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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

## YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO GET EXTRA CREDIT!

### PARSHAS BESHALACH

After Bnei Yisroel left Egypt, they were faced with a terrifying situation. The Egyptian army was chasing them from behind. In front of them was the Red Sea. What were they to do? Hashem told Moshe, "Why do you cry to Me? Speak to B'nei Yisrael and let them move on." (Shmos 14:15). **Rashi** says that Moshe started davening to Hashem to save B'nei Yisrael. Hashem said that this was not the time for prayer. Bnei Yisroel should just go forward. **Rabbeinu Bachya** explains that Hashem was telling Moshe that the matter depended on Bnei Yisroel. Hashem hinted that as soon as Bnei Yisroel would move forward, the sea would part for them. They only needed to demonstrate faith in Hashem by moving forward. Moshe then informed Bnei Yisroel of the great miracle which was about to occur. Whereupon Bnei Yisroel started marching forward.

The **Talmud** (Sotah 36B-37A) brings two opinions as to whom was the first to enter the Red Sea. Rabbi Meir says that it was the tribe of Binyamin. While Bnei Yisroel stood at the Red Sea, the tribes were discussing who should go first. Meanwhile, the tribe of Binyamin

*"Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry to Me? Speak to B'nei Yisrael and let them move on." (Shmos 14:15)*

descended into the sea. Whereupon the tribe of Yehudah tried to stop them (different reasons are given as to why the tribe of Yehudah tried to stop the tribe of Binyamin from going into the sea). Both the tribes of Binyamin and Yehudah acted to honor Hashem, Therefore, both tribes were rewarded. The Beis haMikdash was built in the portion of Eretz Yisroel that belonged to Binyamin. Yehudah received royalty.

**Maharsha** says that the other tribes were fearful of entering the sea. The tribe of Binyamin had a higher level of faith in Hashem. Therefore, they plunged forward.

**Eitz Yosef** differs. He was not comfortable saying that the other tribes did NOT want to go into the sea. He felt that it was not logical to say that they did not

want to fulfill Hashem's command. All the tribes truly wanted to listen to Hashem. However, there was a difference of opinion as to what Hashem wanted them to do (see the **Eitz Yosef** for both opinions which were based on the words of the pasuk). The other tribes

thought that Hashem's command was to wait until the land was dry before going in. Nachshon ben Aminadav, the prince of the tribe of Yehudah, correctly thought that they had to first enter the water and THEN it would become dry.

The **Talmud** then quotes Rabbi Yehudah's opinion. Rabbi Yehudah said that the tribes did NOT want to go into the sea. Nachshon ben Aminadav, the prince of the tribe of Yehudah, entered the water and walked until he could go no further without drowning. At that point, the sea split. His tribe and the other tribes followed his lead.

**Mechilta deRabbi Shimon Ben Yochai** (14:20) discusses Rabbi Meir's opinion. The **Mechilta** brings a parable of two sons. Even though the sons' actions were contradictory, their father understood that

they both acted in his honor. According to the the **Mechilta**, it seems that the actions of the tribes of Binyamin and Yehudah were equal. How can that be? The tribe of Binyamin accomplished an astounding feat, showing their utmost faith in Hashem by jumping into the sea. Seemingly, they placed themselves and their families into grave danger to fulfill the command of Hashem! On the other hand, the action of the tribe of Yehudah seemed minor. The members of the tribe of Yehudah didn't put themselves in any danger. They simply tried to prevent the tribe of Binyamin from entering

the sea because they felt that Hashem did not yet want them to go into the sea. How can both actions be compared and be considered equal?

We must say that the tribe of Yehudah acted totally for the sake of Hashem and would have been ready to give up their lives, if necessary, to fulfill Hashem's will. Therefore, Hashem considered it as if they did give up their lives to fulfill His will. Their readiness to do so equaled the actions of the tribe of Binyamin who went into the sea.

**When you have a strong desire to fulfill a mitzvah, you are credited as if you hae performed that mitzvah.**

**Rav Yisroel Salanter zt"l adds that when you perform an easy mitzvah, you can get rewarded as if the mitzvah was very hard. How? If you do a mitzvah with determination, thinking that you would also perform the mitzvah even if it the circumstances would make it a very difficult mitzvah, then you will be credited as if you had done the mitzvah under those difficult conditions.**

(based, in part, on a dvar Torah from Rav Henach Leibowitz zt"l  
as recorded in Chidushei HaLev by Rabbi Binyamin Luban).

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*Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.*

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