

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וארא

וידבר אלקים אל משה ויאמר אליו אני ה'

“Hashem spoke to Moshe and said to him: I am Hashem” (6:2)

Chazal say that Hashem rebuked Moshe for his complaint at the end of the previous parsha. When Hashem said that He had appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, He meant to show Moshe how the Avos had never questioned His ways. Chazal derive this from the use of the word וידבר, which indicates a harsher manner of speaking, as opposed to ויאמר, which denotes a softer tone. R' Moshe Feinstein points out that the softer speech immediately followed the rebuke. Anytime that a person is forced to speak harshly, he must follow with words of appeasement. This idea is especially important for teachers to implement when teaching their students. The best practice is to "push away with the left hand while bringing close with the right." A rebuke will only be more effective if it is accompanied by words of encouragement.

וגם הקמתי את בריתי אתם לתת להם את ארץ כנען את ארץ מגריהם אשר גרו בה
“Moreover, I established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, in which they sojourned” (6:4)

Why does the posuk say that Hashem was giving Eretz Yisrael to the Avos if it was their descendants, and not they themselves, who were going to receive the land? The gemara in Sanhedrin 90b cites this as a biblical source for the concept of Techiyas Hameisim. The Avos will indeed possess the land themselves one day. Techiyas Hameisim is a very important fundamental belief and is the thirteenth of the Rambam's principles of faith. It also holds an important place in our davening as the focus of the second beracha of our Shemone Esrei. It is important to understand that this concept is learned from the Torah and that its eventual fulfillment is nothing less than fact.

Another concept that is learned from this posuk is that the biggest gift one can give a person is to help their child. Even though the Avos were not going to Eretz Yisrael themselves, the knowledge that their children would arrive there was a blessing in their eyes. Parents want nothing more than for their children to succeed, be happy, grow and do well. Learning with a child, helping him grow, educating him and teaching him good middos are all ways in which one helps the child and really does something nice for the parents at the same time.

The Baal HaTurim comments that the word לתת has a numerical value of 830, which is the number of years that the two Batei Mikdash stood. This indicates that the value of Eretz Yisrael lies not in its physical blessings but in its spiritual wealth. The greatness of the land was that it would become the place where the Divine Presence would dwell permanently in the Bais HaMikdash. Even today, when we do not have a physical house where Hashem's presence rests, we should remember that Eretz Yisrael continues to be a place where one can feel closer to Hashem. It is this characteristic that makes Eretz Yisrael special. A trip to Eretz Yisrael is more than just a vacation. It is an opportunity to grow and to take advantage of the special closeness that is available there to those who seek it.

ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לאלקים וידעתם כי אני ה' אלקיכם המוציא אתכם מתחת סבלות מצרים

“And I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you; and you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt” (6:7)

The Meshech Chochma says that the Jews did not change the characteristics that identified them as a unique nation throughout the exile because they constantly hoped for their salvation and nationhood. The key to the redemption in Egypt was that they remained distinct from the nations around them. It is the maintenance of this distinction that will lead to our future redemption as well. Therefore, Chazal symbolized these expressions of redemption through the four cups of wine that we drink on Pesach. Wine is symbolic of this separation because of the halacha that wine which was touched by a gentile cannot be used. The gemara in Avoda Zara 36b teaches that this rabbinic law (called "stam yainam") was enacted in order to prevent association with gentiles and intermarriage. Since drinking wine was often a social activity, wine touched by a gentile was forbidden so that social interaction with gentiles would be limited. The Midrash in Esther records that when Haman told Achashveirosh that the Jews had different laws, he illustrated his point by saying that if the king would touch a cup of wine, the Jews would not drink it and would wash the cup thoroughly before even using it again. Wine is the symbol of how we enforce our separation from the other nations of the world. When we commemorate our exodus from Egypt at the seder, we do so with wine, which reminds us why we deserved to be redeemed then and how we can merit to be redeemed now once again.

**והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ אשר נשאתי את ידי לתת אתה לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב
ונתתי אתה לכם מורשה אני ה'**

“I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov; and I shall give it to you as a heritage - I am Hashem” (6:8)

Rabbeinu Bachye notes that the word מורשה refers to something that one gives over to another. This is a hint that the people leaving Egypt would not enter Eretz Yisrael. They would not inherit it themselves but they would bequeath it to their children. The Torah is also referred to as a מורשה (Devarim 33:4) because we are responsible to transmit it to the next generation. It is both the "Torah that Moshe commanded us," but at the same time it remains a "heritage for the congregation of Yaakov," for future generations. It is the responsibility of every person to ensure that the Torah is passed on to the next generation. We cannot be satisfied by the fact that we keep the Torah ourselves, but we must also feel obligated to provide for the continuity of the Torah. Jewish continuity is a big problem today because we find that there are many families who neglect to pass their Jewish heritage on to their children. This break in tradition happens, for the most part, because of intermarriage. In Ahava Rabba, we ask Hashem to give us the ability "to learn and to teach." Torah study is of great importance. However, one's learning increases in value when it is imparted to others.

**ויבא משה ואהרן אל פרעה ויעשו כן כאשר צוה ה' וישלך אהרן את מטהו לפני פרעה
לפני עבדיו ויהי לתנין**

“Moshe came with Aharon to Pharaoh and they did so, as Hashem had commanded; Aharon cast down his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a snake” (7:10)

Rabbeinu Bachye explains that the first sign that Moshe performed in front of Pharaoh was specifically a snake rather than any other animal. Hashem meant to remind Pharaoh of the snake in Gan Eden which sinned with its speech and was punished accordingly. The snake

used its forked tongue to entice Chava. Pharaoh also sinned with his speech by mocking Hashem when he said "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him." Moshe showed Pharaoh that he would be punished for his words just as the snake was punished for speaking improperly. We also find elsewhere that a snake is used as punishment for inappropriate speech in order to evoke the lesson of the snake in Gan Eden. When the Jews spoke against Hashem in the wilderness, Hashem sent poisonous snakes to attack them.

The symbolism of the snake also contained other messages for Pharaoh. Just as the snake is always slithering and is never completely straight, Pharaoh always changed his mind and was never completely honest. Throughout the plagues, he would at first agree to let the Jews go but would harden his heart after the cessation of each plague. A further symbolism is that just as Aharon's staff swallowed all the other staffs, Pharaoh and his army would be swallowed by the Yam Suf.

ויצא משה מעם פרעה את העיר ויפרש כפיו אל ה' ויחדלו הקלות והברד ומטר לא נתך ארצה

“Moshe went out from Pharaoh, from the city, and he stretched out his hands to Hashem; the thunder and hail ceased and rain did not reach the ground” (9:33)

Why was it necessary for the hail to be miraculously suspended in midair at the end of the plague? R' Moshe Feinstein writes that we often take nature for granted. In order to impress upon the world that nature only runs its course because it is so decided by Hashem, it was important to show that the laws of nature can be overridden at His command. Gravity only operates as defined by Newton because Hashem decrees it to be so. This lesson is recorded in the Torah so that it is remembered for all eternity.

This idea is similar to the story in the Gemara of R' Chanina ben Dosa who told his daughter to light vinegar for her Shabbos candles when she ran out of oil. He said that Hashem, who decreed that oil should burn, also has the power to make vinegar burn. The oil itself only lights because Hashem decided that it should. How could R' Chanina ben Dosa ask for vinegar to light? We generally do not pray for miracles?! The answer is that to him, burning vinegar was no more of a miracle than burning oil. It was all equally miraculous in his eyes. Vinegar burning was just one miracle instead of another. Although we have generally become accustomed to nature running its course because we see it all the time, we should try to take a step back every once in a while and appreciate even the small things that we have come to take for granted and be thankful that they operate in the way that they do.

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