

The Song of the Well

By Aharon Loschak

An eager young man was driving to an interview for an exciting new job when he realized that he was just barely going to make it on time. Frantically pulling into the parking lot of the large corporate office building, he was dismayed to see not a single parking spot available.

“G-d, I need you here! Please, make something open up quick so I won’t be late to my appointment,” he thought to himself. “If You make something work right now oh L-rd, I’ll give a large donation as soon as I get out,” he pledged.

Just then, to his great relief, a car pulled out of a spot up ahead. He looked upwards and said, “Forget it G-d, the donation is canceled. I figured it out myself!”

Of course it’s ridiculous, but the truth is, we all do this at some point.

Can we do better?

Of course.

Another Song in the Desert

This week’s parshah tells of a dramatic song the people sang in the desert, but unlike its twin at the Red Sea, this one is far less known and much shorter; in fact, it’s only four verses long.

Then Israel sang this song:

Ascend, O well, sing to it!

A well dug by princes, carved out by nobles of the people, through the lawgiver with their staffs, and from the desert, a gift.

From the gift to the streams, and from the streams to the heights.

From the heights to the valley in the field of Moab, at the top of the peak that overlooks the wastelands.¹

It’s all very poetic, but what exactly happened that inspired them to burst into this serenade? The verses don’t actually tell us, so we rely on the Midrash² to fill in the details. Long story short, the lands of Ammon and Moab were elevated on two sides of a gorge. The Israelites passed through these lands, seemingly without mishap, but that definitely wasn’t the Ammonites’ plan: they were hiding out in caves in the mountains, waiting to ambush the unassuming travelers as they passed through.

But G-d had other plans. As nature had it, there were protrusions on the mountains of one side that perfectly aligned with clefts on the other. So, just before the people passed through, the mountains miraculously moved towards one another, turning the clefts into a mass graveyard for the Ammonites crushed inside. By the time the Israelites arrived, all they saw was one clear mountaintop road to travel upon, totally unaware that beneath them were buried Ammonite corpses.

So how did they find out about this event?

The Midrash³ tells us that after they had passed through, the well referenced in the song washed up the dead bodies from below and brought them to the surface for the Israelites to see. Only then did they realize their close brush with death and how G-d had miraculously saved them.

And so, they burst into song.

Why Now?

Quite the story indeed. But why did this miracle specifically earn a song of praise? After all, the people experienced many miracles in the desert; from the *manna* to the many wars impossibly won, to the very clouds of glory protecting them. Why did this miracle in particular warrant such heartfelt joy?

Blissfully Unaware

There is something different about this miracle. Think about how the people discovered it—they didn't even know it had happened until after the fact.

Imagine that: They walked over a gorge minding their own business, blissfully unaware that just moments before, an existential threat lay waiting to pounce and destroy them.

Contrast this to any other miracle they experienced. Sure, G-d came through each time, but they were aware of trouble afoot. This time, however, they walked right over the lions' den without even knowing the lions had been there seconds before!

Now *that's* something special. *That* warrants an inspired song for the ages.

I've Got Your Back

As our ancestors sang back then, so can we today.

Many have this notion that "trusting in G-d" in any real way is reserved for those big moments in life when it's *really* necessary, be it a tragedy, a terrific opportunity, or a deep personal challenge. That's when you must resort to faith and place your trust in G-d that all will be well.

But every day? Nah, there's no need to get anxious and/or preachy. On a regular Wednesday morning, when the sun is shining, you're on time for work, you greet your friends with a smile, and breakfast actually tastes

good, well, what's wrong? G-d is certainly a factor, but everything is just fine, so let's get on with it.

The song of the well teaches us that G-d is always there—even when we don't know that we need Him.

Think of all those typical Wednesday mornings when the kids wake up and fight like usual and then go off to school, the eggs cook right, and the weather is almost tolerable? How many times do you go to bed late, wake up on time, cross the street, go to the store, actually pay your bills—and all without a hiccup? Sure, the bill you couldn't pay and the time you almost got hit by a car (G-d forbid) may stand out in your memory, but those are the exceptions. The vast majority of the time those very same things went without a hitch.

Do you know who has your back each and every time? That's right: G-d. Every day, He's looking after you, making sure you can rack up regular moments like finding a parking spot without fuss.

Take pause, notice the blessing, and cherish the peaceful moments that G-d has given you, and you too can sing the Song of the Well.⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. Numbers 21:17-20.
2. Cited in Rashi to Numbers 21:15.
3. Cited in Rashi to v. 16.
4. This essay is based on Likkutei Sichot, vol. 23, pp. 148–156.

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