

“And this will be a sign to thee (that I have sent thee)”

וַיְהִי לְךָ הָאֵימָן

♪ *Certainly I will be with thee; I will be with thee. And this will be a sign to thee, that I have sent thee. I have sent thee, yes I have sent thee to set me my people free. I have sent thee, yes I have sent thee to set my people free. When you have brought forth the people from bondage, I will be with thee. Ye shall serve God upon this mountain, for I have sent thee.* ♪ (the song: ‘I Have Sent Thee,’ based on Ex. 3:12)

Introduction

This week’s *Torah* portion begins to tell one of the most famous stories of all human history—the story of the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. In the *Torah* G-d gave us a helpful outline of the book found in *Shemot* 2:24-25: “During those many days it happened that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to Elohim. Elohim heard their groaning, and Elohim remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya’akov. Elohim saw the children of Israel; and Elohim knew.”

[כג] וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעְקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה׃
[כד] וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־אַבְרָהָם
אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃
[כה] וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים׃

And Elohim “Sh’ma” Their Moaning—Vayishma Elohim (אֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁמַע)

Sh’ma means to prove that one hears by doing what was asked (said). The “doing” comes first. If we are to *Sh’ma*, and we are, isn’t it true that יהוה will also? Indeed, *vayishma* means “and Elohim will sh’ma...” The L-rd has always shown us (illustrated) the way to do something that He Himself has asked us to do...

The fact remains that *Elohim* meant exactly what He had told our father *Ya’akov* when he first came down to Egypt when He said, “I shall descend with you to Egypt, and I shall also surely bring you up...” (*Bereshit* 46:4) Even amid the misery of their backbreaking labor, יהוה was there. Even though we do not read of יהוה speaking in the first two chapters, He was, nevertheless, listening. Indeed, He was silent, but in His silence He was accomplishing several important things.

‘When in Rome, do not do what the Romans do’ has always been true for G-d’s people—we are to be non-conformists. First, G-d was in the process of chastening His children. When *Ya’akov* first went down to Egypt, he went with the intention of merely sojourning there. It was supposed to be a temporary stay. But the temporary stay turned into a permanent dwelling. Israel began to be allured by whatever attractions Egypt had to offer. In short, they began to assimilate and lose their family distinctiveness. Thus, instead of settling down and buying houses, the children of Israel should have been making plans to leave Egypt as soon as possible. In all fairness, they were living in some of the most fertile land in all of Egypt, just on the eastern edge of the Nile River delta. In a time of famine, at least there was water and grazing land for their flocks. Nevertheless, Canaan was the Promised Land. The children of Israel should have left the land of temptation and come up (made *aliyah*) to their Promised Land.

Instead, by remaining in Egypt, the people made themselves completely vulnerable to all of Egyptian culture, which, apparently they may have begun to participate in. Because of this, G-d was in the painful process of disciplining His children. Accordingly, Israel’s sin lay in imitating the ways of the surrounding people and attempting to lose their identity.

Throughout our history, every time Israel fell into the sin of assimilation, it always ended up in slavery, as it did in Egypt (e.g., like in the days of *Ahashverosh* and *Chanukah*). The Jews of Germany were, perhaps, one of the most assimilated of all Jewish generations. All of us know the horrible outcome resulting in slavery in the death camps. Assimilation therefore invariably leads to moaning and groaning.

There is, yet, a third reason for the slavery. This one is more of a positive one—education! Through their slavery in Egypt, יהוה was teaching our people Israel many "object lessons" which will be used to teach profound spiritual truth. There are many such lessons throughout the *Torah*. One such object lesson is found in the concept of being a "stranger" or a "ger." For example, *Adonai* tells our people: "Do not wrong a stranger and do not oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 22:20) How was Israel to know how to treat a stranger? One very poignant and assured way would be by remembering what it was like when they were strangers in Egypt.

Finally, a fourth reason for the slavery is that יהוה was preparing the children of Israel for redemption. They would never know the depth of *Elohim's* mercy if they did not experience the hopeless bondage of slavery. They would not fully understand the freedom of redemption if they never experienced the shackles of servitude.

Our Jewish people's moaning was further exacerbated by יהוה's apparent silence. But even though it seemed like יהוה was staying aloof during the Israelite servitude in Egypt, He was not inactive. He told us that He, indeed, heard the moaning of their suffering in slavery. Consequently, He was accomplishing significant redemptive things that most would not have noticed.

