

Vaera: Moses introduces the logical concept "kal vachomer"

The unspoken answer of Hashem, to Moshe's query, as to why the affliction increased after Moshe's first approach to Pharaoh, leads to a kal vachomer.

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Our Parasha relates, that after Moshe Rabbeinu's initial approach to Pharaoh to send Bnei Israel from their bondage in Egypt, led Pharaoh to increase their burden and affliction, Hashem directed Moshe to appease Bnei Israel, and to promise them, that (6:5) 'I shall redeem them..(6:8-9)I shall bring you to the land..and I shall give it to you as a heritage - I am Hashem'.

We then read, that (6:13)'Moshe spoke accordingly to Bnei Israel, but they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work. Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying 'Come speak to Pharaoh..that he send Bnei Israel from his land.'

'Moshe spoke before Hashem, saying :'Bnei Israel have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!'

'Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aaron and commanded them regarding Bnei Israel and regarding Pharaoh..to take Bnei Israel out of the land of Egypt.'

Rashi comments: 'How then will Pharaoh listen to me': This is one of the ten *kal vachomer* inferences mentioned in the Torah' - *kal vachomer* means inferences from minor to major: a fortiori arguments.

Rav Yosef Salant expounds: 'The commentators all ask on this *kal vachomer*, as the Torah states that the reason Bnei Israel did not heed Moshe's words was: 'because of shortness of breath and hard work', which did not relate to Pharaoh.

The answer to this, is to try to answer Moshe Rabbeinu's question, to which no direct answer is given in the Torah : Why did their conditions worsen as a result of Moshe's initial approach to Pharaoh?

'Moshe had thought that the major barrier for the delay in the exodus from the bondage in Egypt was solely the refusal of Pharaoh to release them.

'In fact, there was also a need to work on Bnei Israel , that they should want to leave Egypt, because, despite the terrible affliction there, when they heard that their exodus was conditional on they abandoning the idolatry to which they had become accustomed in Egypt, they would refuse to do so, and prefer their affliction there, rather than to accept this requirement.

'Therefore, Hashem commanded Moshe, in the words he was to say to them, to say: 'I am Hashem', I and no other; this message was given not once, but three times, in Hashem's charge as to what he was to say to Bnei Israel, that the exodus and the gift of the land, was totally conditional on this acceptance - on leaving their idolatry.

'This is why the Torah states that Moshe 'spoke μ : accordingly' to Bnei Israel, meaning: making clear the condition Hashem had set, for their exodus.

'It was for this very reason, that Bnei Israel 'did not heed..because of shortness of breath and hard work', their refusal to separate from their idolatry, which was 'hard work' in their eyes, as the Midrash relates.

'We can now understand Moshe Rabbeinu's *kal vachomer*: When Hashem directs Moshe, again, to return to Pharaoh, that he send Bnei Israel from

serving him, Moshe replied: Since Bnei Israel did not heed my words, how will Pharoah listen to me?'

'Since Bnei Israel themselves are disinclined to leave Egypt, how will Pharoah heed my demand, that he send them from serving him? further:'And I have sealed lips': there is 'no opening' for me to say anything to Pharoah, regarding sending them away.

'Then - as the Torah relates - 'Hashem commanded Moshe and Aaron regarding Bnei Israel AND regarding Pharoah..to take Bnei Israel out of Egypt.'

'Expounds the Midrash: Hashem commanded them regarding Bnei Israel and regarding Pharoah, 'regarding Bnei Israel, that they leave their idolatry, as a commandment, even against their will; 'regarding Pharoah', also by way of a commandment: to send them out of Egypt, again, even against the will of Bnei Israel - AND against the will of Pharoah.

'This is the unspoken answer of Hashem, to Moshe's query, as to why the affliction increased after Moshe's first approach to Pharoah: that this was necessary, because, despite their terrible affliction in Egypt till then, they still preferred to remain there and suffer, as long as they did not have to abandon their idolatry which had taken such a hold on them.

'Therefore, Hashem felt compelled, as it were, to increase their affliction, till they could no longer bear it, and agree to leave Egypt, albeit against their will, and overcome the hold on them of the idolatry of Egypt.

'They would then be redeemed, and, by the signs and wonders that Hashem would do to Pharoah and the Egyptians, they would learn that Hashem is the only true G-d, and the absolute ruler of all that happens in heaven and on earth, and that there is no One but Him.

