

PARSHAT VA'ERA – 'Ani Hashem' Part Two

We began our shiur on Parshat Va'era, noting how God's opening words to Moshe Rabeinu (see 6:2-5) serve as an introduction to the message that he must deliver to Bnei Yisrael (in 6:6-8).

Part One focused on God's message to Bnei Yisrael, explaining how and why it should be understood as a commandment (and not just information). In Part Two, we return to God's introductory comments to Moshe, to explain why they form the 'prophetic background' for that commandment.

INTRODUCTION - A 'DOUBLE MENTION'

Let's begin by taking a careful look at what God tells Moshe Rabeinu at the beginning of the Parsha, paying careful attention to how and when the word "brit" [=covenant] is mentioned:

"And Elokim spoke to Moshe, telling him I am Hashem. And I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak & Yaakov using the Name KEL SHADAI, but My Name HAVAYA, I did not make known to them.

** And also I had established [upheld?] My BRIT with them [the Avot] to give them the land of Canaan...

** And I have also heard the cries of Bnei Yisrael, for Egypt is oppressing them, and I have remembered My BRIT.

Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael...ANI HASHEM" (6:2-6)

The word "brit" is mentioned twice in these psukim, but its not clear what specific covenant this refers to.

To answer this question, we must return to our study of Sefer Breishit and recall that God had established two covenants with Avraham Avinu:

- * Brit Bein ha-btarim (see Breishit 15:1-20);
[Recall how this covenant was given b'shem Havaya.]
- * Brit Mila (see 17:1-14),
[Recall how this covenant was given b'shem Elokim.]

Even though both covenants focused on God's promise to Avraham of 'zera' [numerous offspring] and 'aretz' [the Land of Israel], each covenant related to a different aspect of God's future relationship with the nation of Israel.

Let's review the main aspects of each covenant.

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM

As we explained in our shiurim on Sefer Breishit, "brit bein ha-btarim" forecasted the long historical process by which Avraham's offspring would become God's Nation.

"And Hashem (be-shem Havaya) said to Avram: Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a LAND NOT THEIRS, and they shall be ENSLAVED and OPPRESSED, for 400 years...and that nation that oppresses them I will punish, and afterward they SHALL GO FREE with GREAT WEALTH... [This won't happen in Avraham's lifetime] only the fourth generation will return here, for the sin of Emorite will not be complete until then...

On that day God made a **covenant** to Avram saying: To your offspring I assign this land..." (see 15:13-18)

In contrast to all other nations, who begin as a group of people who share a common land - and then become a nation; God's special nation is destined to become a nation 'in someone else's land' ["baretz lo lahem"] - through common suffering ["v'avdu v'inu otam"], and only afterward will they attain sovereignty of the Land of Canaan (and only after the original nations living there deserve to be expelled for their bad behavior

["ki lo shaleyem avon ha'Emori ad heynea"]).

In this manner, "brit bein ha-btarim" sets the framework for the set of historical events that will later unfold in Sefer Shmot. Note however, that this covenant did not specify 'who' [specifically] this 'other nation' will be; nor did it describe how intense that affliction would become. [See Rambam Hilchot Teshuva chapter six. See also Seforno's commentary on the first chapter of Sefer Shmot!]

Even though Sefer Breishit did not explain why this entire historical process was necessary, it becomes rather clear from Sefer Shmot (and later on in Sefer Devarim) that this 'suffering in Egypt' was supposed to sensitize the nation of Israel in such a manner, that when they become a sovereign nation - they would be sure to treat their 'strangers' & the downtrodden in a proper manner. [See for example, Shmot 22:20 and 23:9, and Devarim 15:12-15, 24:17-22 etc. etc.]

BRIT MILA

Many years after "brit bein ha-btarim", but immediately before Avraham fathers his first child, God (b'shem Elokim) enters into another covenant, including once again the promise of 'zera v-aretz':

"Avram was 99 years old, and God appeared to him saying I am KEL SHA-DAI, HITHALEYCH L'FANEI v'HEYE TAMIM - walk before Me and be perfect. And I will make a covenant between Me and you...

"...And I will uphold/establish My covenant with you - **"lihiyot lachem le-Elokim"** - and for your offspring after you...and I have given you and your offspring 'erezt megurecha' - the land that you are living in - the land of Canaan... and **I will be for them their God...**" (17:7-8).

In this covenant we find an emphasis on God's special relationship with Am Yisrael on more personal level. Its key phrase - "lihiyot lachem le-Elokim" [to be a close God for you] reflects a type of 'partnership' - He will be our God (and hence look after our special needs), and we will become His people - to represent Him before other nations (see 17:3-4, based on the themes of God's earlier promises in 12:1-3).

