

FROM UNIVERSAL TO PARTICULAR

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

I appeared to Avrohom, Yitzchok, and to Yaakov as Kel Shakai, but I did not make Myself known to them with My Name "Hashem...." I have heard the groan of the Bnei Yisrael...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... I shall take you to Me as a people...^[2]

"I turned to appraise wisdom and madness."^[3] Chazal^[4] understand this as both of those elements coming together - inappropriately - rather than as two opposites studied separately. They specifically implicate Shlomo and Moshe. Shlomo is faulted for misapplying his great wisdom, in thinking that the Torah's warning to the king not to take too many wives did not apply to him. The Torah makes its objection explicit: multiple wives would turn his heart away from Hashem. Shlomo told himself that he could handle the challenge without ill-effect, and disregarded the prohibition. The *yud* of the word *ירבה* / complained to Hashem. "Today Shlomo nullifies a single letter of the Torah. Tomorrow..." G-d responded: "A thousand Shlomos will be nullified, but not a single letter of the Torah."

Shlomo proved himself wrong; he took too many wives, and they turned his heart. Yet we have to admit that we are puzzled by considering this a terrible error. Why should it be so wrong in try to understand the Torah's reasoning and then to act upon it? The Torah in fact is not irrational; good reasoning stands behind every one of its commandments. If Shlomo, the wisest of all men, was blessed with deeper comprehension, why should he not use it with confidence? Moreover, equipped with his extraordinary intellectual depth, how did he indeed fall to the wiles of his wives?

In truth, Shlomo's reasoned well. Nonetheless, it placed the Torah in jeopardy. Countless other people would have, in the millennia that followed his reign, judged themselves to be wise men as well, and invented all sorts of convoluted arguments to free themselves from some of the Torah's requirements. Chaos would have ensued, with Torah becoming more free-for-all than law. For this reason, Shlomo was artificially made to fail; the world had to witness that tampering with Torah was intolerable – without exception. Thus it was the *yud* of *yarbeh* that complained. The three other letters belong to the root of the word. The *yud* turns it into the future tense. Shlomo's failure was only in the impact his actions would have on future generations of Jews who would improperly take the same liberty of seeing themselves as exceptions to the Torah's rules.

Moshe, continues the midrash, acted similarly and also failed. He, too, believed that he understood

the Divine Mind. He assumed that G-d had sent him on a mission to redeem the Bnei Yisrael because His compassion was moved by the sheer enormity of their desperate plight. When Moshe's first encounter with Paroh ended in great failure, he was met with so much anger and derision from the people – giving him no credit at all for his efforts on their behalf, and quickly abandoning him – that he concluded that they were not as desperate for deliverance as he had thought. If so, he reasoned, then why had Hashem sent him? His *midah* of *rachamim* does not interfere with many evils perpetrated by Man! Why, then, had he been deputized to go to Paroh?

Moshe, like Shlomo, had applied his superior understanding to Hashem's Word – and come to a faulty conclusion. He had to be proven wrong. Human reasoning is inherently fallible.

Earlier, Moshe had been introduced to the four-letter Name, which combines the past, present, and future forms of the verb for "being," i.e. was, is and will be. They are not, however, equally represented. The word for "present" / *hoveh* is fully part of the Tetragramaton, in the exact order of its three letters. The words for past and future, however, are only represented in part, and even then (in the case of the past) not in order. We can readily understand why. Moshe had asked for the right Name to use when coming to the people. Hashem had told him to use the four-letter Name, which we call the Essential Name. The nation would now learn much about Hashem's fuller nature. They knew something of the *mesorah* from the patriarchs of the past; in the future to come, Klal Yisrael would get many more glimpses of Him. The most important lessons, however, would be those of the moment – the full story of Hashem reaching out to redeem Moshe's people, in all of its glorious detail. Their understanding for the vast majority of history would draw chiefly on the events of the immediate present. (Thus Chazal teach^[6] that from the time of the destruction of the Temple, a two-letter Name would suffice. That Name consists of a *yud* for the future, and the *heh* for the past. The immediacy of HKBH in the present would disappear. Klal Yisrael would get by with memories of the past, and a longing for the Messianic future.)

