

RETURNING TO EQUILIBRIUM

by Shlomo Katz

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz

Vaera

**Volume XIII, No. 14
28 Teves 5759
January 16, 1998**

Today's Learning:
Berachot 2:6-7
Orach Chaim 39:9-40:1
Daf Yomi: Yoma 12
Yerushalmi Yoma 5

As our parashah opens, G-d tells Moshe, "I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as 'Kel Shakkai,' and My Name 'Hashem' I did not reveal to them." R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of Einayim La'mishpat) explains G- d's message as follows: ,p> "Kel Shakkai," referring, as it does, to G-d's precise measurement of creation, alludes to the Attribute of Strict Justice, which demands strict measure-for-measure accounting. This is the highest form of Divine Providence; indeed, in the beginning, G-d's "design" called for the entire world to be subject to Strict Justice. He knew, however, that the world could not exist under that Attribute, so He paired it with the Attribute of Mercy [see Rashi to Bereishit 1:1]. Nevertheless, G- d did act pursuant to Strict Justice with the patriarchs, for they were on a sufficiently lofty level.

(R' Arieli explains in passing that the difference between G- d's "design" and His implementation is alluded to by the verse (Tehilim 145:17): "Hashem is righteous in all His ways, and magnanimous in all

His deeds." G-d's true "ways" are based on righteousness, i.e., differentiating between right and wrong - Strict Justice. However, His deeds, are magnanimous, i.e., tempered with Mercy.)

R' Arieli continues: The level of Providence that was applied to the patriarchs is reached by serving G-d with love, as it is written (Yeshayah 48:8), "The seed of Avraham, My beloved." No person ever reached this level except they. For their sons, in contrast, Providence is tempered with Mercy, manifested by the fact that the Exodus occurred before its time, i.e., before the 400 years passed.

In fact, Yaakov asked that his descendants merit to deserve Hashem's favor even when subjected to Strict Justice - "May 'Kel Shakkai' show you mercy" [Bereishit 43:14]. Then, the redemption from Egypt would have been the complete and final redemption. Instead, however, the difficulty of the subjugation required that Hashem apply Mercy that was undeserved and end the exile early. (Midrash Ariel)

"This was the Aharon and Moshe to whom Hashem said, 'Take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt according to their legions.' They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take Bnei Yisrael out of land of Egypt - this was Moshe and Aharon." (6:26-27)

Rashi observes: Sometimes (as in verse 27) Moshe is mentioned before Aharon; sometimes (as in verse 26) Aharon comes before Moshe. The Torah does this to teach us that the two brothers were equals.

R' Aharon Soloveitchik shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Brisk- Chicago) asks: In what respect were Moshe and Aharon equals? Isn't one of Judaism's basic beliefs that Moshe was superior to any other prophet?

He answers: The midrash applies to Moshe and Aharon the verse (Tehilim 85:11), "Kindness (chesed) and truth (emet) met; righteousness (tzedek) and peace (shalom) kissed." The midrash explains that Moshe and Aharon emphasized different traits - in Moshe's case, emet and tzedek; in Aharon's, chesed and shalom. What this midrash teaches is that the traits of both Moshe and Aharon were crucial to accomplishing the Exodus. This also is what Rashi means when he says that the two brothers were equals.

How did each contribute to the Exodus? The Torah relates (Shmot 6:10-12) that when Hashem told Moshe to demand Bnei Yisrael's release of Pharaoh, Moshe responded with a kal va'chomer: if the Jews themselves will not listen to me, certainly Pharaoh will not listen to me. In the next verse, Hashem speaks to Moshe and Aharon, commanding them to address both Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh concerning the Jews' leaving Egypt. Yet, we do not find that Hashem explicitly responds to Moshe's logical argument. Why? Because Hashem wanted to teach Moshe that the destiny of the Jewish people is not governed by logic. We cannot understand the history of the Jewish people by simple logic.

Bnei Yisrael also had to be taught this lesson, and that was Aharon's job in verse 26 quoted above. Hashem had appointed Aharon to be Moshe's spokesman to Bnei Yisrael, and this is why Aharon is listed first in the pasuk which does not mention speaking to Pharaoh. On the other hand, it was Moshe's job to speak to Pharaoh; therefore, in verse 27, Moshe is mentioned first.

Why were the respective responsibilities divided thus? When dealing with others, one must have recourse to chessed, emet, tzedek and shalom. However, when dealing with Bnei Yisrael, Aharon's traits - chessed and shalom - must be predominant. On the other hand, when speaking with Pharaoh (or non-Jews in general), greater measures of Moshe's traits - emet and tzedek - are called for. (The Warmth and the Light p.113)

"Pharaoh summoned Moshe and Aharon and said, 'Go - bring offerings to your G-d in the land [of Egypt].'

