

FOUR EXPRESSIONS OF REDEMPTION

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaera

Four Expressions of Redemption

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Today's Learning:
Nazir 1:6-7
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ta'anit 12
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shabbat 79

In this week's parashah (6:6-8) we find the famous "Arba Leshonot Geulah" / "Four Expressions of Redemption" on which the Sages based the mitzvah to drink four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder. These expressions are usually understood as relating to different aspects of the redemption from Egypt. In contrast, R' Yaakov Sakly z"l (Spain; 14th century) sees them as a prophecy regarding a broader range of events in Jewish history. He explains:

"I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt" -- this means exactly what it says.

"I shall rescue you from their service" -- this refers to the splitting of the sea. Note that the verse says "their service" (plural). Prior to the Exodus, Bnei Yisrael were slaves to Pharaoh alone. However, in order to encourage his people to accompany him in chasing the escaped slaves, Pharaoh promised them that Bnei Yisrael would serve all of the Egyptian people.

"I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments" -- this refers to the battle

with Amalek at Refidim, which was won when Moshe climbed to the top of a hill and stretched-out his arms. (Of course, R' Sakly adds, you must understand that it was really the hand of Hashem that saved Bnei Yisrael.)

"I shall take you to Me for a people" -- this refers to the events following the sin of the Golden Calf. Hashem decreed destruction upon Bnei Yisrael, but Moshe spoke on their behalf and Hashem took them as His nation again.

Finally, "I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand" -- this refers to the sin of the spies. Once again, Hashem decreed destruction upon Bnei Yisrael, but Moshe spoke on their behalf and the younger generation was spared. Nevertheless, Moshe did not ask Hashem to reverse the decree entirely and let the older generation live because Hashem had hinted to him with the words "about which I raised My hand" that He had taken an irreversible oath. (Torat Ha'minchah)

"Moreover, I have heard the groan of Bnei Yisrael whom Egypt enslaves, and I have remembered My covenant." (6:5)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (Chida; died 1806) writes: Hashem told Avraham (Bereishit 15:13), "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own; they will cause them to be enslaved, and they will oppress them for four hundred years. But also the nation for which they shall slave I shall judge, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." Hashem told Avraham that He would punish the nation that would enslave Bnei Yisrael. Why didn't Hashem also say that He would punish the nation that would oppress Bnei Yisrael? Likewise, why does our verse refer only to slavery and not to oppression?

Chida explains: The Egyptians did not deserve to be punished to the extent that they were only fulfilling Hashem's decree. Therefore, they were not punished for oppressing Bnei Yisrael. However, the decree of slavery was lifted from Bnei Yisrael as a result of Yosef's slavery. [As the trailblazer for the Avraham's descendants in Egypt, Yosef could fulfill the decree on behalf of all of them.] Thus, the Egyptians did deserve to be punished for enslaving the Jewish People. That is why our verse says that Hashem heard the groans specifically of Bnei Yisrael who Egypt enslaved.

(Nachal Kedumim)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take Bnei Yisrael out of the land of Egypt." (6:13)

Rashi comments: "He commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael"- to deal with them in a gentle manner and to be patient with them. "Regarding Pharaoh, the king of Egypt"-that they should show respect to him in all they spoke.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Bloch z"l hy"d (Rosh Yeshiva in Telz, Lithuania; killed in the Holocaust) asks: Why did Moshe and Aharon need to receive a special command to deal with Bnei Yisrael in a gentle manner? Moshe and Aharon were, after all, exceedingly humble and undoubtedly treated every person respectfully.

R' Bloch explains: There are two concepts that come into play when one is seeking the truth. One is "emet la'amitah" / "absolute truth." The second is simply "emet" / "truth." Unlike emet la'amitah, ordinary emet is not pure in the sense that one who wishes to impart emet may alter his presentation to account for his listeners' backgrounds and preconceived notions. But such a presentation is not without risks, for it may lend credence to the very notions that it seeks to refute. Indeed, the mere fact that one would trouble to defend Torah beliefs against heretical ideas gives credibility to those very heretical ideas.

Returning to our verse: Why would Hashem command Moshe and Aharon to show honor to the evil Pharaoh? Absolute truth would dictate that Pharaoh did not deserve honor, but relative truth required that he be honored. Honoring kings, whether or not they personally deserve honor, is necessary to preserve world order. Therefore, such honor is the "truth." Rashi himself notes this when he explains why Yaakov sat up in Yosef's presence. He writes (Bereishit 48:2): Yaakov said, "Although he is my son, he is a king, and I will do honor to him." >From this, Rashi continues, we may infer that we must show honor to a person of royal rank. Similarly, he concludes, Moshe showed honor to the king.

