

Beshalach

“Then Hashem said to Moshe, “Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.”

Our *parsha* opens with the description of the Jewish people and their plight just before the Splitting of the Sea. They are boxed in at the shore, with the Egyptian army approaching. They cry out to Hashem in fear, but surprisingly, this is not well-received. Hashem admonishes Moshe, saying: *“Why do you cry out to me?”* This seems strange. After all, is it not the case that prayer and supplication are the Jew’s most formidable weapons?

The Chasam Sofer (1762-1839) cites the Shelah (1555-1630) who explains that the urgency and fear expressed by Israel’s cries were what was objectionable. After having seen so many miracles, they should have been certain that Hashem’s help was close at hand. Their terror suggested a certain lack of faith, which engendered this admonition.

However, the Chasam Sofer quotes Rashi to Song of Songs 2:14, who says that in fact, Hashem wanted to hear Israel’s cries: *“...let me hear your voice’: The Holy One, Blessed be He, desired their prayer.”* This seemingly contradicts the Shelah’s claim: Israel’s prayers were exactly what Hashem wanted to hear!

The Chasam Sofer explains that this may be compared to our own belief in the arrival of Moshiach, the Messiah. While we live with perfect faith that he will someday come and redeem us, nonetheless it is only natural that we at times cry out in our distress, imploring Hashem to send Moshiach soon. We have faith, but we also do not know when our salvation will arrive.

Similarly, the Jews at the sea understood that Hashem’s salvation was guaranteed. What they did not know was: when would it come? In the face of the approaching army, they panicked. They cried out in their terror and pain, wondering if they would be saved. In their distress, they lost perspective, and lost faith.

Hashem’s answer was: *“Ma titzak eilai?”* Not “why,” but “mah”--“what”! What should

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Israel's prayer be? Rather than panicking, they should seek some clarification--what should they do next? Advance toward the charging Egyptians? Should they try to swim? When they adopted this attitude, Hashem answered them: Advance toward the sea. With this renewed faith, Israel was saved.

“As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.”

— Albert Einstein

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman

