



TOWARDS MEANINGFUL

TEFILLA

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Az Yashir

After the introduction of *ויברך דוד*, we dive right into *אז ישיר*, the song of praise sung by Moshe and the entire Jewish people after they witness the Kriyat Yam Suf. It is a beautifully organized song, consisting of 4 stanzas with a chorus in between each stanza.

Stanza #1 – General Praise

The first stanza consists of general praise to Hashem as a mighty savior who fights wars against His enemies. *אשירה לה' כי גאה* - *I will sing to Hashem for He is mighty exalted... Hashem is my strength and song, He is my salvation.* We describe Hashem as an *איש מלחמה*, a man of war. Finally we conclude with a chorus. Each chorus in this song uses repetition to praise Hashem. *ימינך ה' נאדרת בכח / ימינך ה' תרעץ אויב* *Your right hand Hashem is glorious in power. Your right hand Hashem dashes in pieces the enemy.*

Stanza #2 – Specific Praise

After the general introduction in stanza 1, we can move on to specifically describe Hashem's miraculous forces at Kriyat Yam Suf. *וברוח אפיך נערמו מים נצבו כמו יד נזלים* - *With the blast of Your nostrils, the water*

was piled up, the liquids stood upright like a heap. We describe the overconfidence of the Egyptians - *אמר אויב ארדף אשיג אחלק שאל...* - *The enemy said, "I will chase and I will catch up, I will divide the spoils, I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them"*. But despite their determination, Hashem proved them wrong. *נשפת ברוחך כסמו ים צללו בעופרת במים* - *He blew with His wind and the sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters.* We conclude with another repetitive chorus of praise - *מי כמכה באלם ה' / מי כמכה נאדר בקדש* - *Who is like You Hashem among the mighty, Who is like You glorious in Kedusha?*

Stanza #3 – Impact on the World

Beyond the immediate result of saving Bnei Yisrael, the miracle of Kriyat Yam Suf had an impact on the entire world. *שקעו עמים ירנזון חיל אחז ישבי פלשת...* *The people heard and they trembled, shivering has overtaken the inhabitants of Plishti...the inhabitants of Canaan were melted away.* A great fear fell over the entire world, an understanding that it would not be wise to mess with Bnei Yisrael because their G-d is all-powerful. We conclude this section with yet another repetitive chorus, in which we explain that the people were so scared that they could not even move *עד יעבר עמך ה' / עד יעבר עם זו קניח* - *until Your nation passed Hashem,*

until the nation that Your acquired passed.

Stanza #4 – Impact on the Future

Here we discuss how this great miracle will impact on the future. As a result of Kriyat Yam Suf and the fear that was instilled into the entire world, we will be able enter into Eretz Yisrael and conquer it, and eventually build the Beit Hamikdash. תְּבָאֵמוּ וְתִשְׁעֵמוּ... מִקֶּדֶשׁ ה' כֹּנְנֵנוּ יְיָיִךְ. – *You will bring them in and plant them... Your hand will establish the mikdash.* In addition, this event paves the way for the entire world to recognize Hashem and proclaim ה' יִקְלֶךְ לְעֹלָם וָעַד - *Hashem will rule forever and ever!*

Finally, we conclude with a summary paragraph, in which we repeat the details of the miracle in brief.

This is indeed a beautiful song but the obvious question is - why does it specifically belong in our daily Tefilla? I think the answer might not relate so much to the specific miracle itself. After all, Hashem performed many amazing miracles. Why should we single this one out? But here we can learn more from the reaction of the people. How does one respond when experiencing Hashem's greatness? Az Yashir serves as the prototype for how to view and react to the events around us.

Let's see how.

The Mechilta (15:1) lists 10 songs from the beginning of creation until the end of Tanach. Az Yashir is one of them. How does the midrash define what is considered to be a שירה? When a person reaches a certain

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level of understanding of the world, when they have a flash of insight that makes them realize how all the pieces of life fall into place, then they are able to sing שירה. After Kriyat Yam Suf, Bnei Yisrael finally understood their situation. The Mechilta writes that at this point, even a maid had a higher level of nevu'a than the prophet Yechezkel. In a burst of clarity, everyone finally understood Hashem's plan – their suffering, the tricking of Paroh in order to cause him to chase them, the helplessness they felt when they were stuck. They realized that Hashem has a master plan. He orchestrates all of the events in the world with clarity and precision. When they sang Az Yashir, Bnei Yisrael used each stanza to go a little further in explaining Hashem's ingenuity. They began with overall praise for Hashem's strength, continued to the specifics of this unbelievable miracle, went on to discuss how Hashem's actions impacted on the world at large, and how those same actions will guide the course of history in the future.

By including אַז יִשִּׁיר in our davening, we are reminding ourselves daily of the correct perspective of looking out at the world. When we watch events unfold before our eyes, we need to firstly take note of Hashem's hand behind the scenes. We then need to try and recognize the depth of the impact of these events, to think about how every incident that Hashem orchestrates has a ripple effect in so many different ways on so many different people. We can't always understand Hashem's actions right away but if we look at Kriyat Yam Suf as a prototype, we can be confident that every single event in the past and future are all meticulously crafted as part of Hashem's masterplan. In this way, we can look at everything that happens to us on a daily basis and every thing that occurs in current events with a sense of clarity and awe, and be able to praise Hashem with the same type of heartfelt שירה. This is indeed a valuable message to embed into our daily Tefilla.

— *Cut and paste into your siddur* — — — — —



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