



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות
פרשת בשלח

SERIES 2: ISSUE 16

GOD PREPARES FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EGYPTIAN ARMY

Chapter 14

19) *The angel of God that had been going in front of the camp of Yisrael moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and stood behind them.*

20) *It came between the Egyptian camp and the camp of Yisrael, and there was the [pillar of] cloud and the darkness, and it illuminated the night; and neither [camp] came close to the other the whole night.*

21) *Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea and God moved the sea with a powerful east wind the whole night and He made the sea turn into dry land and the waters were split.*

22) *Bnei Yisrael came in the sea and the water became a wall for them to their right and to their left."*

יט) ויסע מלאך האלהים ההלך לפני מחנה ישראל וילך מאחריהם ויסע עמוד הענן מפניהם ויעמד מאחריהם.

כ) ויבא בין מחנה מצרים ובין מחנה ישראל ויהי הענן והחושך ויאר את הלילה ולא קרב זה אל זה כל הלילה.

כא) ויט משה את ידו על הים ויולך ה' את הים ברוח קדים עזה כל הלילה וישם את הים לחרבה ויבקעו המים.

כב) ויבאו בני ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה והמים להם חומה מימינם ומשמאלם.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why was it necessary for the angel of God and the pillar of cloud to change their positions and stand between the camps of Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians?
2. What do the words ויאר את הלילה mean? How can the presence of the cloud and the darkness illuminate the night?
3. Why did God bring the east wind?
4. Why does it say first that the sea turned into dry land and then that *the waters were split*? Should it not be the other way around?

God wanted the miracle of the splitting of the sea to take place at dawn because that is a time of Divine favor. He also wanted to make sure the Egyptians did not attempt to attack before the entire Jewish people had entered the sea (for if they attacked on dry land, the plan to punish the Egyptians through water, *middah keneged middah* for having thrown the Jewish male babies into the Nile, would not be fulfilled). But the Egyptians had already caught up with the Jewish camp the previous evening and were threatening to attack. So when the pillar of fire appeared in front of the camp of Yisrael, instead of the pillar of cloud disappearing as usual, it moved behind the camp together with an angel, as verse 19 clearly states.

Both were necessary to ensure that *neither [camp] came close to the other the whole night*. To explain: The cloud merged into the ordinary darkness of the night in front of the Egyptian camp and, by doing so,

it thickened and intensified it, making that area pitch black. Meanwhile, the pillar of fire, which led the Jewish people by night, lit up Bnei Yisrael's camp – and it did so with an illumination that appeared even brighter to the Egyptians because of the intense darkness in which they themselves stood. This is what verse 20 means when it says that *there was the [pillar of] cloud and the darkness, and it illuminated the night*. **[This answers Question 2.]** The Jews were thus easily visible to the Egyptians – and thus especially vulnerable to attack. However, as verse 19 points out, the angel also stood between the two camps. It was the presence of this angel that ensured that the Egyptians could not come close to Bnei Yisrael and attack them. In addition, the Jews could not move backward toward the Egyptian camp because the thick darkness that reigned there (due to the cloud's intensifying effect) – along with the fact that they themselves were standing in a brightly lit area – made it impossible for them to see. **[This answers Question 1.]**

Now, when the Jewish people were entering the water, *Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea* (verse 21). But in order to fool the Egyptians into thinking that the drying up of the waters was a natural phenomenon and not a Divine miracle, *God moved the sea with a powerful east wind the whole night*. **[This begins to answer Question 3.]**

You might say that this was counterproductive, since it could make the Jewish people also think that it was a natural phenomenon. God therefore performed several miracles:

(1) He made all the waters of the world split at the same time as He split the sea. We learn this from the fact that verse 21 states that the “waters” (in plural) *were split*, rather than saying that the “sea” was split.

(2) Even when the Jewish people were in the water up to their noses (before the sea split), God made the ground beneath them dry such that they were walking on dry land rather than on the normally muddy seabed. The Torah therefore says: *He made the sea (i.e., the floor of the sea) turn into dry land, and then the waters were split* (verse 21). Thus *Bnei Yisrael*, when they were in the sea, *came on dry land* (verse 22). **[This answers Question 4.]** The east wind would not have been able to dry up the seabed when it was covered with water.

(3) God also made sure that the waters split into two walls and withdrew the exact distance necessary to let Bnei Yisrael march through the sea, but so close to their immediate left and right that it was impossible for any Egyptians to come up along their sides and attack them before the walls crashed down and drowned them. This miraculous phenomenon of the walls could also only have been accomplished by the hand of God and not through the east wind. **[This completes the answer to Question 3.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKodosh” (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.

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