

## Parshat Va'era

By Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

According to the popular Midrash, Bnei Yisrael had fallen to the 49th level of "tumah" (spiritual impurity) in Egypt. In contrast, there appears to be no foundation for this criticism in either Parshat Shmot or Va'eyra. What is the basis for this harsh condemnation? In this week's shiur, we will discover the biblical source for this Midrashic censure. In doing so, we will not only enhance our understanding of several difficult psukim in Parshat Va'eyra, we will also arrive at a better perception of the nature of Moshe Rabeinu's "shlichut" (mission) to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt.

**BACKGROUND / REVIEW** Last week's shiur discussed the double mission which Moshe Rabeinu received at the burning bush: 1) To **INFORM** Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill His promise to the Avot, i.e. to take them to Eretz Canaan. 2) To **COMMAND** Pharaoh that he must allow Bnei Yisrael to journey into the desert and worship God.

Moshe's task to **COMMAND** Pharaoh was a 'mission' in the fullest sense of the word. It required repeated warnings, negotiations, as well as the performance of miracles. However, Moshe's task to **INFORM** Bnei Yisrael can hardly be considered a 'mission'. All Moshe needs to do is provide Bnei Yisrael with relevant information. Despite the apparent simplicity of this task, Parshat Shmot is replete with detail of precisely **WHAT** Moshe must say and **HOW** he is to relate God's message to Bnei Yisrael. Furthermore, at the beginning of Parshat Va'eyra, God instructs Moshe yet another time to inform Bnei Yisrael that He is taking them out of Mizraim: "... Therefore **TELL** Bnei Yisrael that I **AM** GOD, and I will take them out... and I will save them from their bondage... and I will bring them into the Land..." (6:6-8)

Considering that Moshe is merely providing Bnei Yisrael with information, why does God insist that Moshe restate this message?

To answer these questions, we must examine more closely the nature of Moshe's "shlichut" to Bnei Yisrael. In doing so, we will show that Moshe's mission consists of much more than him becoming the official 'fortune teller' for Bnei Yisrael.

We begin by 'painstakingly' analyzing the psukim which describe Moshe's shlichut in Parshat Shmot. This may seem a bit tedious, but as you will see, it will be well worth it. Our point of departure will be (where last week's shiur left off) the strange question that Moshe asks immediately after he receives his "shlichut" at the burning bush: "Moshe said to God: When I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you' and they ask me 'WHAT IS HIS NAME?', what shall I say to them?" (3:13) What provokes this question? Why is Moshe so sure that Bnei Yisrael will inquire as to the nature of God's Name? To appreciate Moshe's question, we will briefly review a primary theme of Sefer Breishit, namely the two covenants between God and the forefathers.

**BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM AND BRIT MILAH** God had established two covenants with Avraham Avinu, promising the Land of Israel to his offspring. Each covenant ("brit") related to a special aspect of Hashem's relationship with Am Yisrael, reflected in the two respective Divine Names - Havaya and Elokim - by which they were initiated: 1) Brit Milah (17:1-14), b'shem Elokim. 2) Brit Bein Ha'Btarim (15:1-20), b'shem Havaya.

**BRIT MILAH** "And I will fulfill My covenant with you - "I'hiyot lachem l'Elokim" - [to be your God], and for your offspring after you...and I have given you... Eretz Canaan..." (17:7-8)

This covenant (b'shem Elokim) emphasized God's special relationship with Am Yisrael on the INDIVIDUAL level, i.e. a special closeness with God, manifested through natural events. Within the framework of this covenant, Bnei Yisrael expected to return from Egypt to Eretz Canaan: When Yaakov departed Eretz Canaan to re-unite the family with Yosef in Egypt, God (b'shem Elokim) promised him that He would be WITH HIM in Egypt, make his offspring a great nation there, and ultimately bring them back (see 46:3-4). Yaakov passed this tradition on to Yosef (48:21), and later (at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit), Yosef passed this tradition to his brothers: "PAKOD YIFKOD ELOKIM etchem" God will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov" (50:24) [See shiur on Parshat Va'yigash for a complete discussion]

BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM "And He (b'shem Havaya) said to Avram: Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a LAND NOT THEIRS, and they shall be ENSLAVED and OPPRESSED ["v'avadum v'iyinu otam"], four hundred years... then I will PUNISH THE NATION THEY SHALL SERVE, and in the end, they SHALL GO FREE WITH GREAT WEALTH... on that day 'Havaya' made a covenant with Avram saying: To your offspring I assign this land..." (Breishit 15:13-20)

