

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וארא

לכן אמר לבני ישראל אני ה' והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים והצלתי אתכם מעבדתם וגאלתי אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים

“Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments” (6:6)

The Torah Temima cites the well-known explanation given by many commentaries that the four cups of wine which we drink at the Seder on Pesach correspond to the four "expressions of redemption" that Hashem uses in this parsha. He asks: Why should we drink four cups for the four phrases? There was only one redemption, no matter how many ways one can describe it?!

He answers that these four expressions are more than just eloquent ways of describing the exodus. Rather, they each refer to a different level of redemption, each one greater than the next. The first expression, "I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt," implies that Hashem would alleviate the burden of the work and make it easier but would not completely end it. The second expression, "I shall rescue you from their service," refers to a cessation of the rigorous labor but the Jews would still be servants of Pharaoh. The third expression, "I shall redeem you," indicates that the Jews would gain their complete freedom from Egypt. However, this emancipation does not guarantee them any special status. The fourth expression, "I shall take you to Me for a people," is a promise that the Jewish people will become the nation of Hashem.

Thus, each of the four expressions shows the progressive steps of redemption that Hashem performed for the Jewish nation. Each of these phases of redemption was an additional kindness on the part of Hashem and therefore each expression representing these phases deserves a cup of thanksgiving dedicated to it at the Seder, when we celebrate our exodus from Egypt. In fact, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:1) gives a slightly different explanation of the reason behind the four cups. It states that the four cups correspond to the four redemptions, rather than the four expressions of redemption, thus supporting this answer.

The Torah Temima continues: Why is there no fifth cup corresponding to "I shall bring you to the land," the fifth expression of redemption? To say that Eretz Yisrael is not an integral part of the redemption is not a sufficient answer because the fourth expression, their status as the chosen people, was also not necessarily part of the exodus and yet does have a corresponding cup. Instead, he answers that it would be inappropriate to raise a cup of thanksgiving for Eretz Yisrael at a time when we are in exile. Perhaps this is why we have a fifth cup dedicated to Eliyahu HaNavi, the prophet who will be the herald of Moshiach. This symbolic cup reminds us why we do not drink a fifth cup dedicated to Hashem's gift of Eretz Yisrael.

ויקה עמרם את יוכבד דדתו לו לאשה ותלד לו את אהרן ואת משה ושני חיי עמרם שבע ושלשים ומאת שנה

“Amram took Yocheved his aunt as a wife, and she bore him Aharon and Moshe; the years of Amram's life were a hundred and thirty-seven years” (6:20)

Why does the Torah take the time to repeat the lineage of Moshe and Aharon? R' Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that often a leader with great power will be respected to such a degree that people will begin to worship the leader and lose sight of the fact that the leader is no more than a messenger. In order to prevent the deification of Moshe, the Torah reminds us that he was born to a mother and father just like everyone else and was just a messenger of Hashem. In fact, Rav Hirsch writes, "We all know of a certain Jew, in later times, whose genealogical record was *not* available, and *because* it was not available, and because he brought people a few sparks of light borrowed from the *man* Moshe, he came to be considered by the nations as begotten of God; to doubt his divinity became a capital crime. *Our* Moshe was human, remained human, and will never be anything but human."

We can also see from here that a regular person, born from a mother and a father, can also have tremendous potential and can even reach the level that Moshe Rabbeinu attained. The Torah attempts to show us just how high we can go. The Torah shows us this in order to remove any excuses based on our human frailties. Because of the example set by Moshe, if we do not make the decision to perfect ourselves to become as great as we can possibly become, there is a legitimate complaint against us. However, if we do make the effort, Hashem will help us, as Chazal say, "If one attempts to purify himself, he is given assistance." Hashem has given us the free choice to make the right decision and to do the right thing. The path that we will choose is not predestined. We can make what we want of our lives. The choice is ours and ours alone.

[Perhaps Rav Hirsch also refers to this in his comparison to other religions. Christianity is based upon the doctrine of original sin, upon the concept of the innate deficiencies of mankind and their inability to reach spiritual greatness. Therefore, their "great leader" had to be Godlike. He could not have been human because no man born from men could have reached such a high level nor performed the great deeds that they perceive he did. Judaism, however, has a completely opposite view of the nature of man. The Torah teaches us that man is innately virtuous and desires to do what is right and cling to Hashem. The sin of Adam HaRishon did not change this. We have the capacity to choose to be good and to live a life of virtue, a life that we know to be one of Torah and mitzvos. Because of this truth, our great leader, Moshe Rabbeinu was a man, physically and genetically no different than each and every one of us. Our leader does not represent unattainable heights. Our leader represents a level that we can see, a level that is visible to us and that we can reach if we try hard enough. Our leader is an example to follow, not an aberration to marvel at. Moshe is "Rabbeinu," our teacher, both in word and by example. Let us resolve to follow Moshe's example and try to emulate him as best we can. - Michael Gutmann]

ויקח אהרן את אלישבע בת עמינדב אחות נחשון לו לאשה ותלד לו את נדב ואת אביהוא את אלעזר ואת איתמר

“Aharon took Elisheva daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon, as a wife; and she bore him Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar” (6:23)

A name is an important part of a person. Each individual's name contains his task in life and a guidebook for him to follow. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch relates the word "sheim," "name," to the word "sham," "there." The name of an object or person assigns it to its role in the world, to its place in the great universal task of advancing the name of Hashem in the world. Nadav, the son of Aharon, understood this. His name means "a donation." However, he was so zealous in fulfilling the purpose that his name designated for him that he went too far. His fatal mistake was that he brought a donation that was beyond what Hashem wanted. Despite the fact that he was a tzadik, his zealousness led him a bit too far.

