

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps  
Torah Portion: *Bo*

***OUR PART ON THE ROAD TO FREEDOM***

היה ר"מ אומר: כשעמדו ישראל על הים, היו שבטים מנצחים זה עם זה, זה אומר אני יורד תחלה לים וזה אומר אני יורד תחלה לים, קפץ שבטו של בנימין וירד לים תחילה, שנאמר: שם בנימין צעיר רודם, אל תקרי רודם אלא רד ים, והיו שרי יהודה רוגמים אותם, שרי יהודה שנאמר: רגמתם, לפיכך זכה בנימין הצדיק ונעשה אושפיזין לגבורה, שנאמר: ובין כתפיו שכן

אמר לו רבי יהודה: לא כך היה מעשה, אלא זה אומר אין אני יורד תחילה לים וזה אומר אין אני יורד תחילה לים, קפץ נחשון בן עמינדב וירד לים תחילה, לפיכך זכה יהודה לעשות משלה בישראל,

1) It was taught that Rabbi Meir said: When the Israelites stood at the Sea of Reeds, the tribes were vying with one another. One said: "I will be the first to go down to the sea." The other said "I will be the first." As they stood arguing, the tribe of Benjamin sprang forward and went down first into the sea. At that, the princes of Judah began throwing stones at them.

For [showing such initiative], Benjamin won the honor of becoming a host to God.

[AVODAH Commentary: the Holy of Holies, the central part of the Temple in Jerusalem, was built on land belonging to the tribe of Benjamin.]

Rabbi Yehudah said to Rabbi Meir: That's not quite the way it happened. In fact, one tribe said: "I will not be the first to go down into the sea," and another said, "Well, I'm not going to be the first." While they were standing there arguing, Nahshon ben Aminadav [from the tribe of Judah] sprang forward and was the first Israelite to enter the sea.

Because of Nahshon's initiative, Judah won the honor of [becoming a host to God as well as] rulership of all the tribes.

[AVODAH Commentary: Except for the tiny strip of land upon which the Holy of Holies was built, the rest of the Temple stood on land that belonged to the tribe of Judah. Moreover, the Kings of Israel were descendants of this tribe.]

[*Sotah* 36b-37a]

וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּתוֹךְ הַיָּם בַּיַּבֵּשָׁה וְהַמַּיִם לָהֶם חֹמָה מִיְמִינָם וּמִשְׂמָאלָם:

2) *And the Children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon dry ground (Ex. 14:22)*

What does this verse mean? If they went into the sea, then why does it say *upon dry ground*? And if they walked upon dry ground, why does it say *into the midst of the sea*?

This teaches that the sea was not split for them until they stepped into it, indeed until the water reached up to their noses. Only then did the passage become dry land. [*Sb'mot Rabbah* 21:10]

**QUESTION:** According to these teachings, what is the role of human initiative in the liberation of the Israelites from slavery? How much is any single person responsible for starting a movement toward liberation?