

## PARSHAS VAEIRA 5778

The Ovos were given a tremendous nisoyon. Hashem promised many things to them and He displayed His ability to deliver on all those promises, but they didn't see them come to fruition in their lifetime. The Shem of YKVK is the Shem that underlies the very existence of the world and the direct cause of everything that happens in the world and is the embodiment of emes. The Shem of Elokim means din and mishpat – justice and judgment – strict law. This is the middoh which sets up laws of nature and works through laws of nature. But the Shem of YKVK transcends everything and can override the laws of nature. With the Ovos, Hashem did not use this Shem and did not deliver on His promises until now.

Moshe Rabbeinu was under the impression that once Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe, the geuloh would commence immediately and there would be no more servitude. He was frustrated when this didn't happen and the servitude only got worse with Moshe's arrival. Hashem was telling Moshe that the Ovos were given this same test of being given promises that weren't fulfilled to see whether they still had faith in Hashem's commitment to Klal Yisroel. Hashem promised Avrohom a great land and many descendants, but the reality was quite different – he was forced to wander from place to place and live at the mercy of the local rulers. He grew old with no children and no legacy. He saw that according to nature he wouldn't have children, yet he still believed in Hashem's promise. This was Avrohom's bitochon which enabled him to persevere. The Ovos trusted Hashem even though it went against all logic and all natural law.

Hashem's word is absolute truth. His bris is unshakable. When Hashem is about to fulfill His promise to Avrohom, that Klal Yisroel will emerge from Egypt, it wasn't so simple. Yaakov Ovinu was very concerned about the future when they went down to golus. He wasn't sure they would be worthy. Hashem had to reassure him that Klal Yisroel will eventually be worthy of geuloh and not be completely assimilated. But Hashem had to first weed out those who were not worthy. Geuloh isn't just emancipation from slavery. It contains four distinct steps. The ultimate purpose of leaving Egypt was that we accept the role of becoming the nation of Hashem. Otherwise, we had no reason to leave. But not everyone was worthy of becoming part of such a nation. Geuloh didn't happen immediately. There are still nisyonos to weed out those who were not worthy.

The posuk describes four steps of geuloh. To recognize these we drink four cups of wine on Pesach night. They are the four words: Vehotzaysi, vehitzalti, vegodalti velokachti.

A slave is someone who is completely subservient to his master. He has no way to create a mental space to be an eved Hashem. This is true of many of us today who are totally preoccupied with what we are pursuing and the pressures from within and without that are pushing us in all different directions. We have no ability to step back and think about what our lives are supposed to

be about and how to dedicate our lives to fulfilling the will of Hashem.

The back-breaking work in Egypt was designed to crush them physically and break them psychologically. They would give Jews an impossible task that could not be accomplished. They forced a Jew to bang his head against the wall accomplishing nothing or gave them trivial tasks that gave no sense of accomplishment. It deprived them of a sense of self which is necessary to be a genuine eved of Hashem. Taking Klal Yisroel out of this state was the first step of geuloh.

The next step was to remove another component of slavery. A slave is never given the ability to take pride in his work. It doesn't belong to him. He doesn't decide what to do and how to do it. He is given commands and he can't express any sense of self. To be Hashem's nation requires a sense of self that is being dedicated to avodas Hashem. You can't just be a robot mechanically executing commands. You have to have an ability to forge a personal bond with Hashem.

The next step brings us to a totally different dimension. Personal redemption means understanding where I fit in to Hashem's plan for the universe. It is more than just having a sense of self which can easily be nullified by the experience of the smallness of one's being. Such a person can feel like someone without significance and value. The next step of geuloh showed that Hashem valued Klal Yisroel and cares for them like His special children. Each individual Jew benefitted from the wondrous miracles that Hashem performed for them. Hashem turned over all the laws of nature on their behalf to execute an exact din vecheshbon. They saw each Egyptian punished in a way that reflected their cruelty to the Jewish People. It means that everything a human being does matters. It creates a response by Hashem to reward good deeds and punish evil deeds. I am not irrelevant.

