

דרכים בפרשה בשלח

R' Mordechai Appel,
an alumnus of the
Telzer Yeshiva, is
the author of
Derachim Beparsha.



אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את השירה הזאת

“Then Moshe and the Bnei Yisroel sang this song.”

After witnessing one of the greatest miracles of their history as a nation, the Bnei Yisroel instantaneously began singing the great song of *Az Yashir* in unison. Rashi notes the discrepancy in the language switching from past tense to future tense (אז- then; ישיר-will sing). He explains אז כשראה—הנס עלה בלבו שיסיר שירה—the meaning is: *then* — i. e. when he saw the miracle, it entered his mind that *he would sing* a song.

In his second *p'shat*, Rashi quotes the well-known Midrash that says: מכאן רמז לתחיית המתים מן התורה— from here (i.e. from the fact that the future tense is used) we may derive a hint that the tenet of *techiyas hameisim* is from the Torah.

It needs to be understood why it was important to teach us this idea specifically at this juncture. I would like to present three approaches to answer this question:

Rav Yechezkel of Kuzmir *zt"l* (17 Shevat 5637) explains that a Yid needs to constantly live with *emunah*, and without it, he has no *kiyum* (lit- cannot exist). The Bnei Yisroel had just witnessed at the *Yam Suf* more miracles than even the great *nevi'im* were able to see. ויראו העם— The nation saw! Everything in the world was open to them; nothing was being concealed. No longer did there remain a challenge to their *emunah* — it was all crystal clear. But that is not how it works as a general rule. *Emunah* is something that one must constantly toil and work on. When one level is gained, Hashem sends another test, and then another — all the while giving us the ability to become even stronger in our faith in Him. Therefore, specifically at that moment, they were introduced to an idea that they could not see. In the future there would be a phenomenon called *techiyas hameisim* that they needed to believe would occur. This was something that they could not see, yet they needed to believe in it.

This idea is also a *chizuk* to our own personal growth in *emunah*. After succeeding in one test of *emunah*, we must remember that there will always be more to come. It would be foolish of us to become complacent, because *emunah* is and needs to be a constant battle.

A second explanation was offered by Rav Aharon Belzer *zt"l*. On one Shabbos Shirah shortly after the war, the Rebbe was sitting with some of his *chassidim* lost in thought. He wanted so much to enliven their spirits in song and dance, but alas, the sense of depression and sadness was too great to bear due to the terrible losses that each and every one of them suffered at the hands of the Nazis, *yemach shemom vizichram*. So, he began to speak about the *parshah* and asked our question:

Why would the Torah discuss *techiyas hameisim* specifically after *Kriyas Yam Suf*? Knowing that four out of five Yidden were taken during *makas choshech*, it could be assumed that every member of Klal Yisroel had lost a loved one. Then the miraculous escape and *Kriyas Yam Suf* occurred. Not having had sufficient time to even mourn properly, it must have been difficult for the Yidden to sing. Should they sing? Could they even sing? They witnessed the greatest of miracles — but they were very likely not “feeling it”. It was at that moment that they were taught *techiyas hameisim*. Yes, there will be a time that they would all be together again and that all the losses would finally make sense. And with that incredible new *emunah* of *techiyas hameisim* they were now able to move on. (We can also learn from here that one shall not wait until later, when things are even better, to thank Hashem. Rather, one must seize the opportunity when it arises, despite it being somewhat difficult at that moment.)

The Maharal writes (Gur Aryeh 15:1) that *shirah* by definition is an emotional response that stems from the heart and is sung spontaneously. The Gemara tells us that Chizkiyahu Hamelech could have been Moshiach, but he failed to sing *shirah* when he was meant to. Rav Gifter *zt"l* asks (Pirkei Torah): so just get up and sing *shirah* afterwards; why was all lost? The Rosh Yeshiva explained that singing and praising later on is nice, but that is not *shirah* — because *shirah* must be a spontaneous emotional outburst that defies any current situation.

We can now understand why the *shirah* began with the word אז. As Rashi explained in his first *p'shat*, it was at that specific moment that they decided to sing. The actual song may have been determined later (ישיר), but at that very moment the emotional response and decision was that “We will sing!”

With this approach, we can now understand why *techiyas hameisim* is introduced here. The *seforim* point out that a *tefillah* devoid of emotion is considered dead. לא המתים יהללו— praise to Hashem must be alive and vibrant. Perhaps when the Bnei Yisroel spontaneously sang their *shirah*, with an outburst of unpremeditated and unrehearsed emotional song, they were learning the secret of how to infuse life into the way we sing to Hashem. The Rambam writes at the beginning of *hilchos tefillah* that *tefillah* used to be informal and without structure. It was based on a person's inner emotions to Hashem at that very moment. As Klal Yisroel had weakened spiritually and *tefillah* was in danger of being lost, Ezra instituted the formalized version of *tefillah*. As great and important as this was, the flip-side of it was that we lost the spontaneous nature of it.

The Torah is reminding us that although we now have structure, we shall not forget about adding that *geshmak* and zest into our *tefillas*. —מכאן רמז לתחיית המתים— from here we learn that even at a time when perhaps we feel a bit out of it, we should think about the אז ישיר, shouting out emotionally to Hashem, thus bringing ourselves back to life.

מרדכי אפפלי, Good Shabbos,