

“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them journey on’, (Perek 14 Pasuk 15). Hashem's statement to Moshe, “Why do you cry out to Me,” is puzzling – is there anything improper about prayer and crying out to Hashem in a time of distress and suffering?

Ramban Shemot Perek 14:15

Israel, 12th c.

Why did He say, ‘Why do you cry out to Me?’ They were certainly worthy of crying out. Rather, it may mean: Why do you allow them to cry out? Speak to them and let them journey on. For I have already told you, ‘And I will be glorified through Pharaoh.’

This, then, is the meaning of ‘Why do you cry out to Me?’ – you should have asked what action to take, and there was no need for crying out, for I had already informed you that I would be glorified through Pharaoh.”

רמב"ן שמות פרק יד:טו

רבי משה בן נחמן

למה אמר מה תצעק אלי, ראוי להם לצעק. ואולי יאמר מה תניחם לצעוק דבר להם ויסעו, כי כבר אמרתי לך ואכבדה בפרעה... וזה טעם מה תצעק אלי, שהיית צריך לשאל מה תעשה ואין לך צורך לצעוק, כי כבר הודעתך ואכבדה בפרעה.

Ramban explains that although salvation had already been promised, Moshe believed that prayer still had intrinsic value even when the outcome was known. Hashem responds that in this moment of fear and crisis, Moshe's role as a leader required action rather than continued prayer, and he must tell Israel to move forward.

Or Hachaim Shemot Perek 14:15

Morocco, 18th c.

The matter does not depend on Me alone. Even though I desire to perform a miracle, since they are not deserving, the attribute of justice prevents it, and the power of mercy cannot override the restraining attribute of justice.

This, then, is the counsel that has been given: to strengthen the side of kindness and mercy – speak to the Children of Israel and let them fortify themselves in faith with all their hearts and journey toward the sea before it splits, relying on trust, for I will perform a miracle for them; and through this, mercy will prevail.

אור החיים שמות פרק יד:טו

רבי חיים בן עטר

אין הדבר תלוי בידי הגם שאני חפץ עשות נס כיון שהם אינם ראויים מדת הדין מונעת ואין כח ברחמים כנגד מדת הדין המונעת... זאת העצה היעוצה להגביר צד החסד והרחמים דבר אל בני ישראל ויתעצמו באמונה בכל לבם ויסעו אל הים קודם שיחלק על סמך הבטחון כי אני אעשה להם נס ובאמצעות זה תתגבר הרחמים.

Bnei Yisrael seemed undeserving of salvation, so Hashem told Moshe that prayer alone was not enough. Only if they strengthened their faith and moved forward toward the sea, mercy would be possible.

Sforno Shemot Perek 14:15

Italy, 15th c.

Moshe's outcry was not out of fear of Pharaoh and his forces, for he had already told Israel of the downfall of the Egyptians and their death, as he said, 'You shall never see them again, ever; Hashem will fight for you.' Rather, his outcry was because of the leaders of Israel who had acted brazenly, saying, 'Was it because there were no graves...,' and he therefore thought that they would not listen to him to enter the sea. For this reason He said to him, 'Why do you cry out to Me about this?' For in truth, you are suspecting the worthy.

ספורנו שמות פרק יד:טו

רבי עובדיה ספורנו

צעקת משה לא היתה מיראת פרעה וחילו, כי כבר הגיד לישראל את מפלת המצרים ומיתתם כאמרו לא תוסיפו לראותם עוד עד עולם, ה' ילחם לכם אבל היתה צעקתו על שרי ישראל שהעیزו פניהם באמרם המבלי אין קברים וחשב בשביל זה שלא ישמעו לו להכנס בים, לפיכך אמר לו מה תצעק אלי בזה, כי אמנם אתה חושד בכשרים:

Moshe's outcry was not from fear of Pharaoh but concern that Bnei Yisrael's leaders might refuse to enter the sea. Hashem tells him, "Why do you cry out to Me?" – trust that if you command them, they will obey, which they did.

Questions for Reflection:

1. According to the Sforno, can true faith exist without action, or is action an essential expression of belief even when the outcome is already assured?
2. Why might Hashem allow Bnei Yisrael to face apparent danger before performing a miracle – what purpose does such a struggle serve?

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