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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

End of Pesach

HAMELECH

Just How Hard is it to Split a Sea?

The first day of Pesach commemorates our exodus from Egypt. The seventh and final day is when we crossed the Red Sea. We were surrounded on all sides with nowhere to go and the Egyptian army was in hot pursuit. And then... Hashem split the sea and we walked straight through! On dry land!

Well-known is the saying of our Sages which draws a parallel between *zivugim* (matchmaking) and the splitting of the Red Sea. We may wonder what is the connection; on the contrary, *Kriat Yam Suf* was a separation of waters to the right and the left, whereas the idea in matchmaking is bringing together?

The Alshich explains as follows: Nothing is really "difficult" for Hashem. He made the entire world and all that is in it. He continues to run the world down to its last details. So what is meant by the phrase: Matchmaking is as *difficult* as splitting the sea?

The answer is that part of Hashem's system in running the world is based upon reward and punishment. So even though *zivugim* are preordained, nonetheless, when it comes time for people to marry, some of their misdeeds may hinder the smoothness of achieving their *bashert*.

The same was true at the Red Sea. Hashem did not take us out of Mitzrayim in order to have us perish seven days later. So what was so "hard" about the splitting of the sea? The answer is that

we had to *earn* it. Our deeds were not yet deserving of it. In Hashem's Masterplan, to give to the undeserving is a deviation of pattern and we cannot fathom the effects of such a grant.

When setting up pairs, arranging *zivugim*, Hashem has everything planned, down to the last detail of why "he" and "she" are perfectly suited for each other. At the same time, there is the concept of free will, and each time a person makes a "wrong" move, let's say from Bar/Bat Mitzvah age onwards, that changes their entire personality. They are no longer the same exact person who was announced in the *Bat Kol* which foretells *zivugim*. Obviously, this is a very deep concept. But we can see a similarity between matchmaking and the splitting of the sea in that, in respect to both of them, there was a certain "original plan" and man's misdeeds made it such that the Master Planner had to arouse the "players" to rectify their ways or to accrue merits so as to see to the fruition of the plan.

Together As One

We see that Hashem, *kivayachol*, goes "so far" to see to it that *zivugim* are a perfect match, because it is so important that they share a life together in total harmony and unity. Therefore it behooves each spouse to rise to the challenge of achieving that desired level of oneness.

Some people give up from the start and don't even try. That's very sad. They go into marriage planning to lead separate lives, only joining up



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when absolutely necessary or mutually convenient. That is certainly not how married life is meant to be.

Sea-Splitting: The Sequel

The Sea did not split only once. The Sea also split for Eliyahu Hanavi (Melachim II:2:8). And once again for Rabbi Pinchus ben Yair (Hullin 7a). On these two latter occasions, we do not find expressions describing the split as "difficult".

Explains the Chid"ah: Eliyahu Hanavi and Rabbi Pinchus ben Yair were total *tzaddikim* so the sea split for them easily. It was a "breeze". But Klal Yisroel as a whole had not yet achieved such a high level of righteousness. So we had to come on to the extra merit of Yosef Hatzaddik. *Kriat Yam Suf* was no "breeze." It took a "mighty eastern wind the entire night." (Shemot 14:21)

Not So Good

Let us suggest another approach in explaining the similar "difficulty" in sea-splitting and match-making. We know that Hashem established Rules of "Nature," i.e. regular supervision and operation of the world. We also know that, from time to time, Hashem has done "miracles," i.e. exceptions to the laws of nature.

Now, *Kriat Yam Suf* is an interesting phenomenon. No one can call it "Natural," yet, it was pre-planned, as Chazal find an allusion in the verse לאיתנו being the same letters as לתנאו to its condition. Meaning that already from the time of

the six days of Creation, the Yam Suf was meant to split upon the Jews' arrival there.

When Hashem made the oceans on the second day of Creation, what He really did was that He separated the Upper Waters from the Lower Waters. Thus, "*ki tov*" does not appear on *Yom Sheini* because the splitting of the waters symbolizes *machloket* – division of that which was meant to be one entity, and as such, it cannot be termed as "good."

