

Parshat Beshalach 5778

In this week's Parasha the Bnei Yisrael have left Egypt and are at the Yam Suf trapped by the sea with the Egyptians chasing after them. They were trapped and afraid and Hashem saves them by splitting the sea so they could pass. The Midrash, a passage in the Zohar in Terumah (170b), relates a conversation that the Malachim have with Hashem as the Bnei Yisrael are going through the Yam Suf with the Egyptians giving chase.

The Malachim ask Hashem, "Why are You saving the Bnei Yisrael and performing miracles for them but You are destroying the Egyptians (by planning to drown them)? After all, הללו עובדי עבודה זרה, הללו עובדי עבודה זרה— these are idolaters and these are idolaters! The Jews have descended to the 49th level of Tumah and you are saving them, but not the Egyptians?"

The Midrash continues that it was indeed, so to speak, difficult for Hashem to save the Jews and to overcome this just claim of the Kateigur, the prosecuting attorney, until morning came. When morning came Hashem considered the Zchus or Avraham Avinu who got up early in the morning to fulfil the Ratzon Hashem at the Akeidah. It was at the same time in the morning that Avraham got up early to perform the Akeidah that Hashem returned the water to its place and in so doing submerging the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael were saved due to the Zchus of Avraham Avinu's alacrity in fulfilling Hashem's command.

The Meshech Chochma asks a question on this. In Egypt the Bnei Yisrael had many miracles performed for them and the Egyptians had many miracles performed against them, so why didn't the Malachim complain during the plagues about the Bnei Yisrael being saved and the Egyptians being punished? Why didn't they say to Hashem then הללו עובדי עבודה זרה, הללו עובדי עבודה זרה?

The Meshech Chochma answers that there could always have been a claim made against the Bnei Yisrael throughout the ordeal they went through in Egypt. However, the Kateigur - prosecuting attorney - had no voice in Egypt because the Bnei Yisrael were never divided in Egypt. They showed tremendous achdus and unity throughout the slavery they went through.

However, Rashi explains at the splitting of the sea the Bnei Yisrael were divided; whilst some turned to Hashem in prayer, others wanted to go back to Egypt and some wanted to fight the Egyptians. Once this in-fighting started, the prosecuting attorney was given a voice. He says to Hashem, "I understand why You didn't destroy them in Egypt because in Egypt the Bnei Yisrael were unified, so I could not say anything against them, but here at the Yam Suf the Bnei Yisrael are divided so do not deserve to be saved"

This idea that division and dispute gives greater voice to the accuser is similar to a comment of Rashi by the Dor Haflaga in Parshas Noach, who had wanted to build a tower to, so to speak, fight Hashem. Rashi highlights that their sin was that of heresy and so was more severe than the sins of the Dor Hamabul who died in the flood in the same Parsha. However, since the Dor Haflaga had a unity of purpose with love and friendship between them, their punishment of being spread across the world was less severe, showing that Hashem hates Machlokes, disputes, whilst peace among man is great.

This teaches us a very powerful idea. When we are divided, when we don't respect each other's views and when our own kavod gets in the way, then the prosecuting attorney is given a voice with the potential for disastrous consequences. However, when we engage in Machlokes Leshem Shamayim, disputes for the sake of Heaven and as a result respect each other and people's rights to have an opinion, even when we disagree, then this unity protects us from the Accusing angel.