

And Bnei Yisrael shall come into the midst of the sea on dry land. (14:16)

The *Tosefta Berachos* 4:16 teaches that when the *Shevatim*, Tribes, came to the banks of the Red Sea, they stopped; a discussion ensued concerning which one was not going in first. Each tribe pushed the “honors” of entering the water onto someone else. Finally, *Shevet Yehudah* took the initiative by rising to the occasion and jumping in. They all followed after him. We wonder why the people refused to enter the water. *Am Yisrael* is a nation in which *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice for Hashem, is part of their DNA. Throughout the generations, we have never restrained ourselves from a willingness to die for Hashem. *Kiddush Hashem*, the ability to sanctify Hashem’s Name through self-sacrifice, was almost a way of life in Europe, a continent whose soil has been soaked with Jewish blood. Why then, of all times, did the people refrain from listening to Hashem?

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that had the Jews been commanded to give up their lives by entering the water, they would have jumped at the opportunity. They would not have held back for a minute. Now, however, they were being instructed to enter the water – and live! This was a different situation. To enter the raging waters as if one were walking on dry land requires an incredibly high level of faith. The Tribes had not yet arrived there. To die for Hashem – they were ready. To enter a raging, stormy sea and feel that one is taking a walk on the beach is more than that generation was capable of processing.

This, explains the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is the underlying meaning of Hashem’s tribute to the Jewish people. *Zocharti lach chesed ne’urayich... lechteich Acharai bamidbar b’eretz lo zerua*. “I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth... how you followed Me in a wildness in unsown land” (*Yirmiyah* 2:2).

The emphasis should be placed on the *lechteich Acharai*, “How you followed Me.” They were following Hashem. The fact that they were traveling through a bitter, desolate wilderness is of no consequence, because they did not sense the bitterness or the desolation. They were following Hashem. Nothing else mattered. This is very much like an infant being held in its mother’s embrace. He or she has no regard to the circumstances which surround it. As long as his/her mother holds the infant, the child is unaware of anything else. This is the true meaning of trust in the Almighty.

Horav Yosef Hochgelernter, zl, author of the *Mishnas Chachamim*, explains that this is the reason we shut our eyes -- or cover them -- when we recite *Shema Yisrael*. When we declare our faith in Hashem, we do not need to see anything. We need no support in our faith. We trust only in Hashem.