This covenant, b'shem Havaya, emphasized the historical aspect of the development of the NATION: its bondage in a foreign land, the punishment of its oppressor, followed by Israel's conquest ('yerusha') of the Promised Land - the land of the Cnaani, Chiti, Emori, etc. Brit Bein Ha'Btarim does not specify precisely where this foreign land is, nor when the '400 year clock' starts ticking. However, it clearly foresees a severe oppression followed by a glorious redemption including the punishment of the oppressor and the attainment of great wealth, all culminating with the conquest of the Promised Land. Within the framework of this covenant, Bnei Yisrael expected to be redeemed from their oppression in Egypt.

A FAMILY TRADITION Both these family traditions, (1) a specific one regarding returning from Egypt b'shem Elokim, and (2) a more general one regarding a miraculous redemption from bondage b'shem Havaya, were ingrained in the heart and soul of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. As both of these traditions were passed from generation to generation, it is reasonable to assume that Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were waiting for these Divine promises to be fulfilled.

BACK TO THE BURNING BUSH With this background, Moshe's question is simple - His query regarding God's Name (3:13) relates precisely to these two family traditions. He wants to know which Divine Promise is being fulfilled, i.e. will the redemption be only b'shem ELOKIM (1), within the framework of Brit Milah, (as promised to Yaakov); or will it ALSO be b'shem HAVAYA (2), within the framework of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim.

This question is not merely a technicality, it relates to the very nature of Yetziat Mitzraim: If their redemption is only b'shem Elokim (1), then Bnei Yisrael should expect a natural process ("hashgacha nisteret"), similar to the manner in which Yaakov was saved from Lavan (see Br. 31:9-13,24-29 & 48:15-16!). Furthermore, they should not expect the Egyptians to be punished, nor to receive great wealth [an important 'nafka mina' (practical difference)]. If their redemption will also be b'shem Havaya (2), then Bnei Yisrael should expect a miraculous process ("hashagacha glu'ya") including the punishment of Mitzraim, attaining great wealth, and finally the conquest of the fullest borders of the Promised Land. Knowing by which specific Name God has come to redeem His people, Moshe will understand the nature of the forthcoming redemption.

God's immediate answer appears at first to be vague: "E'heh'yeh asher e'heh'yeh" [I Will Be what I Will Be], go tell Bnei Yisrael that "E'heh'yeh" has sent you" (3:14) [Rashbam encrypts his explanation of this pasuk in "at- bash"; de-code it, and note how it relates to our exp!]

God expounds His answer in the next pasuk: "... Thus tell Bnei Yisrael: HAVAYA [who is] ELOKEI AVOTEICHEM... has sent me... this is My Name..." (3:15)

God answers that He is coming not only b'shem Elokim, but also b'SHEM HAVAYA, i.e. He has come to fulfill BOTH covenants! Accordingly, God instructs Moshe to relay this message to the elders (3:16-17): "Gather the elders of Israel together and tell them: HAVAYA [who is] ELOKEI AVOTEICHEM appeared to me... saying: (1) "PAKOD PA'KADTI ETCHEM..." [Brit Milah/ see Br. 50:24] (2) "I will bring you up M'ONI MITZRAIM to ERETZ HA'CNAANI V'HACHITI..." [Brit Bein Ha'Btarim/ see Br.15:13,20] Next, God instructs Moshe to take the elders with him to Pharaoh (this makes Moshe the official representative of Bnei Yisrael) and command him that he permit them to worship God in the desert (3:18). The fact that Pharaoh will not agree (3:19), sets the stage for the fulfillment of two additional elements of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, namely punishing the oppressor and great wealth: "I will stretch out My Hand and SMITE Egypt...after that he shall let you go... When you go, you will not go empty handed: Each woman will borrow... vessels of SILVER and GOLD and clothing [compare Br. 15:14]..." (3:20-22)

At the conclusion of God's lengthy answer, Moshe still remains doubtful whether Bnei Yisrael will truly believe that Shem Havaya has appeared to him (4:1). To solve this problem, God (obviously now b'shem Havaya) provides Moshe with several "otot" (signs/ mini-miracles) to prove that a 'miraculous' redemption is indeed forthcoming (4:2-9). [See further Iyun Section - for an explanation why the "nachash" symbolizes the forthcoming redemption b'shem Havaya!]