In other words, Brit Mila describes a relationship where God and Am Yisrael will work as a 'team'. Bnei Yisrael will serve as God's agent, keeping His commandments. In return, God will oversee their daily needs.

For example, a more detailed framework for this relationship is described by the 'tochacha' in Vayikra chapter 26. [Note textual parallel to brit Milah in 26:9 & 26:12.] Should Bnei Yisrael diligently keep God's mitzvot, He will assure ample rain and produce, while guaranteeing safe and secure borders. On the flip side, should they fail to be loyal in this partnership, God will need to punish them (until they obey once again).

[It should be noted that the actual mitzva of 'mila' [circumcision] is not the covenant itself; rather that mitzva serves as symbol of this covenant - an "ot brit" - a constant reminder of this special relationship.]

HOW THEY DIFFER

Even though each covenant complements the other, each 'brit' remains distinct. In regard to God's different Names in each covenant - Ramban [on Breishit 17:1] explains how this reflects a different 'mode' of God's behavior within the framework of each 'brit'. In 'brit mila' (shem Elokim) God's relationship manifests itself through natural events [what he refers to as 'hashgacha nisteret']. It was within this framework that God had looked after the needs of the Avot, and came to their rescue; but even if there was a need for a miracle, it took place in a 'hidden' manner. In contrast, within the framework of 'brit bein ha-btarim' - given be-shem Havaya - God may act in a more miraculous fashion, as was the case in our redemption from Egypt ['hashgacha nigleit']. [See Ramban on Breishit 17:1 and Shmot 6:3.]

A TRADITION PASSED DOWN

From our above explanation, we would certainly expect for

the entire process of redemption from Egypt to relate to 'brit bein ha-btarim'. Nonetheless, we will show how there may be an aspect of 'brit mila' involved as well.

Let's explain:

Recall God's final 'hitgalut' to Yaakov as he left Eretz Canaan on his way to see Yosef in Egypt (see TSC shiur on Parshat Vayigash). At that time, God [be-shem Elokim] had promised Yaakov that He would be WITH HIM in Egypt, make his offspring a great nation there, and one day eventually bring them back (see 46:3-4). Yaakov passed this tradition on to Yosef (see 48:21), and later (at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit), Yosef passes this tradition to his brothers:

"Pakod yifkod ELOKIM etchem... - God will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov" (50:24).

Based on this promise alone, and within the framework of BRIT MILA, Bnei Yisrael can (and should) expect God, b'shem Elokim, to look after their needs in Egypt and eventually tell them when to return to Eretz Canaan.

In contrast, "brit bein ha-btarim" foresees a severe oppression in a foreign land, followed by a glorious redemption (including the punishment of the oppressor and the attainment of great wealth), culminating with the conquest of the Promised Land. However, this BRIT does not specify either where this foreign land is, or when the '400 year clock' starts ticking.

Nonetheless, within the framework of this covenant, Bnei Yisrael have ample reason to expect a miraculous redemption [b'shem Havaya] from their oppression in Egypt.

Hence, it is logical to assume that both these traditions were ingrained in the heart and soul of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt, as they were passed down from generation to generation. Even though their slavery in Egypt intensified, Bnei Yisrael patiently waited for their redemption, as promised by God according to either one or both of His covenants.

[See Shmot 3:13-17, where Moshe Rabeinu anticipates that Bnei Yisrael will ask: 'Which Name of God' has promised to redeem us? - See also Rashbam's amazing commentary on those psukim.]

TWO BRITOT IN PARSHAT VA'ERA

With this background, we can return to the opening psukim of Parshat Va'era in order to show how God, in his conversation with Moshe Rabeinu, refers to BOTH of these covenants:

First note how the opening pasuk constitutes a 'fitting' introduction:

6:2 "And ELOKIM spoke to Moshe and said to him I am HAVAYA"

Note how shem Elokim introduces shem Havaya!

[Compare with the opposite phenomena in the opening psukim of Brit Mila / see Breishit 17:1-3!]

6:3 "And I appeared to Avraham Yitzchak & Yaakov as Kel Shakai, but in MY Name HAVAYA I did not make Myself known to them"

Although God had appeared (be-shem Havaya) numerous times to the Avot, He had never performed miracles for them in the eyes of other nations ('hashgacha nigleit'). Instead, He watched over them from the perspective of shem Elokim, (alternately - shem Kel Shakai, i.e. 'hashgacha nisteret'):

[Be sure to see Ramban on this pasuk!]