What is Rashi teaching? That although Yosef was Yaakov's son, and emet la'amitah dictated that Yaakov not honor him, nevertheless, Yosef was a king and Yaakov did honor him in order to preserve world order. Similarly, Moshe showed honor to Pharaoh.

For the same reason, Moshe and Aharon had to be told to treat Bnei Yisrael gently. As individuals, Moshe and Aharon certainly would have been gentle, but as teachers of Torah, emet la'amitah might require that they be unforgiving. No! said Hashem. Use simple emet! Be gentle!

R' Bloch continues: The above thoughts have serious ramifications when it comes to dealing with our less observant brethren. At first glance, these thoughts might dictate that we approach our brethren on their terms and not appeal to them with "absolute truth." However, says R' Bloch (after additional discussion), such an approach could be appropriate only vis-a-vis a Jew who is a "clean slate," one who is not yet in the grasp of heretical ideas. In contrast, to approach a Jew who is beset by heretical ideas with anything less than emet la'amitah / absolute truth would lend credence to his misguided ideas. Rather, we must approach him with emet la'amitah. Even if he will not be outwardly receptive, the Jewish spark within him will listen.

(Shiurei Da'at p.94)

From the Haftarah . . .

"So said Hashem, 'The heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool; what house could you build for Me, and what could be My resting place? . . . but it is to this one that I look -- to the poor and broken-spirited person who is zealous regarding My Word'." (Yishayah 66:1-2 -- haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh)

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (1697-1777; Italian kabbalist) writes: These verses are a direct rebuke by the prophet to those wicked people whose bad deeds "push away the legs of the Shechinah" [as will be explained]. This means the following: Hashem desires to reside in the hearts of those who possess bechirah / free will. This is the secret contained in the verse (Shmot 25:8), "They shall make a sanctuary for Me -- so that I may dwell among them." One could not think this refers to a sanctuary of wood and stone, for the whole world is already His. [Rather, it can only mean man's heart.] Therefore, He complains to those who possess bechirah: He desires to reside in their hearts, but wicked people push away the legs of the Shechinah. This is alluded to by our verse, "The heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool." [Since we speak of Hashem's revelation in this world as the "legs of the Shechinah," it follows that the earth is His footstool.]

Where will Hashem find His sanctuary? In the heart of the "poor and broken-spirited person who is zealous regarding [His] Word." This refers to a person whose only desire is to make himself into a chariot for the Shechinah. Therefore, Hashem watches over him in particular ("hashgachah pratit"), as alluded to in the words, "It is to this one that I look." [The verb used for looking -- "le'habit" -- refers to paying close attention.]

(Teshuat Olamim)

R' Shabtai Elchanan Del Vecchio z"l

Introduction: In past weeks, we have quoted excerpts from Ma'agal Tov, the diary of R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; 1724-1806), describing his travels as a "Shelucha D'rabbanan" ("Shadar" or "meshulach") on behalf of the Jewish community of Chevron. We have noted that Chida occasionally writes with great esteem of scholars and tzaddikim who are relatively unknown to us today. This week we present a biography of one such person, to whom Chida refers in his entry for 14 Adar I 5516 [1756] as "the wonder of our generation."

R' Shabtai Elchanan Del Vecchio was born in Italy in 1707. His father was R' Elisha, a member of the distinguished Del Vecchio family, whose members also signed their names with the Hebrew phrase, "Min Ha'zekeinim" / "From among the elders." Young Shabtai Elchanan's primary teacher was his grandfather, R' Shlomo David Del Vecchio, who gave his teenage grandson semichah / ordination. In 1727, R' Shabtai Elchanan also received semichah from the rabbis of Ferrara, including R' Yitzchak

Lampronti.

From 1730 to 1739, R' Shabtai Elchanan taught Torah in the Italian cities of Leghorn, Ancona and Lugo. In 1739, he was named rabbi of Casale. (It was there that Chida met R' Shabtai Elchanan in the spring of 1756.)

When the above-mentioned R' Yitzchak Lampronti wrote his halachic encyclopedia, Pachad Yitzchak, R' Shabtai Elchanan was reportedly the only contemporary Italian scholar whose responsa were quoted. In fact, 20 letters from R' Shabtai Elchanan appear in Pachad Yitzchak. A letter from R' Shabtai Elchanan also appears in Chida's work, Chaim Sha'al. (The subject of the letter is the kashrut of a chicken that was found to be missing part of its digestive system.)

In addition to the above-mentioned letters, R' Shabtai Elchanan left behind at least five written works: Ir Miklat, on the 613 commandments; Mishpat Ha'morim; Da'at Zekeinim; Ta'am Zekeinim; and Pnei Zekeinim. It is not known when R' Shabtai Elchanan passed away.

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