"Moshe said, 'It would not be proper to do so, for we will offer the deity of Egypt [i.e., sheep] to Hashem, our G-d. Behold, if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt in their sight, will they not stone us?'" (8:21-22)

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (died 1951; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) interprets Moshe's response as follows:

"You, Pharaoh, could protect us while we sacrificed to Hashem, but it still would not be proper for us to slaughter sheep in view of the Egyptians because it would cause the Egyptians pain." Thus, Onkelos translates the last words of Moshe's statement, not as, "will they not stone us," but as, "will they not say that we should be stoned?" The fact that our actions will cause such pain to certain people that they will want to stone us is sufficient reason for us to not bring our sacrifices on Egyptian soil.

R' Charlap adds: We can learn from this that even an important mitzvah should not be done in a way that will cause others pain, no matter how silly or nonsensical the reason for that pain. (Mei Marom, Vol. V)

"Pharaoh's heart became strong and he did not send out Bnei Yisrael . . ." (9:35)

Why is Pharaoh's refusal to listen to Hashem referred to as having a strong heart? Does this imply that one who does listen to Hashem is weak? R' Baruch Ezrachi shlita (Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Ateret Yisrael in Yerushalayim) explains as follows:

Many commentaries asked: Was it fair to bring the plagues on Pharaoh if his heart was hardened and he could do nothing to avoid the plagues? Ramban answers that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart did not destroy his free will; to the contrary, it restored his ability to choose. Had Pharaoh released

Bnei Yisrael as a result of one of the plagues, he would not have been doing so of his own free will. Rather, he would have done so because the plagues coerced him to act.

Based on Ramban's explanation, we can understand why the Torah speaks here and elsewhere of "strengthening Pharaoh's heart." Pharaoh's heart, his will, was weakened by the plagues, and it had to be strengthened so that it would be in equilibrium. Then, and only then, would Pharaoh have free will. (Birkat Mordechai p.257)

Letters from Our Sages

This week's letter was written in the summer of 1806 from R' Akiva Ginz z"l (1761-1837; better known today as R' Akiva Eiger) to "my friend, the excellent rabbi who is diligent and learned, the honorable officer, our teacher, R' Lazer, may his light shine." Despite this glowing salutation, the identity of the recipient is unknown.

The letter's recipient apparently had asked R' Akiva Eiger to check his son's progress in learning. The letter not only shows us how R' Akiva Eiger saw his mission in life, but also reflects the battle that was being fought in Eastern Europe at that time between the adherents of the pilpul method of study (weaving intricate, but often flimsy, webs of Torah sources as an intellectual exercise) and the proponents of a return to p'shat (seeking the plain and practical meaning of the gemara).

Although the writer addresses his correspondent in the third person (e.g., "His honor's letter . . . reached me"), we present the letter in the second person to make it more readable.

Your honor's letter which was sent with your son, may he live long, reached me today. Regarding your request that I test your son and examine him, I am ready - indeed, I am ready - to do your will, to do what is good for you - this and more. This is particularly true, when it comes to a mitzvah such as this, in that my only desire and goal is to water the rows of saplings which are sure to produce fruit. More than the calf etc. [Ed. Note: From Pesachim 112a, "More than the calf wants to drink, the cow wants to nurse." In other words, the recipient of a kindness is at the same time doing an even greater kindness for the giver.]

At the present time, however, it has not worked out, for I told your son, may he live long, that he should take some time to study a sugya (section of Talmud) which I would show him, so that he should then present that sugya to me. He said that he does not have time for that because he is staying with one of his friends and will be going home tomorrow. He wanted instead to tell me a pilpul, but that is not my style. I cannot assess the quality of a person through a pilpul, only through learning a sugya to determine whether he stands on a foundation of truthful p'shat.

Accordingly, your will was not done. If your son comes back to here to spend a day or two I will take the time, with Hashem's help.

[Signed] Your friend who seeks your well-being with my heart and soul, Akiva Ginz

[This postscript was written six days later]

As things worked out, your son stayed here for Shabbat, and today he made a presentation to me of a sugya. It appears that he is ready to be filled with purity if he continues to study regularly. G-d willing, if your honor will send him to me and he will have an excellent young man as a study partner, so that the two of them may learn together regularly, he will attain true accomplishment.
[Signed] The Aforesaid

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
