



A Remarkable Revelation from the Divine Kabbalist the Rama of Pano Nachshon ben Aminadav Reincarnated into Otniel ben Knaz Who Restored 300 Halachos that Were Forgotten during the Mourning of Moshe

Shabbas Kodesh parshas Beshalach approaches auspiciously. Since it contains Shiras HaYam, it is affectionately referred to as Shabbas Shirah. It opens with the words (Shemos 15, 1): "אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל את" "השירה הזאת לה"—then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael sang (will sing) this song to Hashem—and is a tribute to the miraculous splitting of the sea—Krias Yam Suf. As we know, the turbulent waters initially split to allow Yisrael safe passage on dry land; yet it returned to its initial daunting strength and fury to drown the Egyptians who pursued Yisrael. After all the miraculous feats, including the Ten Plagues, that HKB"H visited on Mitzrayim, why did He see fit to conclude galus Mitzrayim with the miracle of Krias Yam Suf?

Now, we learn a fundamental principle in the Gemara (Berachos 12a): "הכל הולך אחר החתום"—everything follows the conclusion. Thus, we can conclude that HKB"H chose to conclude galus Mitzrayim with the miracle of Krias Yam Suf for a specific reason—to leave a lasting impression and send a crucial message to all future generations. We will endeavor to explain the vital lesson that we are supposed to learn from this incredible miracle.

Otniel ben Kenaz Is Nachshon ben Aminadav

To illuminate the profound significance of Krias Yam Suf in a practical manner that is relevant to each and every one of us, we will begin by introducing a precious teaching from the divine kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Pano, ztz"l, who was a disciple of Rabbi Yisrael Srug, who was a disciple of our illustrious teacher

the Arizal. Here is a translation of what he writes in the sefer Gilgulei Neshamos (Ma'arechet 70, 6):

Otniel ben Kenaz is Nachshon ben Aminadav. Just as he sanctified the name of Heaven by descending into the torrential waters of the sea; so, too, as Otniel, he now descended (delved) into the waters (sea) of the Torah with his acumen of pilpul. Thus, he restored 300 halachos that were forgotten during the mourning period of Moshe Rabeinu, a"h. Now, the letters of (the name) נחשון are an anagram of חנניו ש'; and if we also take the letters אל from the name עתניאל, we get חנניו אל ש' (he was graciously granted the intuition to perceive the 300).

For the sake of clarity, we will present the source for this teaching. Here is how HKB"H commanded Moshe to initiate the miracle of Krias Yam Suf (ibid. 14, 13): "ויאמר ה' אל משה מה תצעק אלי דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו, ואתה הרם את מטך ונטה את ירך על הים ובקעהו ויבואו בני ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה." Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them move forward. And you, lift up your staff and extend your arm over the sea and split it. Then Bnei Yisrael will come into the midst of the sea on dry land."

According to the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh, HKB"H was advising Moshe how to intensify the aspects of "chesed" and "rachamim." He was instructed to speak to Bnei Yisrael, so that they would intensify their emunah with all of their heart and proceed into the sea before it actually split. In other words, they should move forward trusting that Hashem would

perform a miracle on their behalf. On account of this, “rachamim” would prevail. So, when Moshe raised his staff, the sea split miraculously, since that trust and emunah was significant enough to establish their merit and warrant a good outcome. And so it was! The first tzaddik to do so was Nachshon ben Aminadav; he entered the sea until it reached his neck; the sea did not split until he proclaimed that the water had reached a life-threatening level.

The source for the fact that Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped into the sea even before it split and became dry land is found in the Gemara (Sotah 37a). For, when Moshe commanded Yisrael to move into the stormy sea, they were overcome with fear: **This one (tribe) said, “I am not going down into the sea first”; and this one (tribe) said, “I am not going down into the sea first.” So, Nachshon ben Aminadav jumped forward and went down into the sea first . . . Of him it explains in Scriptures** (Tehillim 69, 2): **“Save me, O G-d, for the waters have reached until the soul. I am sunk in the mire of the shadowy depths.”**

Otniel ben Kenaz Restored

300 Forgotten Halachos by Means of His Pilpul

Now, in keeping with the notion of (ibid. 25, 14): **“סוד ה' ליראי”**—the secret of Hashem is revealed to those who fear Him—the Rama of Pano reveals to us a teaching that was transmitted to him by his teachers: Nachshon ben Aminadav reincarnated into Otniel ben Kenaz, who, by means of his “pilpul”—erudition and dialectic—restored 300 halachos that had been forgotten during the period that Yisrael grieved over the passing away of Moshe. Here is a pertinent passage from the Gemara (Temurah 16a):

“אמר רב יהודה אמר רב שמואל... אמרו לו ליהושע שאל”—Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: The people of Yisrael were upset that these halachos had been lost. So, they said to Yehoshua, **“Ask.”** In other words, they pleaded with Yehoshua to inquire via “ruach hakodesh” to have Hashem reveal to him the halachos that were forgotten. **He responded to them, “It (the Torah) is not in heaven”**—i.e., I cannot do that. From the

moment that the Torah was given to Yisrael at Har Sinai, halachos cannot be determined or clarified in heaven; this can only be done down on earth through the study of Torah.

