



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

A project of CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH • Parshas Beshalach 5768

In this week's *parshah* the Torah recounts the miraculous events of the *Yam Suf*. Hashem splits the sea and provides a path of escape for the Jews from their Egyptian pursuers. The sea-walls remain firm for the Jews, then come crashing down on the wicked Egyptians, finishing them off for good.

It would appear that this event should be a cause of great celebration. In fact, the Gemara (*Sanhedrin 39b*) tells us that even the angels were ecstatic, and wanted to sing a song of praise to the Almighty for this wondrous salvation. However, Hashem rejected the angels' praise, telling them, "My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you want to sing merrily?"

Despite the fact that Hashem saved His chosen people from their oppressors in this spectacular fashion, and despite the fact that the perpetrators were really a bunch of sinister thugs, the Egyptians were nevertheless the creations of Hashem. Consequently, their demise was not a cause for jubilation.

On the other hand, we find that Moshe Rabbeinu and the *B'nai Yisrael* indeed went on to sing songs of praise and joy. Immediately following the aquatic decimation of the Egyptians, the Torah records the beautiful *Az Yashir*, the hymn that joyously chronicles the suffering of the Egyptians as they sank into the abyss.

How can we square the singing of the Jews—which was initiated by Moshe—with Hashem's censure of the angels' desire to sing?

In search of an explanation, we turn to a thought from the Maharsha in *Sanhedrin*, who quotes a Mishnah in *Rosh Hashanah (4:7)* which

discusses *shacharis* and *mussaf*. The Mishnah states:

העוֹבֵר לִפְנֵי הַתֵּבָה בְּיוֹם טוֹב שֶׁל רֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, הַשֵּׁנִי מִתְקִיעַ וּבִשְׁעַת הַהֵלָל הָרִאשׁוֹן מְקַרֵּא אֶת הַהֵלֶל.

"On Rosh Hashanah, the *shofar*-blowing takes place during the recital of the 'second' *chazzan* (during *mussaf*). At other times, it is the 'first' *chazzan* (during *shacharis*) who conducts the recitation of *Hallel*."

The Mishnah seems to be telling us two relatively straightforward *halachos*:

- 1) Shofar-blowing takes place during *mussaf*, and
- 2) *Hallel* takes place during *shacharis*.

When the Mishnah discusses the shofar, obviously we must be referring to Rosh Hashanah. Yet, when the *Tanna* refers to *Hallel*, the setting is changed to 'other times.'

Why couldn't the Mishnah stick to Rosh Hashanah when discussing the second *halachah*? Based on this distinction, the Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah 32b*) deduces that *Hallel* is omitted on Rosh Hashanah, despite its being said on all of the other *Yomim Tovim* (besides for Yom Kippur).

The Gemara's explanation for *Hallel*'s omission may sound somewhat familiar: While the King of Kings sits in judgment on His Throne of Glory, and the books of life and death are open before Him, it is not appropriate to render joyous exaltation.

Once again, we are faced with an apparent contradiction. When people—even wicked people—are consigned to death, there is no

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place for joyous singing, as we see from the omission of *Hallel* on the *Yamim Noraim*. How, then, could the Jews sing upon witnessing the downfall of the *Mitzrim*?

Based on the Gemara's explanation, the Maharsha identifies two distinct types of song: *hallel* and *shirah*.

The *halachah* forbidding the recitation of *Hallel* on Rosh Hashanah indicates that Hashem discourages the *hallel* type of song when people—even wicked ones—are suffering punishment. Similarly, Hashem refused to allow the angels to sing *hallel* at the sea.

However, when the Jews sang *Az Yashir*, they were not engaging in *hallel*; rather, they were singing the *shirah* type of song.

What exactly is the difference between *hallel* and *shira*?

In elucidating the words of R' Aharon Kotler (*Mishnas Rebbe Aharon* vol. 3), R' Yeruchem Olshin explains that there are actually two distinct benefits of singing praise to Hashem. The first benefit relates to Hashem: namely, singing praise brings glory to His Name. This type of praise is referred to as *hallel*.

The second benefit of song relates to the singers themselves. While the mere experience of witnessing a miracle makes a significant impression on the spectator, the *verbal expression* of awe and amazement formulated into song substantially strengthens his *emunah*. Through song, the lessons of Hashem's great power and providence become permanently emblazoned on the spectator's soul. This type of praise is referred to as *shirah*.

When the angels desired to sing praise to Hashem as the Egyptians perished at sea, their song could only be characterized as *hallel*. No significant benefit of song would be accrued to

the angels themselves; as permanent residents of the Heavenly spheres, the strengthening of *emunah* is unnecessary for them. The only benefit of their song would have been to relate the glory of Hashem. As such, Hashem chose to forego the angels' *hallel* in light of the suffering of His creations.

However, for the *B'nai Yisrael* the encounter at the sea was a remarkable opportunity that could not be passed up. As denizens of this world, it was extremely important that the Jews take advantage of this rare chance to witness the workings of the Master of the Universe. They themselves would benefit tremendously by engaging in *shirah* and building up their personal faith in Hashem. Hashem did not want to deprive the *B'nai Yisrael* of this enormous benefit, and so He readily accepted their adulation.

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