Torah Online - Rabbi Tuvia Bolton

In this Torah portion we read about the splitting of the Reed ('red') Sea.

Never in history was or would there be anything like it; an entire nation of several million people escaped from the most powerful army in the world by walking on dry land in the middle of a sea! And then, as soon as they got to the other side the water miraculously caved in and drowned their pursuers!

[And it's not just history. That nation has been miraculously surviving such enemies for thousands of years and still exists today; the Jews!]

But at first glance this is not understood.

What was the purpose of these miracles at the sea? Why didn't G-d just kill the evil Egyptians in their sleep and take the Jews quietly out. Why all the fanfare? And G-d split the sea at the last moment? (See 14:9-12) Why all the tension?!

Also this week was the tenth of Shvat, the day that the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak passed away and his son in law, the Seventh Rebbe, who said that this generation would be the generation of 'Moshiach', took over.

Is there as connection?

To understand this here is a story (Rabosainu N'si'ainu pg 186)

The sixth Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch; Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak was a truly remarkable man, wise, spiritually gifted and brave. Besides being gifted in all aspects of the Torah and of secular knowledge .... he was a man of action.

In Russia he single handedly stood against the atheistic, murderous regime of Stalin by sending thousands of his followers throughout Russia to teach Torah to children at the risk (and often the cost) of their lives. And in the last ten years of his life in the U.S.A. he began the 'outreach' movement that has totally transformed Judaism today.

But the main driving force in his life was love; helping others and doing everything possible to alleviate suffering. And he taught his followers to do the same.

For instance when Rabbi Michel Vishedske (a neighbor of mine in Kfar Chabad) escaped Russia some 50 years ago and settled in New York he did everything in his power to help Russian Jewry and he took it upon himself to visit all the orthodox synagogues in New York and see if they could help as well.

One of his meetings was with one Rabbi Rabinovitz; the head Rabbi of the Bronx. When he arrived at his synagogue he found the place empty, as most synagogues are in the early afternoon, and the Rabbi seated at a long table in a chair next to the head of the table.

Rabbi Michel shook the Rabbi's hand, introduced himself and, supposing that the Rabbi had left the head seat vacant for him, sat in it.

"Excuse me," Rabbi Rabinovitz said, "Please don't sit in that chair. It's the head seat and I always leave it vacant."
Rabbi Vishedski apologized and stood up and when he took a different seat the Rabbi smiled, apologized himself for not warning him and said. "You're a Lubavitcher, right? Well then, you'll probably understand the reason I leave that seat open. It was because of a dream."

"Really? A dream?" Rav Michel was interested and seeing his interest, Rabbi Rabinovitz, smiled and began telling him the story.

"It began almost twenty years ago, 1949. I had survived the holocaust, moved from Romania to New York, got married and began thinking about a job. I had a few ideas about how to make a living but I couldn't make up my mind. Then someone suggested that I go see the Lubavitcher Rebbe for advice.

"I called up and I got an appointment. It was Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe and I got in to see him. He wasn't so healthy and it wasn't easy to understand him but after he heard my questions he said that he thought I should be a Rabbi. He was very clear about that and he said I should let him know what happened.

"Well sure enough, a while later I got this offer to be the head Rabbi here of the Bronx so I went back and asked the Rebbe if I should take it. He closed his eyes, thought for a minute and finally looked up and said."

"'A Shul (synagogue) is a Shul. But I don't like the Shamash (sexton-caretaker).'

Then he again closed his eyes and repeated; 'A Shul is a Shul. But I don't like the Shamash'. Then he blessed me with success in the new job and asked me to return two weeks to see him again.

"So I followed his advice and took the job. But when I came back two Sundays later I found a huge crowd gathered outside his building.... For his funeral! They told me that the Rebbe had passed away on Shabbat! The Rebbe invited me to his funeral. I felt he was telling me that our contact would continue.

"Anyway, things went fine in the Shul; I got along well with everyone and the place began to become popular but I sensed something wrong. Gradually I found out what it was; the Shamash of the Shul was speaking against me. He even had himself a small following of complainers.

"At first he was quiet about it but eventually it got public and the politics threw the Synagogue and myself into turmoil. When I thought I was going crazy I decided to go the Rebbe's son in law who had become the next Rebbe, for advice.

