



From the desk of
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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Va'eira

HAMELECH

Elokim Said to Moshe

Parashat Shemot concluded with Moshe Rabbeinu questioning, "Why have You done bad to this [the Jewish] People? Why have You sent me? From the time that I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, things have only gotten worse for this nation. You have not yet redeemed Your nation."

Hashem told him, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh etc."

This week's *parashah* opens: Elokim spoke to Moshe, and He said to him, "I am Hashem."

Why does the *pasuk* first refer to the Almighty as "Elokim" and then He introduces Himself by His Ineffable Name?

When we refer to Him as "*Elokim*", that connotes *Midat HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Judgment. When we use His Four-Letter Name of "*Havaya*", that refers to the Attribute of Mercy.

So Hashem was communicating here to Moshe: That which you perceive as *Din*, is really an expression of *Rahamim* (compassion).

Things Don't Look Too Good...

Moshe was disturbed. Hashem had sent him on a mission to redeem Klal Yisroel. Instead, his initial meeting with Pharaoh seemed to only make matters worse. The Jews now had to gather straw on their own, and at the same time, maintain the original output quota. A nearly impossible feat. They were bound to fail. They would fall short of work demands and receive beatings. Moshe's diplomatic efforts seemed to have backfired. He was at a loss for understanding.

They're Great!

Hashem began *Maamad Har Sinai*, the greatest revelation of all times, with three words: "*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*." Explains the Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh: "*Hashem*" connotes mercy, while "*Elokecha*" connotes strict judgment. With this, Hashem was making it known that whenever His interaction with us seems to be one of strict judgment, we are to know clearly that the root of it all is compassion. All the time Hashem is running the world and every aspect thereof in a way which is most beneficial to His Beloved Nation. We cannot allow the outward appearance to deceive us.

This very chain of events, after Moshe's meeting with Pharaoh, as painful as it was, hastened the redemption. We were meant to be in Egyptian bondage for 400 or 430 years. How is it that we left there after only 210? Our Sages teach us that the extra-heavy workload with which we were burdened had us practically double-worked, such that 400 years of slavery were packed into 210 years! Since Hashem wanted to redeem us so soon, that is why He arranged for things to get just a bit more difficult, so that we could finish our term sooner and be eligible for redemption. Indeed, it was all for the best.

A Candle, a Chicken and a Donkey

In Brachot 60b, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Akiva both teach that a person should always accustom himself to say that all that Hashem does is for the best.



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The story is told (ibid.) that Rabbi Akiva was travelling. He came to a city and requested lodging. He was refused. Rabbi Akiva declared, "All Hashem does is for the best."

With no choice, he went to find a place to lie down in the outskirts of the city. He had with him a chicken, a donkey and a candle. Along came a wind and extinguished his candle. Along came a cat and ate up his chicken. Along came a lion and feasted upon his donkey.

Rabbi Akiva just said, "All Hashem does is for the best."

That night, an enemy army invaded the city and took everyone hostage. Rabbi Akiva understood that their inhospitality saved him, as did the extinguishing of his flame, so that the soldiers would not see him, and the consumption of his chicken and donkey, so that they would not make noise and attract unwanted attention.

From Bad to Good

Ben Ish Hai (in his Sefer Beneyahu) explains what is accomplished by saying, "All Heaven does is for the best." It is not merely a statement of faith. It is much more than that. It is a powerful device. It can turn around evil verdicts and harsh decrees. It could be that Heaven decreed a certain difficulty to befall someone. But when he greets it with this positive attitude, his load is lightened. This that Chazal tell us to constantly keep this optimistic approach on our lips is not only as a religious requirement. It is also a most helpful piece of advice and a most effective method to combat adversity.

Maharal says it too, in Sefer Netivot Olam (Ahavat Hashem 1 and Bitachon 1). That when

one perceives difficulty and declares an affirmation that he is convinced that Hashem is doing it for his own good, that attitude arouses Hashem to turn things around and have the trouble dissipate and the goodness to be palpable sooner.

Reb Levi Yitshak of Berdichev says it as well (Kedushat Levi, Parashat Vayeshev). That when a person believes wholeheartedly that each circumstance he experiences is for his own ultimate good, this itself "sweetens the judgment" and transforms Heaven's approach to a more compassionate one.

"Thanks, Doc"

In Pesachim 50a we are taught: In this world, when we receive favorable tidings, we say, "Blessed is the Good One who has bestowed goodness." Upon receiving unfortunate tidings, we say, "Blessed is the Fair Judge." In *Olam Haba*, we will only say, "*Baruch Hatov Ve'hameitiv*." In the next world, we will see clearly how all was for the best.

Mesilat Yesharim (Chap. 19) teaches: Pain and pressure which can be perceived as unpleasant are really done for our own benefit. Sometimes a surgeon must operate and amputate a limb in order to save the person's life. An onlooker might view the surgeon as a cruel villain. But anyone familiar with medical procedures can understand the operation as an act of salvation. The patient will not admire the surgeon any less for this deed of his. On the contrary. He will realize that he owes him his very life.

So too, a person should realize that all that Hashem does for him is for the best. We don't



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always understand right away, but we know it's true. For a true Oheiv Hashem, difficulties do not place a strain upon his relationship with Hashem; they only strengthen it.

The Ramban had a *talmid* (disciple) who was deathly ill. The Ramban prepared for him an amulet which would open doors for him in Heaven. He enclosed a note with a number of questions regarding certain tragedies which had befallen.

The *talmid* passed away, and came to his *rebbe* in a dream. He told him that the amulet indeed worked wonders, but once he was in Heaven, he saw that the questions did not even begin. From a bird's eye view, a Heavenly perspective, there was no room for them at all.

The Big Picture

If everything is for the best, why are we so easily tricked into thinking that hardships are bad? Sefer Daat Tevunot (Ramchal, paragraph 128) explains that "*ra*" (evil) only exists in partial form. If something in this world is perceived as evil, it is only because the onlooker does not see the entire picture. Nothing complete is bad. Some pictures are completed in minutes. Some take days. Some take years. Some – centuries, and some – millennia. But the final picture is a stunning masterpiece.

In the aftermath, we can read through *Megillat Esther*, *Mechirat Yosef*, *Shibud Mitzrayim*, the above story of Rabbi Akiva – and smile throughout, because we know the happy ending and how each painful detail was a link in the chain of ultimate goodness.

We can learn from past completed stories that even our present pain is here for some ultimate good. A simpleton visited a tailor shop and was astounded to see the tailor cutting apart fine material to bits and pieces. Were he to see the operation from start to finish, he would appreciate each step and congratulate the tailor on his expertise. So too, in Hashem's big world. Each person is only given to see a small glimpse of history. He ought not jump to negative conclusions from the short sample clipping he was shown. You have to see the whole show to appreciate the goodness throughout.

Missing the Boat

A story is told (Nidah 31a) of two merchants who set out on a business venture which promised enticing revenues. One merchant boarded his ship on time and set out. The other one, as he was heading towards the port, a thorn got stuck in his foot and he could not continue walking. When he finally freed himself of the unwanted thorn, much to his dismay, he missed the boat. Not only did he miss the boat, he began cursing and expressing anger. So he *really* "missed the boat."

A few days later, he heard the unfortunate news that the ship sank at sea. Then he expressed his appreciation for the thorn which saved his life.

How often are we totally unaware of salvations being done for us? Miracles left and right? Had he knows from the start the outcome of that boat's voyage, he would have danced for joy at missing it. His original sadness and despair was only a result of seeing just half the picture, remaining uninformed.



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Unwanted Riches

In Taanit 23b, we are told of Rabbi Money who went to visit Grand Rabbi Yitshak ben Elyashiv. Rabbi Money had some difficulties. He complained, "Some wealthy folk in my *shver's* home are bothering me."

Apparently, their wealth was a catalyst for their arrogance.

Rabbi Ben Elyashiv said, "Let them be poor," and they became poor.

Soon enough, Rabbi Money returned, "Now, my financial situation is difficult to cope with."

Apparently, they had been helping him out, and now, he had nowhere to turn.

Rabbi Ben Elyashiv said, "Let them be wealthy," and they became wealthy, once again.

Rabbi Money was not yet finished. Realizing he had connections to a great and pious Sage, and the sky was not the limit, he expressed his displeasure with his wife's physical appearance.