Further on in the Gemara, Rav Yehudah in the name of Rav reveals to us the reason Yehoshua was punished in this manner—that 300 halachos were forgotten during the period of mourning of Moshe:

“אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, בשעה שנפטר משה רבינו לגן עדן, אמר לו ליהושע, שאל ממני כל ספיקות שיש לך, אמר לו רבי כלום הנחתיך שעה אחת והלכתי למקום אחר, לא כך כתבת בי ומשרתו יהושע בן נון נער לא ימיש מתוך האהל, מיד תשש כוחו של יהושע ונשתכחו ממנו שלש מאות הלכות ונולדו לו שבע מאות ספיקות... אמר רבי אבהו אף על פי כן החזירן עתניאל בן קנז מתוך פלפולו.”

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When Moshe Rabeinu passed away to Gan Eden, he said to Yehoshua, **“Ask me any uncertainties you have (regarding Torah law).”** He (Yehoshua) replied to him, **“Rebbe, did I leave you even for a moment and go to another place? Have you not written about me (Shemos 33, 11): ‘And his servant, Yehoshua bin Nun, a lad, would not stir from within the tent?’”** So, why should I have any uncertainties? Immediately, Yehoshua’s strength was impaired. As a consequence, he was made to forget three hundred halachos, and seven hundred uncertainties occurred to him . . . Rabbi Avahu said: Nevertheless, Otniel ben Kenaz restored them through his “pilpul” (Talmudic dialectic and erudition).

Now, as a general rule, HKB”H rewards individuals “midah k’neged midah”—measure for measure—as we are taught in the Mishnah (Sotah 8b): **“במדה שאדם מודד”**—by the measure that a man measures others, they (the heavenly court) measure him. Similarly, this principle is expressed by the following passuk (Tehillim 62, 13): **“ולך ה' חסד כי אתה תשלם לאיש”**—and Yours, Hashem, is kindness, for You repay each man according to his deeds. Thus, it behooves us to explain how Nachshon ben Aminadav’s reincarnation into Otniel ben Kenaz—to restore the three hundred forgotten halachos to Yisrael—constitutes a case of “midah k’neged midah.”

Words of Torah Only Endure in Someone Who Devotes Himself to Them

I would like to propose a wonderful explanation for this matter based on the Midrash on this week's parsha (S.R. 23, 6): "אז ישיר משה, הדא הוא דכתיב ואני אשרי עוזך: וארגו לבוקר חסדך... ואני אשרי עוזך, אימתי, בשעה שעמדו ישראל על הים ואומרים שירה, שנאמר אז ישיר משה... וארגו לבוקר חסדך... אותו הבוקר של **"Then Moshe sang"**: Regarding this it is written (Tehillim 59, 17): "I will sing of Your might, and I will rejoice toward morning in Your kindness" . . . "I will sing of Your might": When did this occur? When Yisrael stood by the sea and were uttering words of song, as it is stated, "Then Moshe . . . sang." . . . "And I will rejoice toward morning in Your kindness" . . . refers to that morning of Matan Torah, as it is stated (ibid. 19, 16): "On the third day when it was morning." This Midrash teaches us that there is a fascinating connection between the "Shirah" uttered by Bnei Yisrael in relation to Krias Yam Suf and Matan Torah at Har Sinai. We will endeavor to explain this connection.

Let us refer to the following Gemara (Berachos 63b): "אמר ריש לקיש, מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו: **Reish Lakish said: From where do we learn that words of Torah are not retained except by one who sacrifices himself for her sake? For it is stated (Bamidbar 19, 14): "This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent."** Simply understood, it is teaching us that a person should minimize physical pleasures. Here are the inspirational words of the Rambam on the subject (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3, 12):

The words of Torah will not be retained by a person who applies himself feebly to obtain them, and not by those who study amid pleasure and an abundance of food and drink. Rather, one must give up his life for them, constantly straining his body to the point of discomfort, without granting sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids. The Sages alluded to this concept: "This is the Torah, a man should he die in a tent . . ." The Torah can only be retained by a person who gives up his life in the tents of the wise.