'This was the reason that Hashem caused their burden to be increased now, and this was Hashem's answer to Moshe Rabbeinu's anguished cry: 'Why did you cause a worsening of their affliction?'

Rav Shimon Sofer notes, on our Rashi - as to the *kal vechomer* - that 'it can clearly be refuted, as the reason Bnei Israel did not hearken to Moshe Rabbeinu - as the Torah states - was because of קוצר רוח: shortness of breath, which our Sages say was that they were unable to abandon their idolatry, whereas Pharoah considered himself an idol and, as the Midrash relates, that he exulted, that he created the Nile.

'Therefore, it was clear that he would not hearken to the admonition of Moshe Rabbeinu, and the *kal vachomer* falls apart.'

Rav David Hofstedter poses a different question, as to Bnei Israel not heeding Moshe Rabbeinu's admonition to them: 'Why' he asks, 'when Moshe Rabbeinu, after Hashem appeared to him in the burning bush, Bnei Israel believed - as the Torah states - Moshe Rabbeinu's wondrous tidings, that the redemption was near at hand, yet, in our Parasha, as Moshe complains to Hashem, Bnei Israel did not hearken to his words?

'True, as the Torah relates, in our Parasha, Bnei Israel did not hearken ' because of shortness of breath and hard work', but were they not subject to these same tribulations for many years, when Moshe spoke to them on the earlier occasion - yet then they did hearken.

'Should you argue that, in our Parasha, the burden had increased, after Moshe Rabbeinu's initial unsuccessful approach to Pharoah, leading to their minds being more occupied, and unable to think clearly,, you would have thought the opposite: that the increased suffering would make them more amenable to hear tidings of their impending redemption.

'Indeed, this observation led our Sages to the conclusion that the reason that they not hearken to Moshe Rabbeinu's words, in our Parasha, was their unwillingness to abandon their idolatry; but this raises another question: were they not already in thrall to this idolatry, when Moshe Rabbeinu first spoke to them, on which occasion, as the Torah relates, they believed him and rejoiced?

The answer can be found in the change of words that the Targum chose, as to the two occasions: as to Moshe Rabbeinu's words on the first occasion, when the Torah states (4:31) 'and they heard that Hashem had remembered them', the Targum comments: 'And they heard the words of Hashem'; on our Parasha, on the words (6:9): 'they did not hearken to Moshe', the Targum says: 'They did not accept' - the difference being between merely hearing words, on the first occasion, and 'internalizing and accepting' what they heard, on the second occasion, in our Parasha.

The fundamental difference between their response on the two occasions, was that, on the first occasion, Moshe told them that Hashem had heard their cries, and would therefore redeem them, but did not impose any obligations on them, for their exodus from their enslavement to their freedom and for coming to the land.

The tidings that Moshe Rabbeinu imparted to them, in our Parasha, were very different: in the 'four languages of redemption', the people were informed in detail of the objective of their redemption: to be elevated from slavery to Pharaoh, to become slaves of Hashem, and to be His people.

This required giving up their idolatrous ways; and in this new requirement lies the key to their changed response - there was no such demand in Moshe Rabbeinu's first words to them, only the glad tidings that they would be redeemed from their enslavement, so they rejoiced in them.

In our Parasha, Moshe did not only talk of redemption from their affliction, but also the precondition to it, the objective being to become Hashem's people, necessitating the complete abandonment of their idolatry.

This - as the Targum teaches - was what they had difficulty in accepting, as their hearts were 'inured' against doing so - and this *avodah zara* was what our Parasha alludes to, in its words, that they did not hearken to Moshe Rabbeinu's words, because of עבודה קשה: the עבודה not being the physical work, but the עבודה: their service of idolatry.'

The Ktav Sofer first notes the *kal vachomer* that Rashi brings, and that the commentators have brought refutations to it, and comments: 'It appears to me, that Hashem had said to Moshe Rabbeinu, at the initial revelation at the burning bush (3:12): 'When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship Hashem on this mountain'.

'Rashi, on this passuk, comments: 'in the merit that they will accept the Torah, they will be redeemed'.

'In our Parasha, the four 'languages of redemption' are said, including 'I shall take you to Me for a people, and I shall be a G-d to you', which alludes to acceptance of the Torah.

'Moshe thought that in the merit of accepting the Torah now, his mission would succeed, and Hashem would redeem them by His miracles; therefore, when they did not hearken to his words 'because of a shortness of breath and hard work', which Rashi expounded was their reluctance to give up their idolatry, he surmised that his mission was doomed to failure, as the necessary merit of acceptance of the Torah, was lacking.

