day after Pesach, and then writes that the real proof is our tradition. However, the Rambam as we have it doesn't seem to be expressing this point this strongly

⁷ Eruvin 13b. There it says his student Sumchus could purify with 48 reasons. Then it says a student in the Yavne yeshiva could purify with 150 reasons. This latter student seemingly wasn't one of Rabbi Meir

⁸ Tosafos to Sanhedrin 17a. It's not clear why Rav Shimon Sofer doesn't cite the Tosafos on the gemarra in Eruvin he's quoting, who say the same thing

⁹ Genesis 15:13

is for this very reason that they were considered small in faith. Meaning, they didn't believe they would be taken out early, as was indeed the case. It went against their tradition.

When the Jews saw the Egyptians chasing after them, they complained to Moshe. They took this as a sign that they weren't supposed to leave yet. Even after the sea collapsed on the Egyptians, they had doubts that perhaps they had emerged from the other side unscathed. Their faith in the length of their exile was so ingrained in them that nothing could shake it. Only once they saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore did they believe. They realized that they would no longer have to serve the Egyptians.

Despite their tradition, they had to shift their perspective. It must be that since the Egyptians worked them harder than they were supposed to, the redemption came earlier. Now the verses can be read exactly as they are written. Only once the Jews saw the Egyptians dead did they believe in Hashem and in Moshe. Meaning, once they saw without a shadow of a doubt that the Egyptian exile was over, did they believe in Moshe's mission to redeem Hashem's people early.

Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach!