



Parshat Beshalach

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The miracle of the splitting of the sea, which marked the dramatic culmination of the process of the Exodus, made a profound impression upon the newly-freed slaves. The Torah tells in Parashat Beshalach that as *Benei Yisrael* stood safely on the shore watching their former oppressors drowning at sea, "Israel saw the mighty hand with which the Lord had performed [miracles] in Egypt, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moshe" (14:31). The spectacle of *keri'at Yam Suf* (the splitting of the Sea of Reeds) inspired the people with a level of faith in the Almighty and confidence in Moshe that they had not previously attained.

At first glance, this verse appears to stand in direct contradiction to Maimonides' firm, unequivocal assertion that *Benei Yisrael's* belief in Moshe as God's prophet was cemented solely by the event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. In Maimonides' view, unwavering belief cannot be achieved through witnessing miracles, which can always be dismissed as illusionary or some kind of unusual manifestation of nature. He writes:

Israel did not believe in our teacher Moshe because of the miracles he performed, for one who believes on the basis of miracles remains skeptical in his heart, as the miracle could perhaps be performed through magic or sorcery... So on what basis did they believe him? Through *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, where our eyes – not some other person's – saw, and our ears – and nobody else's – heard, the fire, sounds and torches, as he [Moshe] entered the fog and the voice [of the Almighty] spoke with him...

(Hilkhos Yesodei Ha-Torah 8:1)

The question thus arises, if *Benei Yisrael* believed in Moshe's prophecy only at the event of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, then to what kind of "belief" does the Torah refer when it tells of their newfound belief in Moshe at the sea?

The answer likely emerges from a verse Maimonides proceeds to cite as proof for his claim that complete faith in Moshe was achieved only at *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. When the Israelites encamped in Sinai, God appeared to Moshe to inform him of the revelation that would soon occur: "I will hereby come to you in the thick of a cloud so that the nation will hear when I speak with you and they will also believe in you *forever*" (Shemot 19:9). The effect of *Ma'amad Har Sinai* was unique in that implanted within the people the eternal belief in Moshe. The belief achieved as a result of the splitting of the sea was temporary; had this experience not been followed by the Revelation at Sinai, its effects would have faded with time. The awe and emotional charge that the people felt in

the wake of the miracle of the sea would only have endured so long; as the memory of the miracle began to wane, their confidence in Moshe would likewise decline. *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, however, as Maimonides explained, left no room for questioning or doubt. It demonstrated Moshe's stature not through drama and supernatural manifestations of divine power, but rather through God's explicitly summoning Moshe to ascend the mountain to receive the Torah. Belief acquired through empirical observation necessarily has a far more enduring effect than that achieved through emotional arousal.

Thus, *keri'at Yam Suf* indeed resulted in the people's belief in Moshe, but that belief would not have endured to this day had they not witnessed the Revelation at Sinai.

It is perhaps noteworthy that despite the temporary nature of the "belief" achieved at the sea, the Torah nevertheless found this achievement significant enough to earn emphasis in the narrative of *keri'at Yam Suf*. This emphasis likely demonstrates that even partial achievements and milestones are meaningful and should be recognized and appreciated. In all areas of life, the pursuit of perfection should not cause one to ignore or overlook his accomplishments. Even as we constantly strive to improve, we may and must take pride in what has been achieved thus far, and draw inspiration and encouragement from those achievements in looking ahead towards further progress.