This in fact is the lesson taught by the Mishnah (Avos 6, 4): "כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל, ואם אתה עושה כן אשריך וטוב לך, אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא." **This is the way of the Torah: To eat bread with salt, to drink water in small amounts, to sleep upon the ground, to live a life of hardship, and to toil in the Torah. If you do so, you are praiseworthy, and it will bode you well. You will be praiseworthy in Olam HaZeh, and it will bode well for you in Olam HaBa.** We find a similar elucidation in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 111a) related to a passuk extolling the virtues of the Torah (Iyov 28, 13): "לא ידע אנוש ערכה ולא תמצא בארץ החיים, לא **"Man does not know its true value, and it is not found in the land of the living"** . . . the Torah is not found in someone who is self-indulgent.

The Turei Zahav: Denying Oneself to Engage in Torah Dialectic

We do, however, find an alternative interpretation of the statement: "שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה." It is not referring exclusively to denying oneself physical pleasures but also to intellectual pursuits; one should devote oneself especially to studying Torah in depth and with "pilpul." Here is a pertinent excerpt from the writings of the Turei Zahav (O.C. 47, 3):

"שהתורה אינה מתקיימת אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, דהיינו שעוסק בפלפול ומשא ומתן של תורה, כמו שפירשו על [הפסוק] [ויקרא כו-ג] [אם] בחקותי תלכו, על מנת שתהיו עמלים בתורה, מה שאין כן באותם שלומדים דברי תורה מתוך עונג ואינם יגעים בה אין התורה מתקיימת אצלם."

Sacrificing oneself for the sake of the Torah means engaging in debates and "pilpul" regarding Torah issues; the study of Torah demands labor and exertion; it should not be a leisurely undertaking. Otherwise, the Torah one learns will not be retained.

Based on this understanding, the Turei Zahav explains the formula instituted by Chazal for the berachah related to Torah-study: "וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה"—**and He commanded us to engross ourselves in words of Torah.** They did not employ the formula: "ללמוד דברי תורה." They were emphasizing the fact that the essence of the mitzvah of Torah-study is specifically the toil and

exertion associated with it. Thus, they employed the term "לעסוק", from the root "עסק", indicating that we must actively engage in the study of Torah, debating points of ambiguity and disagreement. It is intellectual work that a person must treat like a business transaction.

The Miracle of Krias Yam Suf Prepared Yisrael to Receive the Torah with Self-sacrifice

Following this line of reasoning, we will now proceed to explain the reason HKB"H chose to conclude galus Mitzrayim with the incredible miracle of Krias Yam Suf. As we have learned many times before, the exile in Mitzrayim was necessary to prepare Yisrael and refine their neshamos for receiving the Torah. As it is written (Devarim 4, 20): "ואתכם לקח ה' ויוציא אתכם מכור הברזל ממצרים להיות" —but Hashem has taken you and withdrawn you from the "iron crucible," from Mitzrayim, to be a nation of heritage for Him, as this very day. This is also evident from HKB"H's remark to Moshe (Shemos 3, 12): "בהוציאך את העם ממצרים" —when you take the people out of Mitzrayim, you will worship G-d on this mountain." Rashi comments that this meant that Yisrael were destined to receive the Torah on that particular mountain.

Thus, it appears that this is why HKB"H arranged to bring an end to galus Mitzrayim with the miracle of Krias Yam Suf by instructing Moshe Rabeinu: "Speak to Bnei Yisrael and have them move forward" into the stormy sea in an act of self-sacrifice. This was designed to instill in Yisrael the attribute of self-sacrifice, which is a mandatory prerequisite for receiving the Torah—which can only be retained by someone who is willing to devote himself to it and sacrifice himself on its behalf.

It appears that we can embellish this thought. To understand why HKB"H chose to inculcate the attribute of self-sacrifice in Yisrael specifically by having them jump into the sea, let us refer to the following Gemara (A.Z. 3b): "אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל, מאי דכתיב ותעשה אדם כדגי הים, למה נמשלו בני אדם כדגי הים, לומר לך מה דגים שבים כיון שעולין ליבשה מיד מתים, אף בני אדם כיון שפורשין מדברי תורה ומן המצוות מיד מתים." **Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel: What is the meaning of that which is written** (Chabakuk

1, 14): "You have made man like the fish of the sea"? Why are human beings compared to the fish of the sea? To teach you that just as the fish of the sea die immediately if they go up onto dry land, so, too, do people who separate themselves from the words of Torah and from the mitzvos die immediately.