'Therefore', he said to Hashem: 'How will Pharoah listen to me?', if Bnei Israel do not have the merit of acceptance of the Torah; and more so, because of my speech impediment.

'Hashem answered, by commanding him and Aaron 'regarding Bnei Israel and regarding Pharoah..to take Bnei Israel out of the land of Egypt' - to correct his misunderstanding, that, in fact, the merit was not that they would now, as he spoke to them, accept the Torah - but rather, that they would accept the Torah in the future, after they left Egypt, and that this merit stood to their credit already now.

'In this merit, his mission would succeed, as it was to now only take them out of Egypt, as once they left, when they will have witnessed Hashem's miracles and chessed to them, Bnei Israel would find themselves obligated to accept the Torah.

'This is why, he only had to speak to Bnei Israel, 'to take Bnei Israel out of the land of Egypt.'

Rav Yehonatan Eyebeshitz brings a completely different exposition, as to the *kal vechomer* that Rashi proffers, noting that it can - as the parshanim note - be readily refuted: 'It therefore appears, that the intention of Moshe Rabbeinu in this *kal vechomer*, was for the benefit of Bnei Israel, for the same reason that Yona tried to avoid the mission to Nineveh, out of his concern that, should they do teshuva, and Bnei Israel did not likewise repent their sinful ways, there would be anger Above against Bnei Israel.

'In the same way, opined Moshe, since Bnei Israel did not hearken to his words, should Pharaoh heed them, the Divine anger would be aroused against Bnei Israel.

'Out of this concern, he refused the mission.'

We can now enrich our souls with an expanded development of this exposition, by **Rav Pinchas Friedman**.

Expounds the Rav: 'Nowhere in the whole of the Torah, except in our psukim (6:12), do we find the words: 'Moshe spoke before Hashem'.

'The answer to this may be found in the original drasha of the Chatam Sofer, that Moshe Rabbeinu, in our Parasha, originated the principle of *kal vachomer*, which was to become one of the thirteen principles by which the Torah is interpreted.

'This is the meaning of the words: 'before Hashem': that Moshe innovated this principle that Hashem was later to give, at Sinai, as one of the thirteen principles.

'This enables us to resolve the question raised by the Tosafot, on the gemara (Shabbat 87.): 'Moshe did three things from himself, and Hashem agreed with them: added one day when the Torah was given, separated there from his wife, and broke the luchot', two of these three by applying the principle of *kal vechomer*.

'The Tosafot asked: since this is one of the thirteen principles by which the Torah is interpreted, why is Moshe credited as if he did so 'from himself?

'From the drasha of the Chatam Sofer, we can answer, that since Moshe innovated this principle, it is correctly said that , in these instances, he did indeed apply it 'from his own mind, and Hashem agreed with him.'

'We can conclude, that in those later two instances - at Matan Torah - Moshe Rabbeinu continued to apply the principle of *kal vechomer* that he innovated in our Parasha, in Egypt.'

'This', says Rav Friedman, 'compels us to ask: why did Moshe Rabbeinu see the need to innovate this principle, in our Parasha, especially as, considered literally, it contradicted his mission, since, by his principle of *kal vechomer*, it was seemingly doomed to failure.

'Again, the answer is provided in the torah of the Chatam Sofer: Moshe Rabbeinu, like Yona , was fearful that Bnei Israel would be punished because of his mission: if Pharoah - like Nineveh - would heed his admonition, and repent, and should Bnei Israel not heed the admonition - and repent - Divine anger and punishment would befall them.

'Moshe Rabbeinu, out of his love for his people, therefore said: Bnei Israel 'did not heed' my words, what will be if Pharoah heeds them?

'In that event, 'I have sealed lips'- I will be unable to offer any words of defence for Bnei Israel.

'This very real concern arose in Moshe's mind, when Hashem charged him with the mission in our Parasha, as he said: 'Bnei Israel have not listened to me, so how's will it be if 'Pharoah does listen to me?'

'A careful reading of our psukim, makes clear that Moshe Rabbeinu did not simply refuse to undertake the mission, but that he initiated the principle of *kal vachomer*, that Pharoah be precluded from heeding his admonition, since Bnei Israel had already not heeded them.

'Hashem accepted Moshe Rabbeinu's novel plea, saying:'I will harden Pharoah's heart and multiply my signs and my miracles in the land of Egypt.'

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