It is important for one to analyze his name, as well as his natural gifts, talents and tendencies, and discover what unique abilities he has that can be used in the service of Hashem. However, in doing so, one must ensure that he is doing the right thing and not go overboard. Each person has great potential, but that potential can be misused. Nadav teaches us both the importance of a name and the importance of following it within the boundaries provided by Hashem.

הוא אהרן ומשה אשר אמר ה' להם הוציאו את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים על צבאתם
“He is Aharon and Moshe to whom Hashem said: Take the Children of Israel out of Egypt according to their legions” (6:26)

Why does the posuk say "he is Aharon and Moshe" rather than the more logical formulation of "they are Aharon and Moshe?" The answer is that Moshe and Aharon worked as a team, in unity. Their mandate was to work together and they fulfilled their task to the point that they were as one. They each had their own task but they blended their tasks together and worked in tandem. This is the lesson that the Torah teaches us by referring to Moshe and Aharon as a single entity. Whenever a person works with other people, the goal that a person must strive toward is to be considered as one. This ideal can be applied to marriage, as well as to all other interpersonal relationships. Moshe and Aharon were successful because they made an effort to

complement one another. The key to successful teamwork is to aim to be one.

וידעו מצרים כי אני ה' בנטתי את ידי על מצרים והוצאתי את בני ישראל מתוכם
“And Egypt shall know that I am Hashem, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt; and I shall take the Children of Israel out from among them” (7:5)

Why does the posuk say that Hashem will remove the Bnei Yisrael “from their midst,” instead of “from Mitzrayim?” The Meshech Chochma explains that Hashem not only needed to physically remove them from Mitzrayim, but mentally as well. He had to erase their Egyptian mentality and outlook on life and transform them into a holy nation. They needed to be taken out from the ideology of Egypt, from the foreign philosophy that had taken root within them. The message that the plagues proclaimed, the portrayal of Hashem as the sole Ruler of the world, was directed to the Jews as well as to the Egyptians. Upon seeing the wonder of the plagues and how they were unaffected by them, the people were to recognize that Hashem was the one and only God and that they should dedicate themselves to him. This is why they had to wait forty-nine days after leaving Mitzrayim before receiving the Torah. In Mitzrayim, the Jews had become wallowed in the depths of the forty-nine levels of impurity and needed forty-nine days of purification to counteract the effects of living in Egypt for many years.

כי ידבר אלכם פרעה לאמר תנו לכם מופת ואמרת אל אהרן קח את מטך והשלך לפני פרעה יהי לתנין
“When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying: Provide a wonder for yourselves, you shall say to Aharon: Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh - it will become a serpent” (7:9)

When Aharon threw his staff before Pharaoh, it turned into a snake. When he picked it up, it reverted to its original form as a staff. R' Meir Shapiro explains the symbolism of the sign of the snake. Moshe was saying to Pharaoh that despite the fact that Bnei Yisrael seemed lost and completely estranged from Torah and mitzvos, they were not completely lost. Only before Pharaoh were they poisonous because they were in the wrong surroundings. They had become influenced by the people around them and had deteriorated. However, in the hand of Aharon, they become the staff of Hashem. In the right surroundings, they would be naturally virtuous and dedicate their lives to Hashem. Yes, when thrown among Pharaoh and Egypt, they have no hope and they seem helpless. But when taken away from his domination, they regain their original form of a special people under Hashem. This is the lesson of the sign that Moshe performed. The lesson that we can take from this is that although there may be people who go wrong and deviate from the way of the Torah, it is often only because they are in the wrong surroundings. We can recognize that there is still hope for them if we can remove them from their negative surroundings. If we help them, they can revert back to their natural selves, the inner self who desires to follow Hashem.

ויאמר ה' אל משה השכם בבקר והתיצב לפני פרעה ואמרת אליו כה אמר ה' אלקי העברים שלח את עמי ויעבדני
“Hashem spoke to Moshe: Arise early in the morning and stand before Pharaoh; say to him: So said Hashem, the God of the Hebrews: Send out My people that they may serve Me” (9:13)

The Alshich writes that Pharaoh's doorway was lower than normal so that one should be forced to bow to the idol that stood opposite the doorway in Pharaoh's chamber. However, when Yaakov Avinu, Moshe and Aharon entered, the entrance miraculously became higher and they were not forced to bow before Pharaoh. This is why Hashem specifically told Moshe to "stand before Pharaoh," to inform him of the miracle that would be performed on his behalf. When a person acts in such a way that his whole life is dedicated to his beliefs, Hashem helps him and performs miracles so that he should not have to stumble along the way. Moshe and Aharon were so far removed from idol worship and therefore Hashem did a special miracle for them.