We can explain this in light of a teaching in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): "יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש" —המיתו, שנאמר צופה רשע לצדיק ומבקש המיתו" —a man's yetzer overwhelms him daily and attempts to kill him, as it states (Tehillim 37, 32): "The wicked one watches for the tzaddik and seeks to kill him." Additionally, they teach (ibid.) that HKB"H announced to Yisrael: "בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים" —בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו" —My son, I created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand. Furthermore, we know that the Torah is compared to water (B.K. 17a): "אין מים אלא" —תורה שנאמר הוי כל צמא לכו למים" —there is no water other than Torah, as it says (Yeshayah 55, 1): "Ho! All that are thirsty, go to the water."

This explains very nicely the analogy of Yisrael to fish, since their existence relies solely on the waters of Torah. When they study it diligently, they are able to overcome the deadly, spiritual influence of the yetzer hara. Yet, when they abandon the waters of Torah, they perish spiritually under the influence of the yetzer hara.

It Is Imperative to Immerse Ourselves in the Waters of Torah with Self-sacrifice

Thus, we have succeeded in explaining why HKB"H chose to conclude galus Mitzrayim with the miracle of Krias Yam Suf, having Yisrael jump into the stormy sea performing an act of self-sacrifice. He intended to create a symbolic gesture for having Yisrael immerse themselves in the sea of Talmud, delving into the world of Torah with self-sacrifice. If they do so, HKB"H will split the waters for them, and they will walk assuredly with confidence, with an understanding and appreciation of the Torah, in keeping with the notion of (Vayikra 26, 3): "אם בחוקותי תלכו" —if you will follow

was made to forget three hundred halachos, and he seven hundred uncertainties occurred to him . . . Rabbi Avahu said: Nevertheless, Otniel ben Kenaz restored them through his “pilpul.” Rashi comments: Yehoshua was made to forget on account of the impropriety of causing Moshe to be dejected. For, Moshe was pained that Yehoshua boasted that he was as great as him.

This deserves further explanation. Why was Moshe bothered by Yehoshua’s response? After all, the Torah attests to Moshe’s unrivaled humility (Bamidbar 12, 3): “והאיש משה עניו מאד מכל האדם אשר על פני האדמה” -- **now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth!** Furthermore, Chazal teach us (Sanhedrin 105b): “בכל אדם מתקנא חוץ מבנו ותלמידו” — **a man is jealous of everyone except his son and his disciple.** If so, then it is unimaginable that Moshe would be jealous of his loyal disciple Yehoshua, who never left his side.

Therefore, it behooves us to suggest an alternative explanation for Moshe’s dispirited reaction. We have learned (Nedarim 38a) that HKB”H bestowed the gift of “pilpul” on Moshe Rabeinu exclusively. Nevertheless, Moshe graciously shared it with Yisrael. Of him, it says (Mishlei 22, 9): “טוב עין הוא יבורך” — **one with a generous disposition will be blessed.**

It appears that we can explain Moshe Rabeinu’s generosity related to the power of “pilpul” given to him by HKB”H based on the following teaching (Eiruvin 54a): “מאי דכתיב חרות על הלוחות, אלמלי לא נשתברו לוחות (ירושלמי) הראשונות לא נשתכחה תורה מישראל.” **What is the meaning of that which is written (Shemos 32, 16): “Etched on the luchos”? Had the first luchos not been shattered, the Torah would never have been forgotten by Yisrael.** In other words, the fact that Yisrael forget the Torah that they learn is attributable to the shattering of the luchos.

Now, “pilpul” is a fantastic tool for restoring Torah that a person has learned and has forgotten. In the words of the Gemara (Kesubos 103b): “אמר ליה רבי חנינא לרבי חייא, בהדי דידי מינצת, דאם חס ושלום נשתכחה תורה מישראל מהדרנא ליה מפלפולי.” **Rabbi Chanina said to Rabbi Chiya: Do you dare argue with me? If, chas v’shalom, Torah was forgotten from Yisrael, I would restore it through my exegesis (pilpul).** This is precisely what happened with Otniel ben Kenaz. He possessed the power of “pilpul” capable of restoring the 300 halachos that had been forgotten during the mourning period of Moshe. Hence, it was precisely for this reason that Moshe graciously bequeathed the power of “pilpul” to Yisrael; he provided them with the means to restore the parts of the Torah that were forgotten on account of the shattering of the luchos.

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