

IT'S ALL PART OF THE PLAN

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaera

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Sponsored by Martin and Michelle Swartz in memory of Martin's grandmother Elise Hofmann a"h

In our parashah, in the middle of describing Moshe's and Aharon's mission to Pharaoh, the Torah interrupts to list the descendants of Reuven, Shimon and Levi--"These were the heads of their fathers' houses . . ." (6:14). Why? R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1843-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia) explains:

Hashem took a number of steps to ensure that Moshe and Aharon would be accepted forever as legitimate prophets. First, He appointed them when they were elderly--Aharon was 83 and Moshe was 80. Most men of that age are not power-hungry and certainly would not take on the challenge of leading millions of people into a wilderness if they were not Divinely-appointed to do so. Second, He orchestrated events so that Moshe would be challenged by some of Bnei Yisrael at every turn. That way, future generations could not claim that their ancestors had followed Moshe blindly in order to escape Egypt, without analyzing his claim that they must observe the Torah. For the same reason, He kept them in the desert for 40 years, eating the mahn and free from all mundane concerns, so that they would have plenty of time to focus on Moshe Rabbeinu's every action and challenge him if they were so inclined.

And, challenge him they did! In particular, descendants of Reuven (Datan and Aviram), Shimon (Zimri), and Levi (Korach) questioned Moshe's authority. Because of the central role that the descendants of the tribes Reuven, Shimon and Levi played in confirming the legitimacy of Moshe's mission, they are listed here when he begins that mission. (Meshech Chochmah)

"Elokim spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am Hashem!'" (6:2)

At the end of last week's parashah, Moshe Rabbeinu complained (5:22-23), "My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he did evil to this people, but You did not rescue Your people." The Midrash Rabbah comments: The Attribute of Justice wanted to punish Moshe for his complaint, as it is written, "Elokim spoke to Moshe." [The Name "Elokim" represents the Attribute of Justice.] However, when G-d saw that Moshe Rabbeinu had spoken thus because he felt Bnei Yisrael's pain, He acted toward him with the Attribute of Mercy, as it is written, "I am Hashem." [The Name we pronounce "Hashem" represents the Attribute of Mercy.]

R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z"l Hy"d (1885-1944; rabbi of Pistyan, Slovakia; killed in the Holocaust) explains this midrash as follows:

On the verse (6:3), "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Kel Shakkai, but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them," Rashi z"l writes that Hashem was saying: "The Patriarchs are gone but not forgotten. Although I made promises to them, they never questioned Me." What indeed was the difference between the Patriarchs and Moshe?

R' Teichtal explains: The Gemara relates that Rabbi Akiva would always say, "Kol d'avid Rachamana l'tav avid" / "Everything the Merciful One does, He does for a good end." The sage Nachum Ish Gam Zu would always proclaim, "Gam zu l'tovah" / "This too is for good." What is the difference between these two statements? R' Teichtal writes that Rabbi Akiva's formulation acknowledges the existence of unfortunate events but says that they too serve a good end. According to Nachum Ish Gam Zu, however, everything that happens is itself good.

Regarding this trait, the level of the Patriarchs was that of Nachum Ish Gam Zu. As Rashi writes, they never questioned. Moshe, on the other hand, questioned G-d [though he surely understood that G-d had a reason for his deeds]. "Why have You done evil to this people?"

Why, in fact, did Moshe question G-d? R' Teichtal explains that bitachon / trust in G-d is a very commendable trait, but only as relates to one's own affairs. When it comes to alleviating the suffering of others, there is no place for bitachon; one must take action.

This explains the midrash with which we began--when Hashem saw that Moshe's questioning was motivated by his love for Bnei Yisrael and his desire to alleviate their suffering, He acted toward him mercifully. (Mishneh Sachir: Mo'adim Vol. II p.36)

"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. *I shall take you to Me for a nation* and I shall be an Elokim to you." (6:5-6)

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yeshivat Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) writes: Our Sages

instruct that the Pesach haggadah should "begin with degradation and end with praise." This reflects two different reasons why a person might praise G-d for his situation--either because the person's situation is good in an absolute sense, or because it is relatively good compared to his prior situation. In the haggadah, we first mention our degradation--we were slaves--and praise G-d for redeeming us. The mere fact that there was a redemption was a relative good compared to the slavery that preceded it. Afterward, we mention the absolute good--He gave us the Torah, took us into Eretz Yisrael, and built the Bet Hamikdash.

