

# JUSTICE

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Vaera

### Justice

Our parashah opens with Hashem rebuking Moshe Rabbeinu. At the end of last week's parashah, Moshe complained, "My Master, 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." At the beginning of our parashah, Hashem answers him, "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 explains: Hashem was rebuking Moshe, "I made many promises to the Patriarchs and did not fulfill them in their lifetimes, yet they did not complain!"

R' Moshe Zuriel shlita (former mashgiach ruchani of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) observes: The Gemara (Bava Metzia 84b) relates that after the sage Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Shimon [son of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai] died, he appeared to his wife in a dream with a worm coming out of his ear. He explained to her that this happened because he once heard a Torah scholar being denigrated and he did not protest. Rashi (to Makkot 24a) comments that this indicates that Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Shimon ordinarily did protest when he heard a Torah scholar being denigrated and, precisely because he excelled in that way, he was judged very harshly for his one failure.

Similarly, R' Zuriel writes, any criticism that our Sages level against Moshe Rabbeinu (or other great people) actually is a compliment, a testament to the high standards to which he was rightfully held. (Otzrot Ha'Torah)

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

R' Chaim Halberstam z"l (1793-1876; the Sanzer Rav) writes: The words "and He said to him" would seem to be redundant. What would have been lacking if the verse had said, "Elokim spoke to Moshe, 'I am Hashem'"? He explains:

It is well known that "Elokim" refers to the Attribute of Justice and "Hashem" refers to the Attribute of Compassion. It is important to remember, though, that while we relate to Hashem through His different attributes, He is in fact One and Indivisible. Thus, He can even appear through multiple attributes simultaneously such as when He split the Yam Suf, which showed compassion for Bnei Yisrael but brought justice upon the Egyptians.

The Sanzer Rav continues: At the end of last week's parashah, Moshe challenged Hashem over the seemingly worsening situation of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, and this verse is Hashem's response. Had the verse said, "Elokim spoke to Moshe, 'I am Hashem'," we would have interpreted Hashem's response to mean, "Yes! Now I appear as Elokim. Some other time I will appear as Hashem." But, that was not Hashem's answer. Rather, "Elokim spoke to Moshe and He [Elokim] said to him, 'I am Hashem'" --at one and the same time, Elokim is Hashem, Justice is Compassion. (Divrei Chaim)

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We read in the Pesach Haggadah that Rabbi Yehuda provided a mnemonic for remembering the Ten Plagues: "Detzach adash b'achav." But this mnemonic is nothing more than an acronym of the names of the plagues! What does it add to our understanding?

R' Elazar Rokeach z"l (Germany; 1160-1238) explains: In the book of Tehilim (78:44-51; 105:28-36), the plagues are listed in two different orders. With his mnemonic, Rabbi Yehuda teaches us that the order in which the plagues are listed in the Torah is the historical order in which they occurred [which we would not necessarily have known, as our Sages teach that the Torah is not entirely in chronological order.]

In addition, Rabbi Yehuda is highlighting a pattern within the Ten Plagues. In each set of three, Pharaoh was warned before the first two plagues, but the third occurred without warning. This is consistent with the opinion in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 81b) that a person who sinned twice after being warned and received the punishment of makkot / lashes each time can be punished for his third offense even without a warning. (Haggadah Shel Pesach im Peirush Rokeach)

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"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)

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"Entreat Hashem -- there has been an overabundance of G-dly \*thunder\* and \*hail\* . . . '

"Moshe said to him, "When I leave the city I shall spread out my hands to Hashem; the \*thunder\* will cease and the \*hail\* will no longer be . . . '

"Moshe . . . stretched out his hands to Hashem; the \*thunder\* and \*hail\* ceased and rain did not reach the earth.

"Pharaoh saw that the rain, the \*hail\*, and the \*thunder\* ceased, and he continued to sin; and he made his heart stubborn, he and his servants." (9:28-29, 33-24)

Why, in fact, did Pharaoh continue to sin? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains:

Pharaoh appears to have been more afraid of the thunder than of the hail; thus, he asked Moshe (verse 28) to pray first that the thunder stop and only then the hail. Moshe agreed to Pharaoh's request (verse 29) and Hashem accepted Moshe's prayer (verse 33).

However, Hashem had His own calculations as well. Midrash Rabbah teaches that the hail that was in the process of falling when Moshe prayed for the plague to end stopped in mid-air and remained there for future use (see Yechezkel ch.13). Hashem did stop producing thunder when Moshe prayed for the thunder to end, and hail when Moshe prayed for the hail to end. But, the last hailstones never reached the earth; rather, they gathered in the atmosphere. Thus, from Pharaoh's vantage point, the hail stopped (i.e., it stopped reaching the ground) while he could still hear the thunder. The hail appeared to end first (verse 34). Thus, Pharaoh believed that Moshe's prayer was not answered; apparently, the whole incident had been a coincidence, and there was no reason for Pharaoh to change his ways.

Perhaps, concludes R' Kluger, Hashem acted this way so that Pharaoh could continue to rationalize his refusal to let Bnei Yisrael go. (Imrei Shefer)

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## Memories of Yerushalayim

R' Ben-Zion Yadler z"l (1871-1962; "Maggid / preacher of Yerushalayim"), describes in his memoir, B'tuv Yerushalayim, his role in supervising the eruv in Yerushalayim. He begins with background information:

Thereafter [in the early 20th century, after a period of supervising tithes, as described in prior issues],

I became free to return to my previous activities improving the spiritual life of Yerushalayim itself-- for example, making eruvin and inspecting the weights and measures of storekeepers, a matter that was then under rabbinic jurisdiction. In those days, Yerushalayim was expanding, with new neighborhoods in all directions, with G-d's help.

My first activity was to expand the perimeter of the general eruv so that it surrounded all of the neighborhoods that had been built outside of the walls.

Approximately 50 years ago [in the mid- to late-19th century], all the residents of Yerushalayim lived in the Old City. The Old City did not need an eruv because it was completely enclosed by a wall. (When the German Kaiser, Wilhelm, visited Yerushalayim [in 1898], the wall near the Jaffa Gate was breached in his honor and, since then, the Old City does need an eruv.) At that time, Eretz Yisrael was under Turkish rule and Orthodox Jews had the authority to ensure that Torah was observed. Thus, it was customary that every Shabbat, from morning to night, guards were posted near the Jaffa Gate so that no one would carry out of the walled city, for there was no eruv outside the walled city.

Among the guards was R' Moshe Seminitzer z"l and with him was the bodyguard of the Chacham Bashi, i.e., the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, who had authority equal to that of the mayor. With them was a Turkish policeman. Whenever a Jew would exit through the gate [on Shabbat], they would inspect whether he was carrying anything. If any objects were found in his possession, they would be confiscated and not returned to him until he came back from outside the walls.

In 5661 [1901], when the Aderet zt"l [R' Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim (1845-1905)] was appointed Rabbi of Yerushalayim, and he saw that the settlement had expanded outside of the walled city and that the supervision at the Jaffa Gate was very difficult, he toiled to make an eruv outside the walled city so that we could carry there as well. He made the eruv himself, insisting that it be made only from boards and strings, not relying at all on telephone lines. When the eruv was completed, an announcement was published under the headline, "Good news for the inhabitants of Yerushalayim."

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