

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

The *Midrash (Socheir Tov 114)* states that the waters of the Red Sea split when they saw *arono shel Yosef*, the coffin of Yosef, which was being transported to *Eretz Yisrael* for burial. At first, the waters remained in place, despite the presence of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Aharon *HaKohen* and all of *Klal Yisrael*. Only after the waters took note of the presence of Yosef's coffin did they "agree" to split. David *HaMelech* immortalized this *tete-a-tete* in *Tehillim* (114:3), *Hayam raah va'yanoss*, "The sea saw and fled." "What did the sea see? It saw *arono shel Yosef*." What was it about Yosef's coffin that motivated the sea to "acquiesce" to change the course of nature?

The *Ksav Sofer* (quoted by *Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl*) offers an insightful explanation. The *sar shel yam*, the angel in charge of the sea, was not prepared for the change in nature which Hashem had set in motion during Creation. He asked, "Why should I split the sea? Should nature be changed just because *Klal Yisrael* is in danger? Should they go to war with the Egyptians and be allowed to win?" Why change *maaseh Bereishis*, an act of Creation?

At first glance, the angel's argument is quite sensible and practical. Moshe, however, countered that the Jewish people, having been "guests" of the Egyptians during the hunger that occurred at the time of Yaakov *Avinu*, could not be ingrates and make war with the Egyptians. A debt of gratitude is a firm and demanding responsibility, regardless of the character of the benefactor.

The angel asked, "Who is to say that *Klal Yisrael* is unable to fight due to a compelling debt of gratitude owed to the Egyptians? Perhaps they are simply too lazy to fight." His attitude changed as soon as he saw Yosef's *aron*. He now had clear, unabashed proof that gratitude played an overwhelming role in Jewish life. How was this evinced from Yosef?

The *Ramban* asks why Yosef was forced to run (like a guilty person) from Potifar's wife? He could have easily overpowered her and taken back his garment. He had no reason to run and leave his garment in her hands. All this achieved was to make him appear as if he were an intruder with unholy intentions who had been caught red-handed. *Ramban* explains that he could not make her appear as the evil aggressor (that she was), because he was grateful to her for the hospitality she had shown him when she welcomed him into her home.

We see now why Yosef's *aron* (or, rather, Yosef) made such an impression on the angel. Yosef could have easily maintained his pristine reputation by smearing Potifar's wife and exposing her for the immoral woman that she was. What prevented him from doing this was his sense of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. The angel now desisted, because he saw that the Jewish people adhere strongly to *hakoras hatov*. It is part of their natural heritage, a legacy passed on through the generations. Thus, he "allowed" nature to be altered via the splitting of the Red Sea.