R' Borodiansky continues: Our Sages refer to the above verses as the "Four Expressions of Redemption," and one of the reasons we drink four cups of wine at the Seder is to represent these four expressions. Note that the first two expressions-"I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service"--describe relative good (freedom from slavery), while the second two-"I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you to Me for a nation"-- describe absolute good, i.e., He didn't just free us from slavery; He made us His special nation. ["Redemption" implies an elevation of status, not merely attaining freedom.] (Siach Yitzchak: Geulat Mitzrayim p.16)

"I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand [i.e., swore] to give it to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov; and I shall give it to you as a morashah / legacy--I am Hashem." (6:8)

R' Shmuel Yehuda Katznellenbogen z"l (1521-1597; rabbi of Venice, Italy) writes: There is a difference between the word "morashah" / legacy and "yerushah" / inheritance, namely that one receives an inheritance, while he leaves a legacy. It follows that, in this verse, Hashem hinted to Moshe Rabbeinu that the generation of the Exodus would not enter Eretz Yisrael. They would never inherit the Land; they would only leave their rights to it as a legacy for their descendants.

R' Katznellenbogen continues: The word morashah also appears in the verse (Devarim 33:4), "Moshe commanded us the Torah, a morashah for the Congregation of Yaakov." This indicates that we are commanded to pass on the Torah to our children as a legacy. (Derashot Maharam Mintz no.1)

"Pharaoh sent and summoned Moshe and Aharon and said to them, "This time I have sinned . . ." (9:27)

Why, after the plague of hail, did Pharaoh admit that he had sinned?

R' Raphael Emanuel Chai Riki z"l (1688-1743; author of Mishnat Chassidim and other works) explains: The hail destroyed the crops, which ultimately would cause famine. This reminded Pharaoh of the kindness that Yosef had done for the Egyptians, and that caused him to acknowledge that it was wrong to oppress Yosef's family. (Chosheiv Machashavot)

Letters from Our Sages

The letter below was written by R' Avraham of Slonim z"l (1809-1883), the first Slonimer Rebbe, to a chassid in Eretz Yisrael. It is printed in Yesod Ha'avodah - Michtevai Kodesh, no.30.

Shalom, etc.

Regarding your request for advice on how to act in our Holy Land, I will tell your honor what my teacher [R' Noach z"l] from Lechovitch used to say, "I shall advise you, and may G-d be with you" [quoting Shmot 18:19]. In whatever you do, look for ways to come closer to Hashem, seek His assistance, and rely on Him and His many kindnesses. The travails you encountered on the way and the great expense you incurred are part of the suffering through which Eretz Yisrael is acquired. [Ed. note: This is a reference to our Sages' teaching that three things can be acquired only through suffering: Eretz Yisrael, Torah, and Olam Haba.] As for the future, may the words of R' Mordechai [z"l from Lechovitch], may his merit protect us, be fulfilled. [He said that] "yissurin" / "suffering" is related to "assur" / "bound together"; [that is, through your suffering may your] soul be bound to the holiness of the Land which G-d watches over always [paraphrasing Devarim 11:12], meaning that there are fewer barriers [between G-d and man in Eretz Yisrael], since it is not watched over by guardian angels. This [i.e., being closer to G-d] is both a thorn and a benefit, for it means that a person must watch himself very carefully so that he, himself, will be in the Holy Land. By "he, himself," I mean his soul . . . otherwise, his body will be in Eretz Yisrael and his soul will not be. First, the main thing is to review the belief that the holiness of the Land is very great. And, one should be intensely joyous that he is living there in the "land of the living," where the gate of Heaven is. If one desires to purify himself [there], the assistance he gets [in Eretz Yisrael compared to elsewhere] is like the difference between trying to lift a heavy load from its center versus trying to lift it from one edge. Also, because of its great holiness, one who arrives there is like a new-born; therefore one [should take advantage and should] make the effort so that the verse (Eichah 3:23), "They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness," will be fulfilled in him.

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 [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](https://torah.org/torah-portion/hamaayan) page.

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