

And he turned the sea to damp land, and the water split. (14:21)

The splitting of the Red Sea was a remarkable miracle; is there a parallel in Jewish history? Was it truly the only time that water "deferred" to man? Indeed, in the *Talmud Chullin 7a*, *Chazal* recount an incident in which R' Pinchas ben Yair was on his way to perform the *mitzvah* of *pidyon shevuyim*, redeeming Jewish captives. He came to a river that was impassable. He commanded the water to split, so that he could pass through. The river responded, "You are performing the command of your Master, and so am I. You might be successful in your efforts to rescue the hostage, while I am assured of success. What makes you think that your *mitzvah* takes precedence over mine?" R' Pinchas ben Yair, responded, "If you do not split immediately, I will decree upon you that all of your water should dry up!" The river split, and R' Pinchas ben Yair passed through. *Chazal* summarize the story with the observation that R' Pinchas ben Yair's power was equal to that of Moshe and all of *Klal Yisrael*.

Keeping this in mind, the **Sfas Emes** wonders how *Krias Yam Suf* demonstrates the singular greatness of *Klal Yisrael*. After all, did a similar miracle not occur for an individual? He offers a profound response. Certainly, Hashem can alter the course of nature for a single *tzaddik*. The righteous have extraordinary merits which grant them access to miracles. When, however, did Hashem alter nature for an entire nation? The *chidush*, novelty, of *Krias Yam Suf* was that an extraordinary miracle took place for an entire nation. This phenomenon demonstrated to the world the *kedushah*, holiness, of *Am Yisrael*--not just the individual Jew--but the totality of the nation!

Horav Tzadok Ha'kohen, z"l, M" Lublin supplements this thought. *Am Yisrael's* innate *kedushah* was exhibited to the world through the miracle of *Krias Yam Suf*. After all, what virtue did the Jews have that made them more worthy than the Egyptians to be spared? They had sunk to the nadir of depravity, to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, spiritual impurity. What distinguishes one idol-worshipper from another? The answer is that while externally the Jews may not have displayed a spiritual demeanor that would merit *Krias Yam Suf*, their inner being, their *penimius*, was inherently holy.