

Parshat Shemot: Path to Redemption

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Gemara in Brachot says, “*Eizehu ben olam habah, zeh hasomech geulah l'tefilah*. Who is worthy of the next world? One who joins redemption to prayer.” Rav Schwab asks, one would think that prayer would precede redemption, why then is redemption mentioned first? Exile is a form of distance from Hashem. *Geulah* is sensing His presence up close. This is the level we must achieve in *tefilah*. Our challenge is to pierce through the outer darkness and get to the spiritual inner core. The long torturous experience of exile, the desolate state of distance from the Divine Presence, brings us to appreciate the sweetness of *geulah*.

In this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu saw an Egyptian man beating one of his fellow Israelites. Moshe promptly killed the Egyptian. Later, he saw two Israelites, identified by Chazal as Datan and Aviram, hitting each other. When Datan and Aviram asked Moshe, “Will you do to us as you did to the Egyptian?” Moshe responded, “*Achen nodah hadavar*.” (Now I know why Bnei Yisrael are still in exile.) Rashi cites the *midrash* that Moshe understood that if there were talebearers

among the people, they weren't worthy to be redeemed. The Maharal explains that a person who is not careful to avoid forbidden speech is not connected to his inner self. On a certain level he is living in exile. *Geulah* by definition is something deep, concealed, and internal.

Speech takes the inner world of a person and limits it by expressing it outward. Therefore, we can understand that Moshe's speech defect, in a certain sense showed his perfection. We can also understand why *geulah* precedes *tefilah*. The Navi says, Hashem is found in the still, small voice. When one can connect to one's inner self and achieve closeness to Hashem, one can begin the silent prayer of *Shemone Esrei*. Spiritual self-display is an oxymoron because spirituality by nature is deep and personal. Our challenge is to find that part of us and develop it. It is enough if only Hashem knows our spiritual achievements. Then we have achieved a level of redemption. When we can sense the Creator's presence in our life, we can immediately turn to Him in prayer. And then we will merit the level of *ben olam habah*, living in this world, while feeling the pleasure of closeness to

Hashem in the next world.

How do we reach this state of internal *geulah*? The Ohr Gedalyahu notes that the answer is hinted to in the book of Shemot. *Shemot* means names. A person's name connotes his purpose in life. It is also related to the word *shemama* which means desolation. We are meant to take the darkness and despair of exile and give it meaning, value, and direction. A person's name reflects his potential energy and his ultimate destiny. When a person doesn't utilize his inherent powers, his name and essence is in exile. Living up to one's name gives one the ability to pierce through the blackness of exile and glimpse the redemption. At the end of *Shemone Esrei* there's a custom to recite a verse pertaining to one's name. We then pray, “Be my rock and redeemer.” We ask Hashem to help us reach our true potential and to have goals and a plan to get there, so that we can attain the ultimate *geulah*.

Tree of Life – Torah Study: Attaching Oneself to G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The Torah tells us, “*U'vacharta ba'chaim*, You shall choose life.” Torah is the means through which our souls live, grow and change. One could say that it is possible to develop a certain sense of inner peace and meaning without Torah. Still, one could never have a true relationship with Hashem that way. Being alive means moving beyond self towards something greater. Studying the Torah's directives teaches us how to do this.

There are two ways of reaching Hashem. The first way is learning how He perceives the world and following His ways by studying Torah and doing *mitzvot*. The second way is saying no to things and actions that distance us from Hashem. The evil inclination's most potent weapon is attempting to make the Torah seem irrelevant to life. You can't feel attachment without knowledge. Torah helps us know Hashem both intellectually and experientially. Loving Hashem and cleaving to Him means emulating His attributes. We can study Hashem's *middot* and how He responds and relates to His creations through the Torah.

Thought, speech, and action are the garments through which we can perceive Hashem. The more we know the details of the *mitzvot*, the more we have a picture of His will. We could see Hashem's providence through the way He interacts with the world and His will through what he tells us in the Torah.

A person who doesn't busy himself with Torah is called *nazuf* (yelled out). When a person screams at someone he is really saying, “We are connected, but at this moment I feel alienated from you.” When a person doesn't learn Torah he implies that he doesn't want a relationship with Hashem. This in turn causes Hashem to turn away. When the Almighty gave us the Torah, it was as if He handed us a spade and commanded, “Dig.” Digging for the truth brings us to attachment and love with Hashem. A person can involve himself with good deeds, live a life of meaning, and feel a certain sense of satisfaction, but without Torah he will never have the formula that will take him to the source of infinity and goodness.

