

## **SEVEN STATIONS FROM THE REED SEA TO MOUNT SINAI - THE COMMON POINT**

By: **A.B. - SAMARITAN NEWS SERVICES 2011**

The Israelite Samaritan tradition has a counting of seven stations for the People of Israel in the Sinai Desert, and its sub-deserts, on their way from the Reed Sea to Mount Sinai. However, these seven stations were seven events that happened within and between these stations and the next station: The Reed Sea, Marrah, in the Desert of Shor, Elim, the Desert of Sin, Rephidim, in front of the war hill with Amalak, and in front of Mount Sinai.

Pharaoh and the elite of his army [that were called the chosen of his generals] were defeated and destroyed in the Reed Sea, with their army and their chariots which drowned in the sea. The Almighty split the sea and made the water to form two walls on each side, and between them the people of Israel passed through on dry land, when the army of Egypt was chasing after them. However they were fast enough to cross the sea before the army of Pharaoh captured them. There is a known disagreement between Torah seekers and its scholars as to whether Pharaoh also drowned with his army in the Reed Sea. The greatest sage of the Samaritans, Marqeh, of the 4th century did not leave any doubt that Pharaoh was also drowned. Yes, the written text in the Torah is a little bit unclear when the text describes in the Song of the Sea and the previous chapter about the chariot of Pharaoh that drowned in the water, but not precisely about him. The ancient tradition that Marqeh mentioned contained Pharaoh between the casualties, not only the chariot of Pharaoh and his army but also he himself drowned in the sea. "Pharaoh and his men, you have drowned in the Reed Sea," said the poet Marqeh. Nothing was left from the 600 chariots that Pharaoh brought with him, not even one. And the people of Israel went out of Egypt proud, in front of the Egyptians, and this vision of the people of Israel arriving at the west shore of the sea without any casualties was also the last vision that the army of Egypt saw before the water of the sea covered them and their chariots and drowned them.

Due to the distance of time of all seven stations being between Pesach to Shavuot [the Festival of Weeks], all together 50 days, it means that in every station on average the People of Israel camped for seven days. This was exactly the same period of time that was dedicated to each of the ten plagues previous to the stations and the plague of the firstborn that marks the meeting point between the end of the plagues and the start of camping in each station. Between plague to plague was a separation of seven days, including the plague itself and the length of its strike "and seven days were fulfilled after the Almighty struck the Nile." Thus seven days separated each station from the other station adding to that the days that the People of Israel stayed on their way to the first

station to the Reed Sea when they camped in Succot in order to get back to Egypt and get the bones of Joseph. When they departed from Succot in order to bring the bones of Joseph, as he made their forefathers swear, according to the tradition they arrived at the Reed Sea on Friday and camped at the sea. They ate the Pesach in haste when they left Egypt in the evening, three days they went until they arrived at the Reed Sea. In this short period they found the bones of Joseph, and brought them on the shoulders of the heads of the tribe of Ephraim. However Pharaoh was advised by his ministers and regretted on the permission he gave the People of Israel to exit Egypt, and decided to chase after them with the elite of his army. On Motzeh Shabbat, according to our tradition the people of Israel raised their eyes and saw the Egyptians traveling after them. The story of the big miracle that happened to them at the Reed Sea is known to all of us.

In the morning of the day after, Sunday after the first Shabbat, their first Shabbat outside of Egypt, the day that was appointed by the Almighty afterwards as the first day of the counting of the Omer they saw the corpses of the Egyptian army heroes floating on top of the water, and among them the great Pharaoh who was considered as the god of the Egyptians. They were thrilled from the miracle and believed in the Almighty and his slave, Moses. Yes, they were armed when they went out of Egypt with weapons that they borrowed from the Egyptians, but despite their numerical advantage over the little army that Pharaoh brought they had a lack of military experience in comparison to Pharaoh's army. They had no other choice but to wait for the salvation of the Almighty, a salvation that was provided to them by a strong hand and outstretched arm of the Almighty.

From the Reed Sea, after they recovered from the great visions, they followed Moses the great prophet that knew the desert from his long sixty-year stay within it. As a result of that, he became the first travel guide in the history that we know from the history itself. They walked for three days in the desert and arrived to the next station, Marrah in the Desert of Shor, one of the deserts of Sinai. The place is called Marrah because of its bitter water that was not drinkable. The thirst made them forget all about the miracle of the Reed Sea and the people were shouting at Moses "what are we going to drink!" And it was as though the miracle was ordered at that moment, less important in comparison to the miracle at the Reed Sea, but in the eyes of the thirsty who feel they are dying from thirst the sweetening of the water was for them a huge miracle. The people drank until satisfied. The poor bread, the fruits and the vegetables that they brought from Egypt were hardly enough for them now before they would be spoiled and be inedible.