Moshe had not fully comprehended all of this. He believed that Hashem came now to the people through His *midah* of *rachamim*, which is part of, as it were, His universal aspects. He shows His compassion to all who are created in His image. Hashem had something different in mind. He was going to demonstrate not the universal, but the particular in His relationship with Man: the special relationship of a Father to His children.

The opening lines of our *parshah* follow logically. G-d tells Moshe that the *avos* had known Him in other ways, but not in the fullness of His Essential Name. To be sure, they were familiar with it. But the richness of its implications had not been experientially demonstrated to them. It would now be shown to their descendants.

He continues – almost as an aside. Not only was Moshe mistaken in assuming that his mission grew out of the *midah* of *rachamim* alone, but he was wrong in minimizing the longing of the Bnei Yisrael for redemption! "I have heard the groan of the Bnei Yisrael." The cynicism of Doson and Avirom was

entirely atypical of the rest of the people, who still in fact resisted their servitude with all their being. Even had he been correct, Hashem continues, Moshe had misjudged His intentions. Yes, He would begin with *rachamim*. Thus, "I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt." They would quickly be given respite from the back-breaking excesses of their servitude.

If *rachamim* fueled the mission, then His intervention would stop there. Work – even hard work – may not be pleasant, but in a world not yet perfected by Moshiach, inequities between people will exist, and *rachamim* will not be generated by servitude alone. Some people will serve other people. The Bnei Yisrael could have remained in Egypt, subject to a more benign servitude. That, however, was not the case. "I will save them from their labor." Serving the Egyptians in any capacity left them spiritually vulnerable. They had descended to the 49th rung of *tumah*. In order to fulfill their special, particular mission – one that did not apply to any other nation on earth – they needed complete freedom.

Furthermore, they could not march towards their spiritual destiny without completely undoing the stigma of their long servitude. Hence, "I shall redeem you," meaning that He would publicly dramatize His special relationship with them, and remove the stain of slavery from their being. Its purpose is the glorious future mission of His special people: "I will take them...and I will be for them G-d," in a way not shared with any other people.

Hashem, in other words, moved Moshe away from seeing Him at this time as acting consistently with one of His universal *midos*. He guided Moshe to appreciating His role as the special, particular G-d of Israel – a concept that he began sharing with the people.

Those people experienced a similar learning curve. They, too, believed that Hashem had intervened for them because of compassion, consistent with His universal nature. Thus, they were troubled by Moshe's insistence that they leave Egypt, and conquer a neighboring country. Surely, many of them thought, G-d would not be with them in such an enterprise. Since He had put an end to the worst aspects of their servitude, His protection had ended. There would be no reason for Him to support them in any military campaign they initiated. Nor, for that matter, did they think He would miraculously bail them out of any predicament. Time and again, when faced with some obstacle, they complained to Moshe for having taken them out of Egypt. That, they thought, was his doing. It had nothing to do with their understanding of the universal G-d, Who does not play favorites.

The moment of full comprehension for them came at the *Yam Suf*. Those who clung to the old understanding of G-d as a Responder with *rachamim* could call out to Hashem, because perhaps He would be compassionate towards some ill-prepared, recently freed slaves at the mercy of the crack troops of the Egyptian army. But they were not merely delivered. They witnessed the miraculous settling of accounts, as each of their former tormentors received his due, perfectly coordinated with his personal culpability. This went far beyond *rachamim*.

Thus, we learn "they believed in Hashem and Moshe, His servant."^[6] What did the miracles of the Sea have to do with Moshe the servant? The Torah means that they now embraced the recent teaching of Moshe - the new understanding of G-d as One in a special relationship with His people. Furthermore, "the nation feared Hashem." They understood that with the special relationship came special responsibility. Hashem would ask more, demand more of them. They were now subject to the scrutiny of His *midah* of *din* like no other people.

Children of the Divine Father have to act differently than others.

1. Based on HaMedrash V'HaMaaseh by R. Yechezkel Libshitz z"l
2. Shemos 6:2-7
3. Koheles 2:12
4. Shemos Rabbah 6:1
5. Eruvin 18B
6. Shemos 14:31