Women are commanded to cleave to Hashem and to love Him just as men are. In earlier times people did this through seeing and living Torah and attaching themselves to it. Today no responsible rabbinic authority will say women can get this without studying. You have to learn what your heart is open to, what inspires you and what gives you *deveikut*. You have to study with *zerizut* (enthusiasm). You have to be a seeker and you have to struggle to make Torah a part of yourself. You have to ask consistently, “Do I really understand?” And if not you have to work to find out. The exertion and determination you invest to understand will open your mind to the light of Torah. You have to be persistent and go over the same thing day after day until it becomes you. At the same time you have to run towards Torah it as it says, “They pursued it to know Hashem.” You have to be willing to go after wisdom wherever it is. Twisting the Torah to one's preferences is defeating its very purpose. One must take one's mind and train it to fit the Torah in a way that one becomes bound to the will of Hashem.



Sefer Tomer Devora Made In His Image – King of Insult

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Tzvi Feur

The first of the Thirteen Attributes is “*Mi Kel kamocha Hashem*. Who is like You Hashem.” At the moment of sin, the sinner takes the energy given to him by the Creator and goes against His will. It's fully within Hashem's power to strike that person down, yet He bears the offense and waits for repentance. We would think Hashem doesn't take away the person's abilities because that is just the way of creation. But the Ramak explains that this is not so. There are times when Hashem does take away a person's life force. One could say that Hashem won't destroy the sinner so as to preserve the balance of free choice. How then do we see Hashem's kindness and goodness here? We can learn incredible patience from the way He allows His energy to be used against Him while He waits for the sinner to repent.

The name *Elokim* connotes strict judgment. The name *Yud Keh Vav Keh* signifies mercy. *Kel* represents mercy hidden within judgment. This name is used when a sinner really deserves punishment yet Hashem awakens His kindness and waits for him to repent. The Ramak says a person should strive to emulate this middah of patience. You should be willing to bear a wrongdoing even if someone is using something you gave him

against you. As long as there is a reasonable chance the person will correct his sin, you should not withhold your goodness. The *Reishit Chochma* adds that this is really a prohibition in the Torah as it says, “*Lo tikom v'lo titor*. Do not take revenge or bear a grudge.” Repaying good for wrong done reflects humility and endurance. Of course if there is no hope that the person will repent, one should take a different track.

Once while traveling by train, a man terribly insulted Rav Yisrael Salanter. When the man realized what he had done, he begged Rav Yisrael for forgiveness. He then said he'd come to receive a certificate to become a *shochet* (ritual slaughterer). Rav Yisrael helped him to get tutors so he could pass the exam. He then went out of his way to find him a job. Rav Yisrael applied this *middah* by refraining from repaying bad, and even exerted himself to act with extra kindness.

The second *middah* is *noseh avon* (carrying a sin), which is even greater than the first attribute. A sin creates negative energy, which we can call a prosecuting angel. According to strict justice, Hashem should send the angel to the person who created him and have the sinner sustain the bad angel. One of three

things could then happen. The destructive angel could take the soul of the sinner, the sinner could get kares and be cut off from his spiritual source, or the angel could arrange that the person be punished based on what he deserves. But Hashem doesn't do this. Just as He sustains the world, he sustains the destructive angels. This seems to be an even greater level of patience. Hashem not only upholds the sinner, but even the angels. He waits until the person accepts suffering, repents or dies and go to *gehinom*, and pay up his dues there.

One should strive to emulate Hashem and wait patiently for the repentance of those who have wronged us. In addition, when a person is going through difficult times and pushes himself to bear the situation and slowly work it through until things get better, that too is a fulfillment of the divine attribute of *noseh avon*. The Gemara tells the story of Rav Preida who would teach his student the same lesson 400 times. Explaining a concept to a student over and over again is also a form of *noseh avon*. Let us strive to fill our days with good deeds, with divine patience and forbearance, and with the hope that all those who have succumbed to the *yetzer hara* return completely to Hashem.