

The Exodus – Is Our Enemies’ Defeat a Reason to Sing?

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Mainz Haggadah



The Songs of Joy – Jacques Joseph Tissot <http://bit.ly/2lsWYEU>

1. The Goal of the Splitting of the Sea – Exodus Chapter 14

(8) The LORD stiffened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he gave chase to the Israelites... (10) As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites caught sight of the Egyptians advancing upon them. Greatly frightened, the Israelites cried out to the LORD.

(11) And they said to Moses, “Was it for want of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, taking us out of Egypt? (12) Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, saying, ‘Let us be, and we will serve the Egyptians, for it is better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness?’”

(13) But Moses said to the people, “Have no fear! Stand by, and witness the deliverance which the LORD will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again. (14) The LORD will battle for you; you hold your peace!”

(15) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.... (17) And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen. (18) Let the Egyptians know that I am LORD, when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.”...(23) The Egyptians came in pursuit after them into the sea, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and horsemen. (24) At the morning watch, the LORD looked down upon the Egyptian army from a pillar of fire and cloud, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. (25) He locked the wheels of their chariots so that they moved forward with difficulty. And the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

... (30) Thus the LORD delivered Israel that day from the Egyptians. Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore of the sea. (31) And when Israel saw the wondrous power which the LORD had wielded against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD; they had faith in the LORD and His servant Moses.

2. The Response – the Song at the Sea – Chapter 15

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD. They said: I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously; Horse and driver He has hurled into the sea. (2) The LORD is my strength and might; He is become my deliverance. This is my God and I will enshrine Him; The God of my father, and I will exalt Him. (3) The LORD, the Warrior— LORD is His name! (4) Pharaoh’s chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the pick of his officers Are drowned in the Sea of Reeds. (5) The deeps covered them; They went down into the depths like a stone. (6) Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the foe! (7) In Your great triumph You break Your opponents; You send forth Your fury, it consumes them like straw... (9) The foe said, “I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall have its fill of them. I will bare my sword— My hand shall subdue them.” (10) You made Your wind blow, the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the majestic waters. (11) Who is like You, O LORD, among the **Elim**; Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in splendor, working wonders! (12) You put out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them. (13) In Your love You lead the people You redeemed; In Your strength You guide them to Your holy abode. (14) The peoples hear, they tremble... All the dwellers in Canaan are aghast. (16) Terror and dread descend upon them; Through the might of Your arm they are still as stone— Till Your people cross over, O LORD, Till Your people cross whom You have ransomed. (17) You will bring them and plant them in Your own mountain,

The place You made to dwell in, O LORD, The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands established. (18) The LORD will reign for ever and ever!

3. Who are the Elim?

- a. **Rashi** – the strong ones
- b. **The Mekhilta of R. Ishmael** (ed. Horowitz-Rabin, p. 142): Who is like Thee among those who call themselves gods? Pharaoh called himself a god... Sancherib called himself a god... Nebuchadnezzar called himself a god...."
- c. **Ramban (Chavel)]**" 'ba-elim' is a reference to the angels who are called elim...
- d. **Mekhilta** (ibid., pp. 141-42) states that the Jews and the nations of the world sang "Mi Kamokha" when they saw God split the Red Sea. They then denied the worth of other gods and proclaimed the glory of Hashem.

4. Rabbi David Horowitz Az Yashir: Human Song of Victory or Divine Song of Joy

It is curious that throughout this passage Moshe Rabbenu is conspicuously absent. Why would one assume that the Jewish people, as well as members of other nations of the world, would say "Mi Kamokha," but that Moshe Rabbenu himself would not? Perhaps, the answer lies in the very distinction we began with between religious monotheism and ontological monotheism. The [non-Jews] and those Jews who had absorbed the Egyptian mindset, after the miracle of kerit'at Yam Suf, were prepared to give up recognizing the power of [idolatry] and begin worshipping only one God, Hashem. However, because this shift in loyalty was exclusively predicated upon the miracle, it did not engender a total conceptual shift....Moshe Rabbenu himself... would have no need to compare the strength of Hashem with that of other gods. They were already at the level of realizing ein od mi-levado, the ontological uniqueness of God, and did not need to say Mi Kamokha.