And Elohim Yizkor (Remembered His Covenant)—Va Yizkor Elohim (וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים)

A most important aspect of being His people is that we are "the people of His covenant." No wonder the psalmist said: "ADONAI relates intimately with those who fear him; he makes them know his covenant." (Ps 25:14) (♪ 'The secret of the L-rd is with those who fear Him. He will make them know His covenant...' ♪)

What did G-d do after He heard the moaning of the children of Israel? It says that He "remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov" Of course, He never forgot that covenant! The writer is simply writing from the human perspective, trying to express with human terms an infinite concept!

Jewish commentators often assert that when good things are done to us it is because we merit them. But in *Shemot* the situation is quite different. There is no merit here. The children of Israel, having swallowed the pill of assimilation, are now crying out to the L-rd for mercy. Then *Shemot* 2:24 says that *Elohim sh'ma* their cry and came to their rescue. There is no merit involved. Whatever *Elohim* did for them was purely for two reasons. First, it was out of His grace and mercy. Secondly, as this verse points out, it was because of His promise to the patriarchs, not because of Israel's merit. Thus, a covenant is a covenant—it is a legally binding agreement between two or more parties. In all cases the solemn engagement of one party to another and the promise of fidelity were fundamental. *Elohim* made such agreements with our forefathers and in essence, pledged His immutable Will and if you please, His life (if it were possible! He did in *Yeshua*! See *Bereshit* chapter 15) as a token of His promise to fulfill His promises. Despite all the cruelty of Egypt and all the assimilation or complacency of Israel, *Elohim* promised to give the land of Canaan to them and to bring them up from Egypt. Thus, it is on the basis of those solemn promises that He now acts.

And Elohim Yareh (Saw) the Children of Israel—Va Yareh Elohim (וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים)

Another important aspect is that our people already knew that "Adonai Yireh." No wonder that *Moshe* said in *Haazinu*: "And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." (Deut 32:20)

Exodus 2:25 says that "Elohim saw the children of Israel." What did He see? Simply, the first two chapters told us what He saw. In *Shemot* 1:1-6, *Elohim* saw the first generation of the children of Israel arrive in Egypt

and disappear from the scene. In verses 7-14, *Elohim* saw the extraordinary fertility and suffering of the second and subsequent generations. Then, in verses 15-23 *Elohim* saw the episode of the midwives.

Finally, in chapter two and onward, *Elohim* saw (*Yireh*—provided) *Moshe*. Stating it somewhat differently, in chapter one, He saw the people, in chapter two and onward, He provided (saw) *Moshe*. *Adonai* saw these physical things. It was a sad and messy sight of miserable beaten slaves in complete subjection to the Pharaohs. But these things anyone could see. What did He see which no one else saw? He sees the heart (of *Moshe*!).

And Elohim Yed'a (He Has Intimate Knowledge)—Va Yeda Elohim (וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים)

Is there something in the universe that has ever existed about which G-d had no knowledge? What does it mean in Exodus 2:25 when it says, "*And G-d knew*"?

The Hebrew word translated "knew" is from the root *yodea*, יָדַע, which although meaning "to know," hints at more than mere intellectual knowledge. It is a word, for example, which is used in connection with a marriage relationship, specifically the sexual part of it. Thus it often speaks of a deep intimate personal knowledge. When we read that "G-d knew" we are to understand that there were some things about the situation of which only G-d had intimate knowledge.

In addition, the phrase comes after the previous words, "G-d saw." There is a 'vav *Conversive*' used to connect it with the previous thought. Therefore, it would mean something like this: Whatever it was that G-d saw, it prompted Him to know in an intimate way that certain actions were now ready to be performed. On the one hand, these actions would be based on an intimate knowledge of the people whom He knew. On the other hand, these actions would be based on the nature of the situation in which they found themselves.

The Call of the Deliverer

One thing G-d knew was that it was now time to raise up a deliverer—*Moshe*. Accordingly, the narrative now focuses on that single man. It is not a complete biography. This portion, however, furnishes enough information for us to see how G-d formed and prepared this great deliverer. *Moshe* needed to grow in several areas of his life in order for G-d to use him effectively as a leader.

First, *Moshe* needed to know his *enemy*. This is why the L-rd had him grow up in Pharaoh's household. For *Moshe* to be able to stand before the king and command such a hearing, he needed to know the ways of Pharaoh's court. Likewise, before *Moshe* could lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he needed to know how to handle the Egyptian opposition. And before he could flee from Pharaoh's mighty army, he needed to know their characteristics. It is always necessary to know how the enemy functions if we are to outsmart him. Thus, G-d made sure that the most effective events would transpire which would enable the great prophet, lawgiver and deliverer to be raised, not just as an ordinary Egyptian, but as part of the very household of Pharaoh himself.

