

Hashem said to Moshe, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, and the water will go back over Egypt. (14:26)

Upon perusing the narrative surrounding the splitting of the Red Sea, we are confronted with a difficulty. Why did Hashem involve Moshe? Why was his participation in the splitting necessary? Hashem smote the Egyptian firstborn by Himself: no messenger, no angel. Why should this be different? In this situation, we find Hashem instructing Moshe to raise up his staff and stretch out his hand over the sea, so that it would split. Undoubtedly, it was Hashem Who split the sea. Why then was Moshe involved? *Horav Nissim Yagen, zl*, explains that herein lies a profound insight. If we were to ask a simple person “Who is greater, a man or an angel?” the immediate reply would be, an angel. This is however not true. An angel does not possess the ability to make choices. He serves at the will of Hashem. *Bechirah chafshis*, the ability to choose freely, is not an option for an angel. An angel can neither build nor destroy. He does what he is told to do. He is an agent Who does not act of his own volition.

A person, however, may do what he wants. He can do the right thing or act inappropriately. He can build and destroy, give life and, Heaven forbid, take life. He has the G-d- given ability to do what he wants, act as he pleases. An angel is an agent; a man is free. Hashem could easily split the sea and have the Jews walk through on dry land. He wanted, however, to demonstrate to all the world and for all posterity the *koach*, power, of a *tzaddik*, righteous Jew. The entire structure of (what we call) nature shuddered from Moshe. Thus, Hashem told Moshe, “You do not require My assistance. You can go at it alone. You can raise your staff and split the sea!” When Moshe came to the banks of the Red Sea, the *saro shel Yam*, angel in charge of the sea, confronted Moshe and challenged him. He did not want the sea to split. He contended, “You carry out the will of Hashem, as do I. Hashem’s will is that the sea should remain whole, with its current running consistently. It should not be altered. Why should I listen to you?”

It was a standstill between Moshe and the angel until the angel saw *arono shel Yosef*, the coffin of Yosef *HaTzaddik*. At that point, Hashem intervened and declared, *Yanuss mipnei ha’nass*, “Let it (the sea) run from the one (Yosef) who ran (from the wife of Potifar).” When the sea (itself) perceived how a young, handsome man did not fall prey to the blandishments of Potifar’s wife, a woman who had done everything within her ability to entice the young Yosef into a sinful liaison, it was reasonably impressed. This brought the sea to make a powerful observation: *Tzaddikim*, the righteous, have the ability to control/lord over nature. If Yosef was able to alter the natural proclivity toward this woman, to rise above his natural desires and quell his urge to be with her, then it (the sea) could override its “nature” and split itself for the Jews. Thus, Hashem had Moshe raise his staff over the sea in order to demonstrate that a *tzaddik* who is *mosheil b’rucho*, rules over his spirit, has the power to “dry up” the Red Sea. From this instance, future generations learn to appreciate the power of a *tzaddik*.