

GLORIFICATION OF GOD AT THE SEA

ELIEZER BARANY

The Torah describes the splitting of the Sea and explains that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in order to make him pursue the Israelites, *that I may gain glory* [ve-ikkavda] *through Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord* (Ex. 14:4). This event immediately follows the series of ten plagues meted out to the Egyptians by God, implying that although the plagues were very impressive, they were not enough to instill said glory. Although the plagues affected all of the Egyptians, and the splitting of the Sea only directly affected the Egyptian troops, the aspect of "glory" was only accomplished at the splitting of the Sea.

Until this point, the ten plagues were meant for the people to know that God is the Lord, as numerous verses in Exodus point out (Ex. 7:5, 8:6, 9:29, 10:2). However, there is an additional element present by the splitting of the Sea, as God will also "gain glory;" something representing a step beyond mere recognition of His existence, which was accomplished by the plagues. *Mekhilta (Beshalach 1)* explains that glory occurs when God wreaks vengeance upon the wicked. However, it is still not clear why the plagues would not have been enough to generate such glory, as they too involved vengeance.

Later, when the two camps meet, we again find the idea of glorification, when God states, *And I will stiffen the hearts of the Egyptians so that they go in after them; and I will gain glory* [ve-ikkavda] *through Pharaoh and all his warriors, his chariots and his horsemen. Let the Egyptians know that I am Lord, when I gain glory* [be-hikkavdi] *through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen* (Ex. 14:17, 18). As opposed to earlier verses where glorification was associated with the splitting of the Sea and knowledge of God was associated with the ten plagues, here the ideas of glorification and knowing the Lord are combined; further obfuscating what the distinction is between the two.

We can propose that the ten plagues laid a foundation that needed to precede the splitting of the Sea. Classically, the plagues allow people to "Know Rabbi Eliezer Barany received ordination from Yeshiva University, and Yeshiva B'nei Torah in Far Rockaway, NY as well as an MS from Azrieli and an MA in Talmudic Studies from Revel, both of YU. As a former classroom educator he is currently helping other educators in his administrative capacity at Azrieli, residing in New York City.

the Lord,” through demonstrating God’s complete mastery over all the laws of nature; the Nile, amphibians, insects, animals, the weather, the sun, man, etc. This teaches people to “Know the Lord,” the singular supreme power over all that exists. This is in direct contradistinction to the view of the Egyptians, who believed that there were numerous gods who controlled the different aspects of the world.

Ramban to Exodus 14:11 points out that people could have reasoned that the plagues were merely performed to punish the Egyptians due to their evil ways, and not necessarily to benefit the Israelites. In fact, the verses themselves (and as Ibn Ezra explains) may point to the Israelites being affected by the first few plagues, until we find by the fourth plague, *And I will separate on that day the land of Goshen, upon which My people stand, that there will be no mixture of harmful creatures there, in order that you know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth* (Ex. 8:18). Since this is the first verse to mention that there was a difference between the Israelites and the Egyptians in respect to being affected by the plagues, it was not yet clear that a special relationship existed between the Lord and the Israelites. However, the splitting of the Sea demonstrated that the same power that controls the world, established via the ten plagues, showed a unique relationship with the Israelites. Now the ruler of the world is establishing a special connection with the Israelites in the presence of all.

When we look to other parts of Tanach, we see glory (*kavod*) used to express the special connection between God and the Israelites. The very nation itself is protected by the *ananei ha-kavod* or the “clouds of glory.” The giving of the Torah expresses the glory of God, *And the glory of the Lord [kevod-Hashem] rested on Mount Sinai* (Ex. 24:16). The glory of God resides on the Tabernacle only through the performance of His commandments, *And Moses said, "This is the thing the Lord has commanded; do [it], and the glory [kavod] of the Lord will appear to you."* (Lev. 9:6). The glory of God is not removed from the people of Israel when the Philistines attack and kill thousands of Israelites, rather it is only separated once the Ark, the covenantal demonstration between the servers and Him, is detached from the people, *And she said, "Glory [kavod] has been exiled from Israel, for the Ark of God has been taken"* (I Sam. 4:22). King David uses this term in describing the Temple service, *and in His Temple everyone speaks of His glory [kavod]* (Ps.

29:9) and in describing God's care of the Israelites, *the Lord will give grace and glory [kavod]; He will not withhold good from those who go with sincerity* (Ps. 84:12). The glory of God exists in the establishment of the Torah nation, which will enhance the world, beyond simply punishing enemies.

“Knowing” and “glory” can be now understood as interacting in both directions. One needs knowledge of God before one can glorify Him. However, by recognizing the glory of God, one actually refines their own knowledge of Him, increasing their awareness of “Knowing the Lord.” In fact, as the chapter in Exodus ends, before bursting into a song of praise, the Torah explains that the people *feared [va-yiru] the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in Moses, His servant* (Ex. 14:31). Had the verse been referring to a trembling fear, the song of praise immediately following would seem untenable. However, as the people now gained a greater appreciation of the glory of God, recognizing their unique status in the world, a sense of awe would certainly be present. In comparison, the text of this verse presents a distinction similar to “knowing” and “glory” by distinguishing between the people merely “believing” in the servitude of Moses, yet obtaining a level of “awe” exclusive for God.

We consistently see a connection between glory [*kavod*] and filling the world with following the ways of God, through the people being able to live a just and righteous life. So it would be appropriate that the height of His glory is expressed through the creation of the nation who allows such a way of life to be shared.