At first, Bnei Yisrael fully believe God's message (4:31). However, their double work load - the consequence of Moshe's first confrontation with Pharaoh - dampens any hopes that Moshe had raised. Moshe's plea at the end of Parshat Shmot best summarizes this situation: "Why did you bring harm to this people? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to

speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people..." (5:22-23)

BACK TO VA'EYRA Our above analysis of Parshat Shmot now enables us to understand the significance of God's response to Moshe. At the beginning of Parshat Va'eyra, God clarifies once again the purpose of Yetziat Mitzraim, i.e. the fulfillment of both Brit Milah AND Brit Bein Ha'Btarim. We proceed now by explaining one pasuk at a time:

The opening pasuk constitutes a 'fitting' introduction: 6:2 "And ELOKIM spoke to Moshe - and said to him I am HAVAYA" Although God appeared (b'shem Havaya) numerous times to the Avot, He had never performed miracles for them in the eyes of other nations ("hashgacha nig'leyt"). Instead, He watched over them from the perspective of shem Elokim, (alternately - shem Kel Shaddai, i.e. "hashgacha nisteret"):

6:3 "And I appeared unto Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov as Kel Shaddai, but in MY Name HAVAYA I did not make Myself known to them" Once again, God emphasizes that the forthcoming redemption will be b'shem Havaya, in a manner unprecedented in the time of the Avot. According to the guidelines of His two covenants (6:4-5), God now presents His primary message (6:6-8):

6:4 "I also established My covenant [-BRIT MILAH-] with them to give them the LAND OF CANAAN..." (compare Br.17:8)

6:5 I have NOW heard the cries of Bnei Yisrael, for Egypt is OPPRESSING them, and I have remembered My covenant [-BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM -] (compare Br. 15:13) [Note Rashi on Shmot 6:4-5!]

6:6 "Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael that I am HAVAYA, and I will take them out... and save them from their BONDAGE, and I will redeem them with an outstretched hand and GREAT PUNISHMENTS (e.g. the Ten Plagues)" [Bein Ha'btarim]

6:7 "And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God..." [Brit Milah, Br. 17:7-8 - l'hiyot lachem l'Elokim]

Finally, as both covenants are being fulfilled: "And you shall know that: I am HAVAYA ELOKEICHEM who is taking you out from your suffering in Egypt."

6:8 "And I will bring you into the Land which I promised to give to Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov [in Brit Milah], and I will give it to you as a possession - 'MORASHA' ['yerusha', as in Br. 15:7-8] for I am Havaya [Brit Bein Ha'Btarim]"

NOBODY LISTENS Moshe conveys this message to Bnei Yisrael (6:9), but they do not 'listen': "And they did not LISTEN to Moshe ["v'lo SHAMMU el Moshe"], due to their crushed spirits and their hard work." (6:9)

The use of the word "shammu" (listened) in this pasuk is problematic. What precisely does "lo shammu" imply? Did they not HEAR what Moshe said? They obviously heard (physically) what he said. Did they not COMPREHEND what he said? Nothing in Moshe's statement appears to be very difficult to comprehend. Did they not BELIEVE in what Moshe told them? If so, the word "v'lo he'eminu" should be used, and not "v'lo shammu"! (see 4:30-31) Did they not OBEY when Moshe told them? Moshe's statement to Bnei Yisrael is informative in nature. It does not imply that the people need to actually do something.

Even more confusing is the "kal va'chomer" which Moshe employs in the next pasuk. Immediately after God instructs Moshe to go to Pharaoh and demand that he permit Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt, Moshe retorts: "If Bnei Yisrael did not listen to me, how then should Pharaoh listen to me... " ["heyn Bnei Yisrael LO SHAMMU ay'li, v'aych YISHMA'EYNI Pharaoh..."] (6:12)

The word "shammu" ostensibly is used differently on each side of the "kal va'chomer": To Pharaoh, "shammu" implies OBEY,

while to Bnei Yisrael it implies LISTEN. In other words, Moshe argues: "Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei did not LISTEN to me." This "kal v'chomer" would be more logical if the "shammu" had the same meaning in both halves of the pasuk, i.e. "Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY me...".

Earlier, we rejected the possibility that "shammu" implied 'obey', for Moshe was merely providing Bnei Yisrael with information. However, the "kal v'chomer" suggests that we reconsider that rejection.

ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM Even though there is nothing in God's message of "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" (6:6-8) which is EXPLICIT regarding what Bnei Yisrael must obey, there is something IMPLICIT. The recognition by Man of "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" encompasses more than intellectual knowledge. It is a fact that must not only be understood, but also internalized. A true recognition of "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" should result in an immediate inner drive to perform His will - the willingness to OBEY any command which God may request. [It is not by chance that this very same phrase later becomes the opening statement of the Ten Commandments (20:1-2)!] Therefore, the recognition by Bnei Yisrael that their redemption is to be b'shem Havaya requires their spiritual preparation. Although no specific commandment to do "teshuvah" (repentance) is mentioned, the Torah's statement "v'lo shammu el Moshe" indicates this message was implicit.

How does Moshe convey this message to Bnei Yisrael? The above psukim in Sefer Shmot leave us only with a clue as to what the precise demand was; Sefer Yechezkel, however, 'spills the beans'! [ Before continuing, it is imperative that you first read Yechezkel 20:1-9, preferably in Hebrew. Then read Shmot 6:2-13 and note the parallels! Note that Yechezkel 20:5-6 is referring to Shmot 3:6-8, and therefore Yechezkel 20:7-8 provides the missing information necessary to understand Shmot 3:9! ]

Yechezkel (see 20:1-10) compares the behavior of the elders of Yehuda, exiled to Bavel seven years earlier, to that of their forefathers. While doing so, he reminds them of what took place prior to Yetziat Mitzraim: "On the day that I chose Israel... when I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt [compare Shmot 6:3]... when I said "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" [compare 6:6]... that same day I swore to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey [compare 6:8, 3:8] ..." "And I said to them [at that time]: Each man must rid himself of his detestable ways, and not DEFILE himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM" "But, they REBELLED against Me, and they did not OBEY me ("v'lo avu l'SHMOAH ay'li"), no one rid himself from his detestable ways, no one gave up the fetishes of Egypt, and I resolved to pour out My fury upon them..." (20:5-8)

Yechezkel states explicitly what Sefer Shmot only alludes to: God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus to be worthy of their redemption. He had instructed them to cleanse themselves of the "tumah" of their Egyptian culture in preparation for God's revelation "b'shem Havaya". However, they did not 'listen'. [These psukim in Yechezkel are the obvious source for the popular Midrash quoted in the introduction.]

Thus, Moshe's "shlichut" to Bnei Yisrael is also a 'mission' in the fullest sense of the word. He must not only INFORM them of the forthcoming redemption, he must also COMMAND them and teach them to do "teshuva" (repentance) [see Shmot 6:13!]. This mission is at least as difficult as his mission to Pharaoh. Bnei Yisrael, as Sefer Yechezkel explains, were just as 'stubborn' as Pharaoh himself.

Although Bnei Yisrael were deserving of being destroyed, Yechezkel explains that God saves them for 'the sake of His Name': "va'a'as l'maan shmi, l'vilti ha'chel l'einei hagoyim" (20:9). [This fact will enable us to appreciate the significance of the Korban Pesach which Bnei Yisrael were required to bring before their actual redemption /iy"n the topic of next week's shiur].

This background provides a beautiful explanation for the difficult psukim describing the events that later take place at 'Marah' (15:22-26). Recall that according to Yechezkel, Bnei Yisrael deserved the same punishment as the Egyptians. God saved them only for the sake of His Name. Had Bnei Yisrael truly listened to Moshe and done teshuva prior to the Exodus, they would have arrived at Har Sinai to receive the Torah after their 'three day journey' into the desert as originally planned. After the splitting of the Red Sea, Bnei Yisrael indeed do travel 'three days' into the desert, but they can not find water [they do not deserve it] (15:22). Instead, they arrive at "Marah", a location where the 'water was BITTER' (15:23). In order to drink the water, Moshe must teach them and instruct them (15:25). [The 'tree' which God shows him may relate to the "etz ha'chayim" of Gan Eden - see Further Iyun]. The purpose of this incident is stated specifically. God must 'heal' them, otherwise He will afflict them with the very same punishment that Mitzraim received. This time, they must truly listen and accept: And He said: -im SHMO'AH TISH'MAU b'KOL HAVAYA ELOKECHA - Should you OBEY and accept the word of the Lord your God and listen to His commandments, and keep His laws, all of the affliction which I put on Egypt I will not put on you, for I am God, your healer" (15:26)

Prior to receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael undergo many tests (e.g. the manna, Amalek etc.) in which they must prove their faith ). Only then is the entire nation worthy of receiving "hitgalut" - the Ten Commandments - which begin with "Anochi HAVAYA ELOKECHA asher hotzeiticha me'Eretz Mitzraim...".

