

Battleground: Torah | Dvar Torah Chukas

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“Concerning this it is told in the account of the Wars of the Lord, “What He gave at the [Sea of] Reeds and the streams of Arnon.” - Numbers 21:14

The Torah connects the miracles at the Sea of Reeds with the miracles at the streams of Arnon. We are very familiar with the splitting of the sea and the drowning of the Egyptians as the waves crashed down upon them. At the streams of Arnon, Amonites and Moabites were waiting for the Israelites and planned to ambush them. G-D saved the Israelites by crushing the soldiers lying in wait with the mountains they were using for cover. The twin peaks merged together destroying the people lying in wait. The verse tell us that these fantastic miracles are recorded in the book of the Wars of the Lord.

The Hebrew words for “what He gave at [the Sea of] Reeds” are “et vahev b’Sufa.” In the Talmud, our Sages ask what *drasha* we can learn from the words in Psalms (127) “et oyvim b’shaar - the enemies at the gates?” The Talmud answers in name of R’ Chiya bar Abba that even a father and son or a teacher and student that study Torah in one gateway become enemies when they argue about the Torah and they do not budge from their position until they love one another, as the verse says “et vahev b’Sufa.” Rashi explains that the Talmud is referencing the mention of the book of the Wars of the Lord and is playing on the word vahev which is similar to the word ahava - love, and is saying that the battles of Torah (the Wars of the Lord) end in love.

R’ Schwab asks the obvious question here. This is a very farfetched *drasha*. What possible connection could there be between the splitting of the seas, the crushing of potential ambushers by way of mountains, and the intense study of Torah with a partner?

We can understand the teaching of the Talmud if we examine the true nature of the miracles being referenced here. There were several miracles at the Sea of Reeds, but the miracle recognized here is the demise of the Egyptians in the raging waters of the sea. The waters split for the sake of the Israelites. It was a necessary measure to save the Israelites from certain death. Once the danger passed there was no longer a need for the miracle and the miraculous forces that were keeping a dry path in the sea stopped holding the waters back. As soon as there was no force splitting the sea, the waters returned to their natural, original position and the Egyptians drowned in the crashing waters.

Similarly, the miracle at Nachal Arnon was the merging of two mountains to crush the enemy. In essence, says R' Schwab, the two mountains were really one mountain with two peaks. They were supposed to be one mountain but were only two peaks for the sake of giving a path for the Israelites to pass. To crush the would-be ambush all that was required was a suspension of the miracles separating the two peaks. Once the force keeping the mountain in two parts stopped, the mountain naturally crushed the ambush.

When fathers and sons or teachers and students study Torah they become enemies. They take different positions on matters of great importance. They disagree on the correct understanding, message, or interpretation. They argue for their point of view and fight for their position. It looks like there is a legitimate war. But the truth is that this schism is a mirage. Their true status is a state of peace and love. It's just that through arguing in the Battles of Torah they take positions that are at odds. Love is their natural position.

The Talmud is saying that the same way the waves crashing on the Egyptians and the mountains crushing the ambushers was the previously held unnatural state returning to its natural state, “et vahev b’Sufa” can refer to the natural state of love between opponents in the Battles of the Torah. Even though they appear to be at odds, they are really only temporarily arguing. Their true state is peace, love, and harmony. The *drasha* is not so farfetched after all.

Never in the history of the Jewish people have so many people had the opportunity to hear so many different perspectives and ideas about Judaism. Hundreds and thousands of years ago, people were exposed only to the small group of people they knew personally. Eventually, books were published with slight variances of tradition and thought but generally speaking, people knew what they knew and they did what they did. Our modern society has opened the floodgates of information. This is a great blessing. We have access to more Torah than we ever had before. But we must now contend with many more competing views of religion in general, Judaism, and Orthodox Judaism. As a group we have a lot of opinions and we are passionate about our ideas.

Sometimes the discussions and disagreements can get heated. After all, it is the Battle of the Torah otherwise known as the Wars of the Lord! There is so much at stake and there is so much to learn and to discuss. We all have opportunities to hear new ideas and learn from others. We also have a chance to share our perspectives and opinions. This is wonderful. But we cannot forget that despite our differences, they are only superficial. Disagreement is not our natural state. Our arguments are only for the sake of Torah and G-D. We must be sure that when our arguments end we find ourselves in our natural state of peace, love, and harmony.

What a poignant thought for our generation. In a world of international discussion and debate via the Internet we can never forget that when our learning is over we leave the conversation with the love of a father to a son. Certainly, in our face to face interactions, Shabbos table discussions, coffee room shmoozing, and of course learning in the Beis Medrash we always remember that it ends in our natural state of love and affection toward each other. - Good Shabbos