

Chol HaMoed and the Seventh Day of Passover 5775, 2015

Hashem: My G-d and The G-d of My Fathers

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

“...this is my G-d and I will extol Him, the G-d of my fathers and I will raise Him up” (*Sefer Shemot* 15:2)

Our phrase is from one of the most famous verses of the *Shirah*, the celebrated passage that we read on the Seventh Day of Passover. It depicts a G-d-intoxicated nation that witnessed the palpable presence of Hashem while crossing the Sea of Reeds. The halachic Midrash to *Sefer Shemot*, known as the “*Mechilta*,” notes the unique quality of this revelation to the **entire** Jewish people:

R. Eliezer says: From where can one say that [even] a maidservant saw at the sea what Isaiah and Ezekiel and all the prophets never saw? As it states [*Sefer Hoshea* 12:11]: “And I spoke to the prophets, and I increased their visions; and to the prophets I assumed likenesses.” In addition it is written: “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year in the fourth [month] on the fifth day of the month, as I was in the midst of the exile by the river Chebar - the heavens opened up, and I saw visions of G-d.” (Translation, underlining and brackets my own, *Tanach* translation passages, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The unprecedented nature of the prophetic experience at *Kriyat Yam Suf* (the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds) stands in stark contrast to the Rambam’s (1135-1204) seventh chapter of *Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah*, wherein he maintains that prophecy is always limited to a small group of people with exceptional characteristics that set them apart from the general population: “... [Prophetic visions] come only to exceedingly wise people of outstanding characteristics, whose inclinations never lead them to earthly matters but who always

conquer their inclinations, and who are of correct temperaments.” Then, too, this highly circumscribed class of individuals obtains the ability to receive prophecy through arduous philosophical and theological speculation, and through assiduous study of esoteric Torah literature. Moreover, they must stay totally focused upon the pursuit of that which is holy and pure. Given this approach, how are we to understand what took place at the Sea of Reeds?

Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein (1860-1941), in his masterful Torah commentary entitled, *Torah Temimah*, explained the *Mechilta*’s statement of the universal prophecy at the *Yam Suf* as a one-time and singular exception to the Rambam’s general rules of prophecy:

[This *Midrash* is actually] very straightforward. This is because they [the Prophets] saw Him, so to speak, solely in a vision, whereas on the Sea [of Reeds] they saw Him [G-d] in a true physical manner (*b’reiah muchashit*). (Translation underlining and brackets my own)

According to Rav Epstein, for one instance in the history of our people, everyone “saw Him [G-d] in a true physical manner.” Thus, for one bright shining moment, the Almighty revealed Himself to His entire beloved nation in an equal fashion. Therefore, we declared in unison “...this is my G-d and I will extol Him, the G-d of my fathers and I will raise Him up.”

While the level of prophecy of *Kriyat Yam Suf* will never be repeated, we yearn for the coming of *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (the Righteous Messiah), when both the Prophets and the simplest among us can once again declare in heartfelt unanimity: “*Hashem Hu HaElokim, Hashem Hu HaElokim*” (“G-d is the one and only G-d, G-d is the one and only G-d,” *Sefer Melachim* I:18:39). May we be *zocheh* to have many such moments in our lives, and to feel the presence of Hashem amongst us. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Moyadim l'Simcha, Chag Sameach and Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis*,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

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