There is no such thing as "killing time" and wasting time. It is foreign to the Jewish understanding of the infinite value of a human being, every one of his acts and what he can accomplish with his time on this world with his free will. Every act I do has meaning and is evaluated by Hashem.

Hashem showed Yisro that He is more powerful than all pagan deities by performing Kriyas Yam Suf. It was by delivering a precise punishment to each individual Egyptian who persecuted a Jew. That means there is a profound difference between human beings and animals. Hashem does not give hashgocho protis to any individual animal to see to it that it survives or dies. He is only concerned with the survival of the species as a whole. No individual animal has any intrinsic value which demands Hashem's attention. But human beings are different. Each individual has a tzelem Elokim and whatever he does counts and is remembered and is calculated.

This was the purpose of the 10 makkos and Kriyas Yam Suf.

Hashem cares about Klal Yisroel and paid attention to their suffering and punished their oppressors. While there may be Elokim and tevah and din, it is only because that is the way YKVK wants to run the world under normal circumstances. When He wants, Hashem can cast it all aside and do what He sees fit to take care of Klal Yisroel. Hashem showed Klal Yisroel the incredible middas hadin - how it works in such a precise way to teach us that everything we do counts.

All of this is necessary in becoming the Am Hashem - the fourth level.

It isn't a simple thing. It means understanding the value of being a human being with a tzelem Elokim and having free will and having everything you do count. The value of connecting to Hashem – the Creator – who also runs the world hands-on, and joining a nation that will be forming a special unique relationship with Him.

If you are crushed by a burden and have no mental space for anything else, if you have no sense of accomplishment and no sense of self, if you don't know the significance of a human action and what he can achieve with his free will, then you have no understanding of what it means to be the Am Hashem either.

The result of this entire process is to recognize that Hashem is the master of the world who decided to take us out of Egypt for a specific purpose. Human freedom does not have any value in itself. Human freedom is only meaningful if you know what to do with it and appreciate that you were created with a tzelem Elokim. Abraham Lincoln emancipated the blacks in America in 1863. But their freedom didn't mean anything. It didn't have an intrinsic purpose.

Hashem told Moshe that now the process of Geuloh will commence. Moshe protested that his level didn't meet the job. But Hashem said you will go to Pharaoh and to Klal Yisroel as a leader. Hashem was giving Moshe the ability and the strength to stand up to Pharaoh and deal with Klal Yisroel.

Klal Yisroel were similarly being faced with a task that they were not really prepared for. They have to reach a level where they are worthy of geuloh and kabbolas haTorah to become a mamleches kohanim and goy kodosh. But they have been sunk in the tum'oh of Egypt for generations! How can they pick themselves up in such a short span of time? Hashem went through a year of makkos and nissim to reach a climax of Gilui Shechinoh and seven days later they experienced a nevuoh greater than Yechezkel Hanovi, and six weeks later they are at Har Sinai. Hashem had to artificially raise them up so that they could reach these levels. But 40 days later, they could no longer hold on. It was too much too fast and they collapsed.

Sometimes Hashem gives us tremendous capacity and then an extra boost. He expects us to use them in a way that He wants us to. We need to do something with it. Moshe and Aharon did it and Klal Yisroel rose and fell until they reached that level on their own.

Leaving Egypt is not just leaving slavery and physical location. It is an entire spiritual journey. After all this is accomplished, they will be brought to Eretz Yisroel. It is not a fifth step in geuloh. It is a consequence of achieving the four previous levels of geuloh. We are told constantly in Chumash that if we are able to maintain our level and appreciate our unique identity being the Am Hashem, then we will merit to live in tranquility in Eretz Yisroel. If we fall and assimilate, we lose that privilege and go back into golus until we become worthy again.

The posuk in Tehillim says Hashem brought us to a built-up land—all the work of the nations was handed to us because this is where we function best as the Am Hashem. This is the point of geuloh and leaving Egypt. The process finishes only with the building of the Beis Hamikdash and the Shechinoh permanently present in our midst.

Looking toward Pesach on the horizon, we should learn these parshiyos to appreciate what leaving Egypt is all about—developing and growing to become the Am Hashem.