5. Talmud Bavli, Arachin 10a-b (with Koren/Steinsaltz translation and elucidation)

Why is the Chag [Sukkot] different, that we say [Hallel] on each day, and why on Pesach do we not say [Hallel]? All days of the Chag [Sukkot] are separate in their sacrifices; [those] of Pesach are not separate in their sacrifices. Shabbat, which has unique sacrifices, [Hallel] should be said.

6. Talmud Bavli, Megillah 10b, Sanhedrin 39b

Rabbi Yohanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written: "And the one came not near the other all the night" (Exodus 14:20)? The ministering angels wanted to sing their song, for the angels would sing songs to each other, as it states: "And they called out to each other and said" (Isaiah 6:3), but the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: The work of My hands, the Egyptians, are drowning at sea, and you wish to say songs? This indicates that God does not rejoice over the downfall of the wicked. Rabbi Elazar said... Indeed, God Himself does not rejoice over the downfall of the wicked, but He causes others to rejoice...

7. Pesikta de- Rav Kahana (ed. S. Buber, p. 189a) (cited in Beit Yosef and Taz)

"Why does Scripture give no [explicit] command to rejoice during Pesach? Because the Egyptians died during Pesach. And similarly do you find that although we read the [entire] Hallel on each of the seven days of Sukkot, on Pesach we read the entire Hallel only on the first day and on the night preceding it. Why? Because of what Shemuel would quote: "Bi-nefol oivekha al tismach" - "Do not gloat at the fall of your enemy." (Proverbs 24:17).

8. Rabbi David Horowitz, ibid "The Ethical Dimension to Ontological Monotheism"

The 19th century-commentator R. Ya'akov Ettlinger, (Arukh le-Ner), amplifies the statement in Sanhedrin by pointing out that, as Jews are commanded to follow in God's ways, (imitatio Dei; ve-halakhta bi-derakhav), Hashem's attitude must shape, and determine our own attitudes.[However, the Talmud said G-d does not rejoice but allows others to rejoice?!]" The Maharsha, who interprets this conclusion as firmly distinguishing between the angels and ourselves, seems to support this conclusion. We Jews, according to this view, need not be concerned with "ma'asei yadai tove'im ba-yam." But this, absolutely, cannot be the position of the Taz... [who cites] the phrase of "ma'asei yadai tove'im ba-yam" as the determining reason why we do not recite Hallel on the seventh day of Pesach!... Can one create a theoretical system of categories which would define and demarcate these limits? When one thanks God for delivering him for a tzara, be it personal or national, he can do it in one of two ways. He can thank Hashem in a spirit of vindictiveness, gleefully proclaiming "My God is stronger than yours!" Although it is good that he recognizes the hand of God in his deliverance and does not attribute his fortune to mikreh (chance), this attitude certainly is not the highest goal of shira. This stance vis-a- vis one's adversaries can be characterized as the ethical correlative of monolatry, the lower level of monotheism in the sense in which we defined it above. Alternatively, a person, a tribe or an entire country can praise Hashem for a victory from another perspective and a different vantage point. On this more refined level, one's thanks is not defined by the defeat of the enemy per se. . As Jews, thanking Hashem for kerit'at Yam Suf, such an approach would stress the fact that God's salvation allowed us as Jews the freedom to serve Him in purity and truth. In this vein, the Rambam, as is well-known, concludes his Mishneh Torah with the declaration that Chazal looked forward to the arrival of the Messiah for one reason: in order that the world be full of knowledge of God "as the waters cover the sea." Ideally, if a shira is even perceived to be delivered in a spirit of vindictiveness, it should not be sung.