Next, *Moshe* needed to know his own *people*. G-d taught him this in several ways. One way was for *Moshe* to be out with the Hebrew slaves and to see their misery and the injustices which entangled them. In this regard we read, "*It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and observed their burdens; and he saw ... Egyptians striking the Hebrew and Hebrews doing the same to each other.*" (*Shemot* 2:11) Commenting on this, the writer of the book of Hebrews tells us what else *Moshe* saw and how the L-rd used it in his life. In Hebrews 11:25, we are told that *Moshe*: "... chose to be mistreated along with the people of G-d rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time." In other words, G-d worked in his life to cause him to identify with the people whom he was called to serve and whom he would lead.

After he tried to practice his own sense of justice, when he saw the abuse as recorded in chapter two, *Moshe* was driven to Midian where he not only found his wife, but also worked as a shepherd for about forty years. This would prove to be a most effective training period for him. He would learn that to lead G-d's sheep (people), is much like leading the woolly animals. When the time came, therefore, for *Moshe* to lead the people of

G-d, he was more than ready. In other words, G-d worked in his life to cause him to identify with the people whom he was called to serve and whom he would lead.

The third area of knowledge *Moshe* needed was to have an accurate knowledge of *himself*. For one thing, the incident with the Egyptians striking the Hebrew slaves showed two things about himself. It showed that *Moshe* had a deep inner sense of justice. But it also indicated that sometimes he tended to act rather impulsively, perhaps out of uncontrolled emotion. Later in his life, this characteristic would be part of the reason why the L-rd denied him the privilege of entering the Promised Land. G-d needed to show him this area of his flesh which required improvement. In other words, G-d worked in his life to cause him to identify with the people whom he was called to serve and whom he would lead.

Another example of *Moshe* needing a better knowledge of himself is in the dialogue between he and G-d in chapter three. After the L-rd gave him a major revelation of Himself and called him to his appointed task, *Moshe* began to object. It was important for *Moshe* to see himself in this light before he started leading G-d's people. He needed to see his own sin in light of G-d's holiness for him to have the proper humility necessary to serve G-d in such a mighty way. G-d made sure that *Moshe* would be sufficiently humbled.

He also made sure that *Moshe* would see that the sufficiency of G-d is greater than all of his insufficiencies. That is why *Moshe* needed to know himself better, so that he would be able to rely totally on the power of the L-rd rather than trying to go on such an important mission in his own flesh.

The last thing (not in priority order!) which *Moshe* needed to know was G-d Himself. Thus, in chapter three, we see one of the greatest moments of revelation which ever happened between G-d and man. It was in this passage that G-d revealed His personal name to *Moshe*. In doing so, G-d revealed His personal character to *Moshe* as well. In Jewish mind and thought "name" is shorthand for character. (♪ 'Certainly I will be with thee...' ♪)

In order to perform such a difficult task as *Moshe* was called to carry out, he needed to know some awesome things about his G-d. This was one of the purposes of the famous encounter at the burning bush. Moreover, it is the only time in the *Tanakh* where *Adonai* actually explained what one of His names mean. Since no one but יהוה could explain יהוה, the name is clearly representative as being explicable only by *Elohim* Himself. Our people will learn the meaning of His name from what He says and does.

Moshe learned that he was called by a G-d who performs miracles beyond the scope of human ability. He learned that his G-d was perfect and eternal in His compassion, His mercy, and His presence. When *Moshe* asked what the name is of the G-d who was sending him, in essence, he was asking: "Which of G-d's attributes would be manifested in the course of redeeming them from Egypt?"

The L-rd responded by saying that not only is He the G-d of his (*Moshe's*) forefathers, but that He is also the G-d who is in the eternal present. He made *Moshe* aware of the fact that He would only be understood by His own subsequent acts and words of revelation. He also meant that He is always actively doing, loving, existing, caring, and empowering in the present; He is not a static G-d.

Thus, we see a little of the process which G-d uses to train and mold a leader. His principles are always the same, even today. If G-d has called someone to leadership, that person needs also to know his enemy, his people, himself, and his G-d.

The same G-d who showed His compassion and willingness to feel and sense in a real way the suffering of the children of Israel in Exodus chapter three, is the same One who sent Messiah to identify with the suffering of sinful man in order to redeem us from slavery to sin and to bring us to Himself.

Not only do we see that the whole history of Israel is foreshadowed in these words: G-d *heard*, *remembered*, *looked upon*, and *knew* them, but the whole history of the new creation is also summarized in the same manner. G-d heard us, He remembered His promise to save us, He looked upon us with pity, and He knew us, that is, He entered into a personal relationship with us.