

Parshat Va'aira: Understanding The Will of Hashem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The midrash in Parshat Va'aira cites a verse in Kohelet, "I see that with wisdom comes foolishness, for what is man to question what has already been decreed and done." The midrash says this refers to Moshe. He had been told by Hashem before he went to Paro that it would be a difficult mission and that the king would not listen to him. Yet after this first meeting, Moshe complained to Hashem about why he had been sent and that the situation had gotten worse. The Shem MiShmuel notes that this midrash is puzzling because Hashem had only told Moshe that he would harden Paro's heart, not that the circumstances would get more difficult.

When Yaakov sent Yosef to find his brothers, the Torah writes that he sent him from "emek Chevron," the valley of Chevron. Rashi explains that this was a fulfillment of an *eitza amuka*, a very deep idea of Avraham, who was buried in Chevron. At the *Brit Bein Habetarim*, Hashem discussed the problem of Jewish continuity with Avraham. The *avot* were great people, but how would their greatness be perpetuated in their descendants? Hashem asked Avraham which solution he preferred, *galut* or *gehinom*, exile in this world or the next? Avraham chose exile as the guarantor of Jewish continuity and this was the *eitza amuka*.

The concept of *galut* followed by *geulah* is a fundamental aspect of Jewish history. *Galut* must result in redemption. The darker the *galut*, the sweeter and more beautiful is the

redemption. The Jewish people in exile have not only suffered but have been the target of whole philosophical campaigns against them. The essence of *galut* is *chillul Hashem* because we are the chosen nation and if we suffer, Hashem suffers too.

Our return to Israel will be a *kiddush Hashem*. The greater the *chillul Hashem* engendered by *galut*, the greater will be the *kiddush Hashem* brought about by *geulah*. The *geulah* will prove that our faith in Hashem was justified despite all the troubles we suffered.

With this idea, the Shem Mishmuel explains that the *galut/geulah* alternative was better than *gehinom* because in a sense the *geulah* would be a redemption of the *galut* itself. This lesson was established with the exile in Egypt and the subsequent great Exodus, which resulted in a tremendous sanctification of Hashem's name.

In Tehilim it is written, "Mikolot mayim rabim... More than the roars of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, are you Hashem on high." Egypt is referred to as the mighty empire, the raging waters are the subsequent exiles, but emerging from all these terrible exiles, stands Hashem, because *galut* produces an astonishingly powerful *kiddush Hashem*. Moshe needed to go to Paro because he was the medium through which Hashem's voice spoke to the king. Nevertheless, Paro chose to defy Hashem's will and therefore the power of *teshuva* was taken from him. After Moshe returned from Paro, Hashem sent the plagues and caused a great sanctification of Hashem's

name. The midrash criticizes Moshe for not understanding Hashem's plan for *galut* and *geulah*.

The gemara writes about repentance out of love, "zedonot naasot k'zichuyot," sins become merits. Ironically, sins can sometimes catapult a person to *teshuva* and redemption of one's character. Sins can cause a person to ascend to higher levels. Indeed Chazal note, "B'makom she'baalei teshuva omdim ein tzaddikim yecholim l'amod. In the place that *baalei teshuva* stand, righteous people cannot stand." One should never say that a sinner is doomed, because a person can repent and become even greater. *Teshuva m'ahava* has the ability to infuse fire and passion into one's *avodat Hashem*. Similarly, we may feel alienated and distant from Hashem during the six days of the week. However, the exile of the soul experienced during the week helps us appreciate the *geulah* of Shabbat. Chazal tell us, "Mi shetarach b'erev Shabbat yochal b'Shabbat." One who works before Shabbat will eat on Shabbat. If one knows that *galut* will eventually lead to *geulah*, one gains strength to go through the week, and when Shabbat finally does arrive, one can truly enjoy it.

As we encounter the difficulties of life, we need to take hope and encouragement in believing that the *geulah* will be even greater than the exile. If we go through *galut* with faith and trust in the coming redemption, we gain strength to bear our suffering. This was the *eitza amukah* that remains the Jewish paradigm as we await

Mesilat Yesharim: Energetic Spirituality #12

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Zehirut (thinking before acting) is related to *sur mera*, abstaining from sin, which in turn corresponds to fear of punishment and the negative *mitzvot*. *Zerizut* (alacrity) is connected to *asei tov*, doing good, which corresponds to the positive *mitzvot* and serving Hashem with love. The gemara taught a principle that a positive *mitzva* can override a negative *mitzva*, *asei doche lo ta'aseh*. Therefore, according to the letter of the law one may wear *shatnez in tzizit*. (In practice, however, we avoid this today.) An additional example,

the Torah permits a man to marry his brother's wife, which is normally a prohibited union, to fulfill the *mitzva* of *yibum*. We see that *ahava* is greater than *yirah* and that *zerizut* is a more elevated level than *zehirut*.

