



Dealing with the Seeds of Doubt

Exodus, Chapter 13

17. It came to pass when Pharaoh let the people go, that G-d did not lead them [by] way of the land of the Philistines for it was near, because G-d said, Lest the people reconsider when they see war and return to Egypt

21. And the L-rd went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to cause it to lead them on the way and at night in a pillar of fire to give them light, [they thus could] travel day and night.

when they see war and return to Egypt

Rashi

If they had gone on a direct route, they would have returned. Now, if when He led them around in a circuitous route, they said, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt" (Num. 14:4), how much more [would they have planned to do this] if He had led them on a direct route?

Exodus, Chapter 14

21. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the L-rd led the sea with the strong east wind all night, and He made the sea into dry land and the waters split.

22. Then the children of Israel came into the midst of the sea on dry land, and the waters were to them as a wall from their right and from their left.

23. The Egyptians pursued and came after them all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen, into the midst of the sea...

28. And the waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen, the entire force of Pharaoh coming after them into the sea; not even one of them survived.

29. But the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea, and the water was to them like a wall from their right and from their left.

30. On that day the L-rd saved Israel from the hand[s] of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dying on the seashore

Sotah 30b

At the time the Israelites ascended from the Red Sea... the babe sat upon his mother's knee and the suckling sucked at his mother's breast; when they beheld the Divine Presence, the babe raised his neck and the suckling released the nipple from his mouth, and they exclaimed: "This is my G-d and I will praise Him" ... Even the embryos in their mothers' wombs uttered a song...

Exodus, Chapter 17

8. Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

9. So Moses said to Joshua, Pick men for us, and go out and fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand

10. Joshua did as Moses had told him, to fight against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended to the

פרק יג

יז. ויהי בשלח פרעה את העם ולא נחם אֱלֹקִים הַדָּרָךְ אֲרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי קָרוֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים פֶּן יִנְחַם הָעָם בְּרֹאֲתָם מִלַּחְמָה וְשָׁבוּ מִצְרָיִם: כא. וְהָ הַלֶּךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם בְּעַמּוּד עָנָן לַיְלָמָה הַדָּרָךְ וְלַיְלָה בְּעַמּוּד אֵשׁ לְהַאֲדִיר לָהֶם לְלַכֵּת יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה:

פרק יד

כא. נִיט מִשָּׁה אֶת יָדוֹ עַל הַיָּם וַיִּוֹלְךָ ה' אֶת הַיָּם בְּרוּחַ קְדוֹם עֲזָה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה וַיִּשָּׂם אֶת הַיָּם לַחֲרֻבָה וַיִּבְקָעוּ הַמַּיִם: כב. וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשׁה וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חוֹמָה מִיַּמִּינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם: כג. וַיִּדְרֹפוּ מִצְרַיִם וַיָּבֹאוּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם כֹּל סוֹס פְּרָעָה רֶכְבוֹ וּפָרָשָׁיו אֶל תּוֹךְ הַיָּם:

כד. וַיִּשָּׁבוּ הַמַּיִם וַיִּכְסּוּ אֶת הַרְכָּב וְאֶת הַפָּרָשִׁים לְכָל חֵיל פְּרָעָה הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיהֶם בַּיָּם לֹא נִשְׁאָר בָּהֶם עַד אֶחָד: כט. וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הִלְכוּ בַיַּבֵּשׁה בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חוֹמָה מִיַּמִּינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם: ל. וַיֹּשַׁע ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּרְא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת מִצְרַיִם מֵת עַל שַׁפַּת הַיָּם:

פרק יז

ח. וַיָּבֹא עֲמֶלֶק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרַפְדִּים: ט. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בְּחַר לָנוּ אַנְשִׁים וְצֹא הִלָּחֶם בְּעֲמֶלֶק מִחֵר אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל רֹאשׁ הַגְּבָעָה וּמִטָּה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדִי: י. וַיַּעַשׂ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה לְהִלָּחֶם בְּעֲמֶלֶק וּמִשָּׁה אֶהְרֹן וְחֹוֹר עָלוּ רֹאשׁ הַגְּבָעָה: יא. וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יָרִים מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגָבַר יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּכְאֶשֶׁר יָנִיחַ יָדוֹ וְגָבַר עֲמֶלֶק:

top of the hill.

11. It came to pass that when Moses would raise his hand, Israel would prevail, and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail.

Rosh Hashana 29a

Was it Moshe's hands that won the battle or lost the battle? Rather (the Torah) teaches you: As long as Israel looked heavenward and subjected their heart to their Father in heaven, they would prevail; but when they did not, they would fail.

...Because they tested G-d, saying: "Is G-d among us, or not?" Then came Amalek, and waged war with Israel in Rephidim

The Chassidic Masters

After all that they had seen G-d do on their behalf -- the Ten Plagues brought upon Egypt to free them, the splitting of the sea, the "bread from heaven" that descended each morning to nourish them -- how could the people of Israel possibly question, "Is G-d amongst us or not"?

But such is the nature of doubt. There is doubt that is based on a rational query. There is doubt that rises from the doubter's subjective motives and desires. But then there is doubt pure and simple: doubt that neutralizes the most compelling evidence and the most inspiring experience with nothing more than a cynical shrug. Amalek is the essence of doubt, of irrational challenge to truth. (Thus the Hebrew word Amalek has a numerical value of 240 -- the same as the word safek, "doubt"). Because the people of Israel had succumbed to the Amalek within their own souls, they became vulnerable to attack by Amalek the nation.

Exodus, Chapter 18

1. Now Moses' father in law, Yitro, the chieftain of Midian, heard all that G-d had done for Moses and for Israel, His people that the L-rd had taken Israel out of Egypt.

Now...Jethro...heard:

Rashi

What news did he hear that [made such an impression that] he came? The splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek. — [from Zev. 116a]

Talmud Zevachim 116a

What report did he hear? R' Yehoshua said: "The war with Amalek." R' Elazar HaModa'i said: "The giving of the Torah." R' Eliezer said: "The splitting of the Sea."

SUMMARY

- The Jewish people left Egypt accompanied by great miracles. The Divine presence led them in the wilderness. Still, G-d took them in a round-about route that would make it difficult for them to return to Egypt since they could suddenly lose their faith.
- The war with Amalek lasted only one day and yet the people's faith faltered.
- Yitro was inspired by the wonders of the splitting of the Sea, convinced that G-d was a true G-d. But Yitro left his home to join the Jewish people only after the war with Amalek.
- Yitro realized that inspiration alone is insufficient and can wear off unless it is acted upon immediately. An awakening must be followed by action, or doubt (Amalek) can easily sink in.