Two Drops

You will notice something interesting, if you have two droplets of water upon a plastic tablecloth, for example. If you are able to slowly have them meet, you will notice that the droplets seem to yearn to join together to form one larger drop.

This can be found in water throughout the world. In fact, even when it rains, the lower water sort of "jumps up" to greet the new water coming down, "like a *chatan* goes out to greet his *kallah*!" (Ta'anit 6b) Amazing comparison! The two yearn to become one!

Therefore, the splitting of the sea was sort of a "catastrophe," because bodies of water, in essence, are meant to stay together. Pulling them apart from each other is akin to divorce! Nonetheless, that splitting of the sea was necessary as it set the stage for a more important union. It allowed Klal Yisroel to become so much closer to the *Ribono Shel Olam*, leading up to *Matan Torah* which is compared to matrimony.



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So too, as they marry and prepare to begin married life, each member of the young couple must "break away", to a certain extent, from their parents' home. They must appreciate their upbringing and continue to respect their parents. Yet, they must "let go" to certain attachments for the sake of joining together with their spouse to build a home. (See Bereishit 2:24) Husband and wife are to view their spouse as their closest relative and friend; better yet; their better half.

The Winning Argument

Here is a point to ponder. What was Rabbi Pinchus ben Yair busy with when the Ginai River split for him? Nothing short of *Pidyon Shevuyim*. He was collecting money and arranging for the ransom and release of Jewish hostages.

What did he tell the river? "Ginai, split!"

What did Ginai say back? "You are doing the will of your Creator, and so am I! You do not know for sure if you will be successful in your mission. I know that when I flow, I am doing what Hashem told me to do!"

Rabbi Pinchus was adamant, "If you do not split, I will decree that water never flow in you again!"

At that, the river split.

There was also a man there carrying wheat for Pesach. Rabbi Pinchus told the river to split for him, too, as he was doing a mitzvah. So the river split for him, too.

Then there was this Arab who had been walking with them. Rabbi Pinchus told the river to split for

him, too, so that Arabs won't say that we maltreat fellow travelers. So the river split for the Arab as well.

Rav Yosef exclaimed, "Rabbi Pinchus' merit seems to have been greater than that of Moshe and the 600,000 Jews who were at *Kriat Yam Suf*, for Rabbi Pinchus merited three splits, not just one!"

The Gemara then reconsiders and suggests that also for Rabbi Pincus, the river split just once and simply remained open for the others to pass through.

Care and Concern

We can explain that the river was telling Rabbi Pinchus that it was doing its job in keeping all of the water together and that is an expression of the will of Hashem. Rabbi Pinchus' great merit was that of *Pidyon Shevuyim* and his concern for the welfare of all of his brethren.

One Jew's concern for another Jew's welfare is an expression of the sublime unity of the Jewish nation and that outdoes the unity of water. The river could not grasp that concept so Rabbi Pinchus had to threaten it. Once the river understood that Rabbi Pinchus' argument was concerning, he split also when Rabbi Pinchus showed concern for his fellow Jew. Even the split for the Arab can be understood as concern for all Jews, because to arouse an Arab's anger can be hazardous to a large number of Jews.



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High Level

The Maharal says that the miracle of *Kriat Yam Suf* was not so much the actual splitting of the sea. It was more the fact that Klal Yisroel achieved a level that it was only appropriate for the sea to split for them.

We can explain this to mean that Klal Yisroel at the Yam Suf achieved a very high level of *achdut* – togetherness, as the verse says: Sharing common hardships breeds brotherhood. Once they achieved that *achdut*, the sea just had to split, because splitting between water is less severe than splitting between brothers.

The Best Shadchan

The Medrash teaches that a Roman noblewoman once pestered the holy *tanna* Rabbi Yosi bar Chalafta with a question. She wondered, "How long did it take Hashem to make the world?"

"Six days," he answered.

"So what has He been doing since then?" she asked.