shabbat shalom menachem

----- FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. The first "ot" for Bnei Yisrael was Moshe's "mateh" turning into a "nachash". This was to show Bnei Yisrael that indeed Hashem (shem Havaya) has come to redeem them (4:1-4). Based on the shiur, the symbolism of the "nachash" is significant. The first

mention of "nachash" is in Gan Eden, the environment which exhibits "olam ha'hitgalut" (shem Havaya/ see shiur Parshat Breishit). In Gan Eden, the "nachash" questioned the very possibility of "schar v'onesh" (Divine retribution). From the perspective of Bnei Yisrael, God's "hitaglut" and Divine retribution is the essence of Yetziat Mitzraim! On the other hand, when Moshe goes to Pharaoh, Hashem tells him to perform a "mofet" with his "mateh". Unlike the "ot" for Bnei Yisrael, now the "mateh" turns into a "tanin". We first find "tanin" in the Creation story of perek Aleph in Breishit, b'shem Elokim. Pharaoh questioned the very existence of God, therefore, he needed a "mofet" to show that God indeed does exist and is the Creator of all nature - the message of perek aleph of Breishit! Bnei Yisrael do not need a sign that God exists, rather they need to know that He is about to reveal Himself, they need a sign from Perek Bet in Breishit- Gan Eden!

B. An obvious question arises: Why are the explicit details of God's charge that Bnei Yisrael do teshuva, which are found in Yechezkel, missing from Sefer Shmot? One could suggest that even though Bnei Yisrael's behavior is inexcusable, it may be understandable, due to their "avodah kasha" (see 6:9). Nevertheless, there may be additional allusions to this in Parshat Va'eyra itself. Let's examine how Parshat Va'eyra continues, noting some obvious questions: 6:13 - "Vay'tza'veym el BNEI YISRAEL v'el Pharaoh melech Mitzraim - l'Hotzi et Bnei Yisrael m'Mitzraim" Why did Bnei Yisroel need to be COMMANDED to leave Egypt? Could this be that command to Bnei Yisrael?

6:14 -28 - What is the 'yichus' of Moshe & Aaron doing here? This parsha is obviously out of place, as the lineage of Moshe and Aaron should have been introduced before the story of the burning bush! Is this Parsha replacing what should have been written here?

6:28 "va'yhi byom diber Hashem el Moshe b'erezt Mitzraim." seems to be only half a pasuk- what is it referring to? Possibly what is recorded in Yechezkel?

6:29 is a repeat of 6:13, with the exception that now there is no commandment to Bnei Yisroel, only to Pharaoh! Likewise: 7:1 - 11:1 The ensuing story of the Makot is exclusively between Moshe and Pharaoh - or Hashem and Mitzraim. There is no dibur at all to Bnei Yisroel! At times they are mentioned in contrast to the Mitzrim; however, they are never warned nor instructed to do anything! Why has the focus changed?

Although the above questions do not constitute an absolute proof, they may indicate that something was expected of Bnei Yisrael at this time.

One can only conjecture as to why Hashem chose not to include that detail in Sefer Shmot. Possibly, its replacement by the lineage of shevet Levi, beginning from the households of Reuven and Shimon, may hint to one zchut that Bnei Yisroel DID have; "sh'lo shinu et shmam" etc. - that they didn't change their names, dress and language. Although they were immersed in Egyptian culture, they kept their Jewish identity, the key to Jewish survival! Another possibility may be that Shevet Levi, unlike the other tribes, kept the masoret and prepared themselves properly for 'geulah'. This may be the reason that they were ultimately chosen to work in the Mishkan, as it is an environment where Hashem's name is present.

C. When Moshe returned to Egypt, God (b'shem Havaya) instructs him to use these miracles to warn Pharaoh, lest his first born be killed (makkat b'chort). This message is followed by a bizarre incident where Moshe is almost killed, but is saved by Ziporah performing Brit Milah on his son. 1. Attempt to relate this to the need to fulfill Brit Milah, before Brit Bein Ha'btarim can be fulfilled. 2. Relate this to the mitzvah that one who has not performed Brit Milah, can not offer Korban Pesach.

D. Note the structure of the Makot in groups of three - dzach adash b'achav - rav yehuda's simanim

1,4,& 7 begin with meeting Pharaoh at the river and warning him  
2,5,& 8 begin with "Bo el Pharaoh" - meet him at his palace and

warn him there 3,6,& 9 have no warning nor meeting of Pharaoh at all.

That makes groups of 1-2-3, 4-5-6, 7-8-9 See if you can find a common theme to each group of three.

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