"What is her name?" Rabbi Ben Elyashiv inquired.

"Chana", Rabbi Money replied.

"Let Chana be beautiful," Rabbi Ben Elyashiv declared, and Chana became gorgeous.

It did not take long for the next complaint to surface.

"Suddenly, she became so bossy and conceited," Rabbi Money said in distress. Apparently her beauty got to her head. Put beauty and riches together and you often have a recipe for conceit.

"Let Chana return to her state of ugliness," announced Rabbi Ben Elyashiv and so it was.

What do we learn from these two similar incidents, one with money and one with looks? That sometimes we feel that we would be so much better off with a different situation, but the truth is that the way we want things to be would only be worse for us, and we ourselves would be the first to admit it. So let's just be happy with how things are in the first place, and not need the double roundabout.

No Questions

There was an elderly *tsaddik* from Nevardok who lived past one hundred. Upon being asked, "How did you merit longevity?"

He replied, "Some people have so many questions why Hashem did this or that. So He takes them 'upstairs' to explain to them His reasons. I never had any questions, so I'm still here."

A Reason to Dance

The Vilna Gaon had a daughter who died on the night before her planned wedding. The Vilna Gaon acknowledged that Hashem knows best. His deceased mother came to him in a dream and told him, "If you would only know how much *nachas* you gave Hashem with your acceptance of His *Midat HaDin*, you would have danced at her funeral more than you would have danced at her wedding!"

It's Worth Being Quiet

A taxi driver was in the process of being "*chozer beteshuvah*" (returning to his rich Jewish heritage). He once took a passenger to the



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Hadassah hospital at Ein Kerem, a place which is a bit out of the city of Yerushalayim. The passenger paid and alighted. The driver was in a bit of a dilemma; should he drive back to town where there are more frequent calls or should he stay around a bit in case someone needs a ride from the hospital. Still debating, he waited around a bit, five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen, twenty... Eventually, he was there forty-five minutes, still constantly debating if he should just travel empty. Behind him, another taxi pulled up, and dropped off a passenger. Just then, someone exited the hospital, saw the freshly emptied taxi, and got in. Now, our driver was about to get furious. "How can he take away my customer?" he thought. "I've been here three-quarters of an hour and he just got here!"

But, being that he was in the *teshuvah* process, listening constantly to *shiurim*, he remembered listening to a rabbi who reiterated that *parnasah* is in Hashem's hands and no one can take away what is really coming to him. In an instant, he calmed himself down and regained his composure. He won the inner battle. He did not let anger get the better of him. His reward was soon to come.

A prestigious foreign diplomat exited the hospital and approached his taxi. He asked how much it would cost for a round-trip up north with a two-hour wait. Our driver made a quick calculation, saw that he was dealing with a man of means, and making no discount, said, "A thousand".

The client agreed and got in for the ride. It was a smooth ride. The driver enjoyed his two-hour rest

and the return trip went smoothly as well. As the passenger got out of the taxi, he handed an envelope to the driver. The driver opened the envelope and couldn't believe his eyes! He saw American bills and counted one thousand dollars. He had meant shekel and his passenger was talking in dollars.

He thought to himself: It's all because I took it calmly when the other driver "stole" my passenger. Had I made a big deal over it, I never would have gotten this windfall.

Make it a Habit

This sounds like high levels of *emunah*, but really it is within our reach. It must be. Otherwise it would not appear as a law in Shulhan Aruch for every last Jew. In Orah Hayim 230:5 we are taught: A person should always get in the habit of saying, "All Hashem does is for the best."

The Shulhan Aruch says: "Always." Don't wait for hard times to strike, *chas veshalom*. The challenge is too big. Get into the habit now, when things are going smoothly. That way, when difficulty comes your way, you'll be an experienced professional. You'll know exactly how to deal with it. You'll be equipped and prepared. You'll pull this line out of your pocket and say, "All Hashem does is for the best." It'll flow naturally from your lips because it became part of you.

As one Chassidishe Rebbe would say, "*Tachshov tov, yiyeh tov*" – think good and it will be good. Such thoughts wipe away *gezeirot*.

**All the best,
Mordechai Malka**