Rabbi Yosi responded, "He's been busy making *shidduchim*!"

She was astonished, "Oh, really?! I can do that, too! I have quite a number of male and female servants. I'll match them up in no time!"

Rabbi Yosi responded, "You may think that it is easy. For HaKadosh Boruch Hu, it is as difficult as *Kriat Yam Suf*!"

Rabbi Yosi went along on his way and the woman took a thousand servants and a thousand maids.

She had them stand in two rows and she began announcing, calling each by name: George, go marry Martha! James, take Jennifer as a wife, and so on.

In just one evening, she matched up one thousand pairs! But, the next morning, she found her servants and maids all bruised and wounded. One had a broken leg and one even had his eye removed!

She said, "What happened?!"

Each one said, "This boy/girl is not for me!"

Immediately, she sent for Rabbi Yosi bar Chalafta and told him, "There is no one as great as your Almighty. Your Torah is true. You have spoken wisely."

Let's Count

We have now begun counting the Omer. Each night between Pesach and Shevuot we count. These days are especially suited for working on *achdut*, between ourselves and our fellows and in the home.

We call it *Sefirat HaOmer*. What is an "Omer"? Besides for being the amount of barley brought in the offering on the second day of Pesach, "omer" can also mean "bundle," as in Devarim (24:19). The idea of a bundle and the *melacha* of *me'amer* – bundling is joining together – *achdut*.

Also, the whole idea of counting is one of joining together. You only get to a larger number if you add to a pre-existing one. That is the whole fundamental of counting.



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The pasuk (Bamidbar 21:27) says that the “rulers” say: come, let’s count. Our Sages say that these “rulers” are those who are in control of their evil inclination. They advise us to learn from the number system. Explains the Ben Ish Chai: There are a number of things we can learn from numbers. One is, as we said, that success is achieved through unity. The more numbers you put together, the greater the sum.

Another lesson is order. When joining forces, it is important to give precedence to those who deserve it. Take, for example, the numbers 3 and 7. If you put the 3 first, you get 37. But if the 3 lets the 7 precede him, you have a much higher number 73, almost twice as much!

This alludes to how people are to join together. Those of lower stature or age should give precedence and respect to the scholarly and to seniority. If they do so, they only stand to gain.

Hair and There...

Why do we not get haircuts during Sefirat HaOmer? In addition to the reason of mourning the loss of *Talmidei* Rabbi Akiva, Ben Ish Chai suggests as follows. Each hair on a person’s head grows out of its own individual little hole. All hairs on the head grow in close proximity to each other, yet each does not infringe upon the others ability to grow. As small as that distance is, each one respects the other’s privacy and does not get too close, not daring to stunt its neighbor’s growth. (See Bava Batra 16a)

As we refrain from cutting our hair at this time of year, let us take a few moments to contemplate this great lesson which the hair is meant to teach us. This is true *achdut* – dwelling together in close proximity, yet leaving each other enough room for individuality and personal growth! The more we think about this, the better we will be in a position to rectify those character failings which led to the great catastrophe of Rabbi Akiva’s students’ demise.

How to Hang Haman

On what day was Haman hanged? On the second day of Pesach! The Medrash teaches that the Omer offering provided a great merit, leading to the hanging of Haman. There was no *Beit Hamikdash* at the time. Nonetheless, Mordechai taught his *talmidim* the *halachot* of *korban omer*, how it is to be gathered together in one fistful of the *kohein* and offered upon the *mizbei’ach*.

This lesson of togetherness was the expression of the *achdut* which Klal Yisroel achieved at the time and in that merit, Haman was hanged and his plot boomeranged upon himself, his family and his people.

So let us internalize this lesson. Let us focus upon the importance of *achdut* in Klal Yisroel. Let us begin at home, striving for a togetherness and unity where only happiness and bliss reside. As the concluding *Mishna* states: Hashem found no better receptacle for blessing other than peace.

**Shabbat Shalom and Chag Samei’ach,
 Mordechai Malka**