[One could also suggest that these words may allude to how the forefathers diligently followed God's commands of "hithaleych l'fanei v'heye tamim" - and hence did not need miraculous intervention, nor severe punishment - to encourage improved behavior.]

In contrast, God now informs Bnei Yisrael that they will soon witness a level of God's providence that the Avot themselves did not see! As background, God first reminds them:

6:4 "I also established My covenant [-BRIT MILA-] with them [the Avot] to give them the LAND OF CANAAN..."

Based on an obvious textual parallel with Breishit 17:7-8, the covenant described in this pasuk clearly must be 'brit Mila' (see Rashi on this pasuk)! Even though that covenant remains in the 'background', God now explains how Bnei Yisrael's present predicament in Egypt relates to another covenant as well:

6:5 "I have NOW heard the cries of Bnei Yisrael, for Egypt is OPPRESSING them, and I have remembered My COVENANT."

Clearly the covenant referred to in this pasuk must be 'brit bein ha-btarim' [again, see Rashi!]. In addition to the obvious thematic connection, textual proof can be found as well when we compare this pasuk with Breishit 15:13-14, noting the parallel to "va-avadum ve-inu otam". With this background from 'Sefer Breishit', God now instructs Moshe concerning what he must now tell Bnei Yisrael:

6:6 "Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael that I am HAVAYA, and I will take them out... and save them from their BONDAGE, and I will redeem them with an outstretched hand and GREAT PUNISHMENTS (e.g. the Ten Plagues)" [Bein Ha-btarim]

The word 'lachen' - therefore - connects this forthcoming statement with the background in 6:2-5. Because God is coming to fulfill His covenants, God first mentions ANI HASHEM - for He has come to fulfill 'bein ha-btarim' (given be-shem Havaya), and hence He will redeem them and punish their oppressor in a miraculous manner, as promised in that 'brit'. However, in addition:

6:7 "And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God..."

[See and compare with Brit Mila, Breishit 17:7-8, noting phrase: lihiyot lachem le-Elokim]

"And you shall know that: I am HAVAYA ELOKEICHEM who is taking you out from your suffering in Egypt."

This pasuk appears to combine both covenants, as both are going to be fulfilled in the process of Yetziat Mitzrayim. It also clearly alludes to what will take place at the covenant at Har Sinai, as these verses form the opening line of the Ten Commandments (see Shmot 20:1-3), which in itself serves as the completion of "brit Milah".

Note how this will all lead the fulfillment of God's promise to make Avraham's offspring a nation in the land-

Therefore:

6:8 "And I will bring you into the Land which I promised to give to Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov [in Brit Mila], and I will give it to you as a possession - 'MORASHA' ['yerusha', as in Br. 15:7-8] for I am Havaya [Brit Bein Ha-btarim]."

Recall that the word YERUSHA was mentioned some five times in 'brit bein ha-btarim'! This final promise confirms that when Bnei Yisrael will enter the land after Yetziat Mitzrayim, it will entail the military conquest of the land, resulting in Bnei Yisrael's sovereignty over the land.

BACK TO THE SNEH

This background can also explain several difficult psukim that we encountered in our study of Moshe's conversation with God at the burning bush. For example, recall that after God had given Moshe his mission to tell Bnei Yisrael that God is now coming to redeem them, Moshe's first question was:

"When I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you' and they ask me 'WHAT IS HIS NAME?' - what shall I say to them?" (see Shmot 3:13).

What provokes this question? Why is Moshe so sure that Bnei Yisrael will inquire as to the nature of God's Name?

Based on our shiur, this question is quite understandable. Moshe's query regarding God's Name (in 3:13) relates precisely to these two family traditions. Moshe is aware of their future redemption, yet they will want to know which Divine Promise is being fulfilled at this time, i.e. will the redemption be only be-shem ELOKIM (1), i.e. within the framework of Brit Mila, (as promised to Yaakov); or will it ALSO be be-shem HAVAYA (2), within the framework of Brit Bein Ha-Btarim. [See Ramban & Ibn Ezra on 3:13!]

Moshe's question is not merely a technicality, it relates to the very nature of Yetziat Mitzrayim:

If Bnei Yisrael's redemption is only be-shem Elokim (1), then they should expect a natural process ('hashgacha nisteret'), similar to the manner in which Yaakov was saved from Lavan (see Br. 31:9-13,24-29 & 48:15-16!). Furthermore, they should not expect the Egyptians to be punished, nor to receive great wealth [an important 'nafka mina!']. Furthermore, if this is only 'brit mila', then their redemption may a temporary salvation, for the full four hundred year time period may not be over yet.