From Marrah they moved to the third station, Elim. In Elim there were twelve wells and seventy palm trees. Our tradition sees those numbers hinting about the twelve tribes and the seventy sages, two institutions that were established in the second year of leaving Egypt. This station was marked by a double miracle. The people were great in number, around 2 million individuals, including 600,000 individual men at the age to be in the army. Notice how all these peoples broke their hunger and thirst only from 70 palm trees and 12 wells of water. No rivers, no brooks, and not even streams - but the minimal expression as a source of water, wells. The miracle was doubled by the fact that they have dates to eat in a season that has no dates because this juicy fruit is ready only at the beginning of autumn, at the seventh month of the year, and they were only at the end of

the first month after leaving Egypt. This was the miracle, dates to eat in the beginning of spring.

The People of Israel continued on their journey and arrived, following Moses to the Desert of Sin, one of the deserts of Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month from the leaving of Egypt. The long journey from Elim to the Desert of Sin made them tired and hungry. The dates that they picked and put in their bags were gone. They could not stand the gnawing hunger. Again the last miracle was forgotten. They shouted at Moses and Aaron to give them bread to eat and meat to be sated. The Almighty never ceased from His responsibility to them. He sent down from the sky quails to be sated and the manna, bread from the sky, to eat. This is the opportunity to learn from Moses the value of Shabbat, the need to take rest, and to collect food that will be enough for two days, Friday and Shabbat.

There is no place here to talk about the manna, we wrote about this subject enough in past issues. It seems as though the people of Israel got used to miracles, but still every discomfort caused them to doubt the existence of the Almighty and to describe in unreal ways their living in Egypt. This stress was the best opportunity to encourage the existence of a group of inciters, among them that doubted the leadership of Moses, and like it is the way of inciters that they preferred the lie over the reality, they described their days of stay in Egypt as truly a paradise. These inciters always found and will find an open ear by those in which their spirit is short and their belief is very little. These inciters will always trust the short memory of the people. In reality those who were seated in Egypt next to the pots of meat and ate bread to be sated were the Egyptian employers and not them.

This is why they again found themselves very thirsty when they arrived in Refidim. But again the miracle was waiting for them. Moses struck the rock and brought out water for them, enough to gain power to be prepared for the next experience. In the next station, also in Refidim, before the big hill in which Aaron, Moses and Hur climbed to the top to watch from there the war of Joshua and the people of Israel in Amalak. This was a war between wanderers. The will of the survival of the people of Israel caused them to better use the weapons that they brought from Egypt and the Reed Sea. Although many of them were killed in the war, because of their lack of experience in comparison to the organized tribe of wanderers that the Amalakites were, this fact does not reduce from the potency of the miracle. Its beginning was watching Moses, the great leader, sitting on the big stone upon the hill and his hands raised up and supported by the hands of Aaron and Hur. These arms of victory was the miracle that encouraged the win over Amalak and its people and to destroy them by the sword in the fight that continued from sunrise to sunset. The fight and the victory established them to be stronger and more united people who for the first time fought for themselves, led by Joshua ben Nun, in which this fight marked him as the next leader after Moses. Until the present day Samaritan women wear red as a memory to the blood shed by Israelite fighters of Amalak.

Sated of miracles and war, the people became deserving of the best miracle of all, the miracle of giving them the Torah on Mount Sinai, the seventh station. They deserved at

that point in time to receive the commandments that came to distinguish them in contrast to other nations by the belief in one God, the keeping of Shabbat, and honoring the parents. All of those that they were not killing, not coveting, not stealing property and souls, deserve to receive the words of God, in which at the end the word of God will be heard and his offering will be received from over his altar in the chosen place, Mount Gerizim, that commandment of which the lack of it is very prominently noticed in the Jewish Masoretic text.

So what is the common point to all of these stations that the people of Israel travelled to in the fifty days until they received the commandment at Mount Sinai? In each place they are begging and receiving by great miracles, of what they ask for. The asking and the receiving are the common point that make together the giant miracles of splitting the Reed Sea before them with the recognition of them as a chosen people that deserve to receive the Torah.

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