The Mesilat Yesharim quotes the Gemara, "Zerizim makdimim l'mitzvot." Anticipation and excitement for the *mitzva* is a prerequisite to the performance of the *mitzva*. The attitude towards the *mitzva* is just as essential as its proper performance. *Zerizut* completes the good deed. Why is this such a difficult *middah*

to master? Man was created from afar (earth). There's a certain heaviness that pulls us down. Not being limited to any type of schedule seems to some people like the peak of pleasure. Hard work goes against our nature. Yet we need to plow, weed, plant, and harvest, in order to enjoy the physical bounty of this world. Similarly, we need to invest *hishtadlut* to grow in spirituality. If Hashem sees we're trying, He will bless our efforts. Obstacles may block our path and prevent us from fulfilling the *mitzvot* properly. Yet we must rise like a lion,

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serve Hashem with *zerizut*, and fight against the evil inclination that seeks to pull us down.

Rav Chatzkel Levenstein once said that he studied the chapter of *zerizut* in *Mesilat Yesharim* 100 times. If we would recognize

that Torah and *mitzvot* are meant to elevate us to a higher degree of perfection we would embrace them with passion, alacrity, and

Parshat Va'eira: The Greater Good

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

Parshat Va'eira begins, "*Vayidaber Elokim el Moshe... v'yomer ani Hashem. Elokim spoke to Moshe and told him I am Hashem.*" How do we explain the shift from judgment, as signified by the name *Elokim*, to mercy, as signified by the name Hashem? The Arizal says that if Hashem would appear to us in His full glory and honor we would not be able to withstand His great presence. Therefore, He diminished his awesome light and power and concealed Himself within nature. This is expressed as *Elokim*, the attribute of judgment. The Gemara says in the future Hashem will take the sun out of its covering and allows its full glory to shine upon the world. The *tzaddikim* will bask in its light while the *reshaim* will be burned by its intensity. This is what happened in Egypt. The last verses of the previous parsha, Moshe asked, "*Lama hare'ota, Why have You made it difficult?*" Hashem answered, "*Ani Hashem.*" Until now I was *Elokim*, I concealed myself. But now I will act as Hashem, I will reveal my full power. I will punish the Egyptians and heal the Jews.

The ten plagues corresponds to the ten utterances with which Hashem created the world. The plague of darkness parallels, "*Vayehi ohr.*" The Egyptians were blinded by Hashem's light while the Jews were drawn closer to Him. The verse in Az Yashir reads, "*Yemincha Hashem nedari b'koach, yemincha Hashem tir'atz oyev.* Your right hand, Hashem, is powerful in strength, your right hand Hashem smashes the enemy." The same right hand that powerfully supported the Jews also destroyed the Egyptians. The Ibn Ezra relates a parable of a man who stood in the sun hanging his clothes to dry. The same

sun that bleached his garments darkened his skin. Hashem will do one action and for one person it will be a punishment and for another it will be a tremendous elevation. It depends on the recipient. For the Egyptians, the plagues were a punishment, for the Jews they were a lesson of faith.

The Baal Shem Tov said that life is like the red heifer. It can make one pure and the other impure. The same event can happen to two people, one will be drawn closer to Hashem and the other will draw away. There are people who have gone through terrible suffering yet they've risen above it and brought strength and hope to thousands. Others who experience suffering find religious observance a challenge afterwards. Our challenge is to ask ourselves, "What type of recipients are we? What lessons have we gained from our tests?"

The Ibn Ezra explains that when Moshe said, "*Lama hare'ota,*" he was really asking, "I understand it won't get better immediately, but why is it getting worse?" Hashem answered, "*Ani Hashem.*" I am kindness. The exile was meant to be 400 years long but Bnei Yisrael were only slaves for 210 years. The suffering came from a place of mercy. The work intensified to such a degree that it was as if they worked 400 years and this sped up the redemption. We have to understand that everything that happens is for the good and with a larger plan in mind. The Arizal explains the verse in Tehilim, "*Dimini Elokim chasdecha b'kerev heichalecha.*" We thought that which we saw was *Elokim*, *midat hadin*, but in reality it was *chasdecha*, kindness. Sometimes we will see it in our lifetime and sometimes we'll only understand *b'kerev heichalecha*, when we get to heaven.

The Torah says Klal Yisrael didn't listen to Hashem, "because of their shortness of breath." The *yetzer hara* tries to distract us from our true life goals by keeping us busy with mundane day to day matters. From time to time we must stop and introspect and ask ourselves, "How can I be a better person?" We must ponder our desires and aspirations and examine them, asking ourselves if they are they rooted in the *yetzer hara* or the *yetzer tov*? When we look at our experiences and ask ourselves, "How can I take this and learn and grow," then we're on the road to reaching our purpose.

Rav Pincus notes that there could be a lapse of time from *Elokim*, the point of *din*, when Hashem promises something, to receiving the goodness, represented by the phrase *ani Hashem*. If we have *emunah* then we can merit seeing the promise fulfilled. This is encapsulated in Parshat Shemot when Hashem appeared to Moshe with the name *Ekeh Asher Ekeh*. Rashi explains this means, "I will be with you in these circumstances and in future circumstances." Hashem says, whatever name I manifest myself with, you must learn to recognize that it's all for the good and I'm with you holding your hand all along the way. The *din* itself is good for us. We can survive those dark moments with faith by recognizing that some challenges are beyond our human comprehension, yet they are ultimately for the best. When we're going through the darkness of *din*, but we hold fast to our faith and allow the challenges to form us into better people, we can merit to see *ani Hashem*, the full glory of Hashem's everlasting kindness.