

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Haazinu

Torah Living

כִּי שֵׁם ה' אֶקְרָא הֵבו גְדֹל לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ

When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our God (32:3)

We note that while Moshe Rabbeinu refers to himself calling out “the name of Hashem,” i.e., the Name spelled *yud-hey-vav-heh*, known as the *Shem Havaya*, he calls upon Bnei Yisrael to “ascribe greatness to our God,” using the Name “Elokim.” What is behind this change of Name?

LIFE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The Meshech Chochmah prefaces his explanation of this pasuk by noting that the ideal way for the Jewish People to live in this world is specifically to be involved in worldly matters – sowing, reaping and harvesting – but imbuing these pursuits with a Godly perspective. This takes the form of, among other things, separating *Terumos* and *Maasros* from the crop and bringing *Bikkurim* to the Beis Hamikdash, as well as expressing their trust in Hashem by leaving their fields three times a year for *Aliyah l'Regel*. Living in this way in the Land of Israel will bring about Divine blessing in our material involvements, as well as instilling fear within the nations that surround us. Indeed, this elevated mode of existence, which permeates the physical with the spiritual, is itself truly spiritual in nature, concerning which it may be said that one hour of such existence is more precious than all of life in the World to Come!

LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS

The mode of existence which we enjoyed under Moshe Rabbeinu during the forty years in the wilderness differs greatly from that described above. In Moshe’s time, the laws of nature were practically completely suspended: food fell from the sky and Hashem’s Presence was clearly visible on the form of the Clouds of Glory which surrounded us and through which Hashem directed our travels. Notwithstanding the exalted nature of such an existence, it cannot be said to be the ultimate form of living in this world, for it practically belongs to the mode of life in the next world!

Chazal themselves noted this idea with a most striking comment on the well-known pasuk in Mishlei:¹

שָׁקֵר הַחַן וְהַבֵּל הַיּוֹפִי אִשָּׁה יִרְאַת ה' הִיא תִתְהַלֵּל

Grace is false, and beauty vain, a woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised.

The Gemara² associates the three phrases in this pasuk with three distinct periods in our history:

- ▶ **Grace is false** – This [refers to] the generation of Moshe.
- ▶ **And beauty is vain** – This [refers to] the generation of Chizkiyahu.
- ▶ **A woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised** – This [refers to] the generation of R' Yehuda bar Ilai, where six students would wrap themselves up in one tallis and engage in Torah study.

What does the Gemara mean by referring to the generations of Moshe and Chizkiyahu as “false” and “vain”? The answer is as per the above. Those generations were characterized by miracles and the suspension of the laws of nature.³ As such, although they were undoubtedly periods of “grace” and “beauty,” they were not “true” in the sense of how life in this world is ultimately meant to lived.

THE ROLE OF MIRACULOUS TIMES

We may ask: If a miraculous mode of existence is not the ideal way to live life in this world, why did this mode pertain throughout our time with Moshe in the wilderness?

The answer, says the Meshech Chochmah, is that since these were the formative years of our national existence, they were dedicated to instilling faith in – and awareness of – Hashem. Beginning their history in this elevated way served to “launch” the Jewish People with all of their faith, ideals and values, which could then be passed on to future generations.

THE AVOS, MOSHE RABBEINU AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The *Shem Havaya* represents Hashem interacting with the world in a miraculous way. In this regard, we find that just prior to sending Moshe to bring about the plagues in Mitzrayim, Hashem says concerning the Avos: “וַשְׁמִי ה' לֹא נִדְעִיתִי לָהֶם – I did not make Myself known to them with My Name Hashem.”⁴ The Avos did not enjoy an otherworldly existence. Rather, they moved among the people of their time and had to deal with things in a this-worldly way, even suffering setbacks and frustrations in their dealings. This is amply illustrated by the episode of Avraham’s burial of Sarah. Upon seeking a burial plot, one did not miraculously make itself available. Instead, Avraham was forced to negotiate with the conniving Efron, and ended up having to pay an exorbitant amount of money. This was similarly the case with all their affairs and involvements. In terms of our discussion, the idea is that the Avos as individuals did not need a miraculous existence in

1 31:30.

2 Sanhedrin 20a.

3 See Melachim II, *perakim* 18-20 for a description of the miracles which occurred in the times of Chizkiyahu.

4 Shemos 6:3.

order to instill faith within themselves, nor spirituality within their lives.

Accordingly, Hashem tells Moshe that the Name associated with the miracles with which He will deliver Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim – the *Shem Havaya* – was one through which He was not known to the Avos. It was only as the Jewish People were about to embark on their formative years *as a nation* that this became the dominant mode of existence. Indeed, in this respect, Moshe himself is known as “איש האלקים,”⁵ which the Vilna Gaon⁶ explains to mean as “the master over the laws of nature,”⁷ overriding them as Hashem’s emissary in directing the miraculous existence of the Jewish People’s early years.

Our Parsha marks the time when this formative period was now coming to a close and Moshe is therefore instructing the Jewish People concerning their transition back into this-worldly life. Thus, he says, “אֶקְרָא ה' כִּי שָׁם – In the same way that I would call upon Hashem” – referring to the miraculous existence you have enjoyed over the past forty years which is represented by the *Shem Havaya* – “הָבוּ גְדֹל לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ” – you render greatness to our God.” The word “הבו” literally means “give.” How is it possible for the Bnei Yisrael to “give” greatness to an Infinite God? The answer is that the Name “Elokim” refers to Hashem operating within nature. The extent to which Hashem provides blessing in the land is a result of the degree to which Bnei Yisrael imbue life there with Torah ideals. As Chazal state,⁸ “בְּזִמְנֵי שִׁישְׂרָאֵל עוֹשִׂים רְצוֹנוֹ שֶׁל מְקוֹם” – “When Yisrael perform Hashem’s will, they add strength to the Assembly On High” The Meshech Chochmah explains that the “Assembly of On High” refers to the laws of nature with which Hashem runs the world. Hence, Moshe exhorts the people to instill all the values that they have absorbed in the wilderness in order to allow for an increase in Hashem’s blessing in their worldly endeavors.

5 Devarim 33:1

6 Aderes Eliyahu ibid.

7 The Zohar Hakadosh (1:21b) explains the term “איש האלקים” to mean “בעלא דמטרוניתא.” The Vilna Gaon explains that “מטרוניתא” refers to the laws of nature with which Hashem governs this world.

8 Midrash Eichah Rabbasi 1:35.