However, if their redemption will also be be-shem Havaya (2), then Bnei Yisrael should expect a miraculous process ('hashgacha gluya') including the punishment of Mitzrayim, attaining great wealth, and finally the conquest of the fullest borders of the Promised Land. By knowing which specific Name of God has come to redeem His people, Moshe will be able to tell Bnei Yisrael more details concerning the nature of the forthcoming redemption.

I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE

With this in mind, let's see how God answers Moshe's question. Note how God's immediate answer appears at first to be quite vague:

"Eheyeh asher eheyeh' [I Will Be what I Will Be], go tell Bnei Yisrael that 'Eheyeh' has sent you" (3:14).

[See Rashbam in 3:15 'zeh zichri' - for an amazing 'encrypted' explanation of this answer that follows perfectly according to our discussion in this shiur! You'll have to 'decode' it to appreciate it.]

God expounds upon His answer in the next pasuk:

"... Thus tell Bnei Yisrael: HAVAYA [who is] ELOKEI AVOTEICHEM... has sent me... this is My Name..." (3:15).

God answers that He is coming not only be-shem Elokim, but also be-SHEM HAVAYA, i.e. He has come to fulfill BOTH covenants! Accordingly, God instructs Moshe to relay this message (3:16-17):

"Gather the elders of Israel together and tell them: HAVAYA [who is] ELOKEI AVOTEICHEM appeared to me... saying:
(1) "PAKOD PAKADTI ETCHEM..."

[Brit Mila/ see Br. 50:24]

(2) "I will bring you up ME-ONI MITZRAYIM to ERETZ HANCAN'ANI E-'HACHITI..."

[Brit Bein Ha-Btarim / see Br.15:13,20]

Next, God instructs Moshe to take the elders with him to Pharaoh (this makes Moshe the official representative of Bnei Yisrael) to demand that he allow Bnei Yisrael to worship God in the desert (3:18). The fact that Pharaoh will not agree (see 3:19) sets the stage for the fulfillment of two additional elements of Brit Bein Ha-Btarim, namely punishing the oppressor and great wealth: "I will stretch out My Hand and SMITE Egypt...after that he shall let you go... When you go, you will not go empty handed: Each woman will borrow... vessels of SILVER and GOLD and clothing [compare Br. 15:14]..." (3:20-22).

At the conclusion of God's lengthy answer, Moshe still remains doubtful whether Bnei Yisrael will truly believe that Shem Havaya has appeared to him (4:1). To solve this problem, God (obviously now be-shem Havaya) provides Moshe with several 'otot' (signs/ mini-miracles) to prove that a 'miraculous' redemption is indeed forthcoming (see 4:2-9).

AND YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM HASHEM

As we have shown, a deeper understanding of the purpose of the covenants that God had made with Avraham Avinu can help us appreciate the necessity for the miraculous nature of Yetziat Mitzrayim. The goal of the Exodus was not merely to fulfill a divine promise to the forefathers. Rather, it was to prepare the nation of Israel to become a nation that would know how to represent God in the proper manner.

The miracles of the Exodus, and in the Desert would only be the first stage in this difficult process. In our study of Ma'amad Har Sinai, we will show how the laws that Bnei Yisrael will receive at Har Sinai will constitute the framework by which God's goals of "brit Avot" - "lihiyot lachem le-Elokim" can ultimately become fulfilled.

Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

OT OR MOFET

The background from the above shiur can help us understand why the first 'ot' that Bnei Yisrael are given is the 'mateh' turning into a 'nachash' (see 4:2-5), in contrast to the first 'ot' that Pharaoh is given of the 'mateh' turning into a 'tanin' (see 7:8-12).

Pharaoh, as he doesn't believe in God at all (see 5:2!), needs to be shown a 'MOFET' (see 7:9) - a wonder - to prove that God exists and was the Creator of the Universe. Therefore, the symbol of a 'tanin' is used, relating back to the story of Creation (see Breishit 1:21).

In contrast, Bnei Yisrael believe in God, yet they feel that God has neglected them, for no one has come to redeem them.. Therefore, they require an 'OT' - a sign - that God indeed has not forgotten them (see 4:1-2). The symbol of a 'nachash' is used, which may relate back to the story of the 'nachash' in Gan Eden (see Breishit chapter 3). That story focuses on God's providence over man, and the complex relationship of 'sechar ve-onesh' - [divine retribution]. In a similar manner, one can understand the other two 'otot' in 4:6-9; Moshe's hand turning leperous (definitely a symbol of 'sechar ve-onesh'), as well as the contrast between life and death, as symbolized by water (life) turning into blood (death).