"I got in to see him and it was the most amazing experience in my life. As soon as I told him my problem he said; 'My father in Law told you that a Shul is a Shul but that he didn't like the Shamash!'

"It was simply uncanny. Remember, this was years later and I never told anyone what the Previous Rebbe said to me! Anyway he continued, told me not to worry and to just be patient and that eventually I'd catch the Shamash doing something wrong.'

"Sure enough, that's exactly what happened! Just a few weeks later I was having trouble sleeping one night and took a walk to the shul and who do I see also walking around outside but the president and the janitor. It seems that they also couldn't sleep. Anyway as we got near to the Shul we noticed something strange; a few lights were on inside and someone was in there doing something. So we entered silently and what did we see? The Shamash was emptying all the charity boxes into his pocket! Needless to say he got fired the next day and my problems were over.... almost.

"Like I said our synagogue became popular and after a few years there was no where to sit. We needed to expand but there was no where to expand to, all the land around the Shul was taken.
But just then the butcher next to us decided he wanted to sell us his place so he could expand elsewhere. It was a miracle!!

"And the butcher was so friendly. We came to an agreement, he gave us a great price and we shook hands, didn't even write a bill of sale! The next week the butcher moved to a big store he bought across the street and we knocked down a wall, did a bit of remodeling and like magic our Shul became almost twice as big as it was! Everyone was happy! For a while.

"But after a few years the butcher's new place also became small on him. He was succeeding and he wanted to expand again; to move his refrigerators to somewhere nearby and use the space for more customers. But he also had a problem finding a place to buy. Until he suddenly remembered the building he sold us and that there had been no bill of sale!

"He got a lawyer, sent us letters telling us to leave and when we tried to reason with him, took us to court and got an order of eviction. Things happened fast and we were going crazy but there was nothing we could do. Then, the night before the eviction I had a dream.

"I dreamt that I was standing in this room and at the head of this table, where I told you not to sit, was the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe with his son in law, the present Rebbe, standing next to him. The Rebbe smiled and said, 'Why are you so worried? G-d will direct everything in the best way.'

"Then his son in law said ' The Rebbe told you that a Shul is a Shul. It means that once a butcher shop becomes a Shul it can't become a butcher shop again. Don't worry.'

"Suddenly I woke up! I looked at my watch. I was late! I was supposed to wake up an hour ago! I got dressed and ran to the Shul as fast as I could, but it was too late. There were police everywhere, all our congregants were standing in the street trying to talk to them while some ten husky fellows were carrying all the seats out of our shul.

"But suddenly there was a big crash from the new butcher shop across the street then screams. Everyone turned to see. One of the workers came running out the door screaming 'Call an ambulance! Get a doctor! Help!! The boss is hurt!!'

"It seems that somehow a huge chandelier that was hanging in the butcher shop came loose and fell on the owner knocking him unconscious. I ran over there and there was blood everywhere! But before the ambulance arrived he came to and limped out the door holding his bleeding head and yelling like a madman. "Put the chairs back!! Don't evict them!! I lied!! I lied!!! They really paid for my store. I'm sorry!!"

"The ambulance took him anyway, the policeman shrugged his shoulders told the movers to return everything and that was the end of it! Just as the Rebbe said.

'That is why I never let anyone sit in this chair.

This answers our questions. The reason G-d split the sea was to prepare the Jews for receiving the Torah and to teach them how to use it afterwards.

At Mount Sinai all the spiritual worlds 'split' to reveal the Creator of the Universe, just as the sea split to reveal the dry land. And so it was when the sea split; the Jews had awesome revelations of G-d! (see Rashi on Zeh Kaili 15:2).

But G-d also tested and strengthened them beforehand to ignore the pressures of the world (as symbolized by Pharaoh and his forces) by spitting the sea at the last moment; just as He did to the Rabbi in our story.

But just as Moses took the Jews from Egypt and brought them to Mt. Sinai so the mystical book 'the Zohar' promises that in every generation there will be a Moses, a potential Moshiach, to reveal G-dliness and take us all through the pressures, darkness, fears and doubts of this world to the
true redemption, when all the Jews will be together in Israel and there will be world peace and prosperity. Just as the Rebbe did in our story.

We are now in the last minute! It all depends on us to ignore the pressures and do all we can to bring...

Moshiach NOW!

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