

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Miryom Slava *bas* Zalman *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The “Burning” Bush

PARSHAS SHEMOS 5776

There are certain episodes recorded in the Torah, the knowledge of which – for one reason or another – is a universal phenomenon. Regardless of background, level of affiliation, etc., it seems that almost everyone has familiarity with them.

One of these appears in this week’s *parshah* – Moshe’s encounter with the burning bush. While tending the flock, he happens upon a most remarkable sight: a bush which, while burning with fire, remains unconsumed. It appears, as the commentators explain, that the message of this spectacle was that while B’nei Yisrael were subjected to much affliction, they nevertheless – through Hashem’s intervention – continued to endure. Thus, Hashem proceeded to charge Moshe with the ultimate mission of redeeming Klal Yisrael from Egyptian bondage.

On closer examination of the *pessukim* of this narrative, we find what appears to be a most striking contradiction. To be sure, the vision itself was inherently a paradox, involving a flaming bush that was not consumed; and it was this facet that initially caught Moshe’s attention. His puzzlement was quite understandable; a conflagration on a bush should result in its destruction. Notice, however, the precise wording of his expressed wonderment; as it states: וְהִנֵּה הַסִּנֵּה בֵּיעַר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינּוּ אֵכָל, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הַמְרֹאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מֵדַוְעַ לְאֵי-יִבְעַר הַסִּנֵּה – “And behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed. And Moshe said: ‘Let me turn to see this great sight – **why does the bush not burn?**’” (*Shemos* 3:2,3). This appears to be an outright contradiction; one *passuk* states that the bush was burning, and in the next one, Moshe seems to assert that it was not. After witnessing the spectacle, we might have expected Moshe to phrase his question differently, such as by remarking on the bush’s uncanny ability to remain unaffected by the flames: “*Madu’a ein hasneh ukal* – Why does the bush **not become consumed?**” Instead, however, he exclaims that the bush was not even burning – “*Madu’a lo yivar hasneh* – Why does the bush **not burn?**” Was it on fire, or wasn’t it?

The Ultimate History Lesson

R’ Moshe Yosef Scheinerman (*Ohalei Moshe, Badei Nechamah* 7:15) cites R’ Mordechai Gifter, who perceives herein a most fundamental lesson. R’ Gifter understands that through this vision, Hashem sought to impart a message that related not only to the immediate predicament of Yisrael in Mitzrayim, but to their general existence throughout the generations.

Thus, during that encounter, Hashem showed Moshe the entirety of the history of Yisrael and all the travails that were to befall them: all the “burnings,” expulsions, pogroms, evil decrees; the Roman persecutions, the Cossack massacres, the Holocaust; everything before, after, and in between. Moshe’s puzzlement over the burning bush reflected his wonderment over the revelations concerning Yisrael’s future; if they were to be subject to such oppression in all of its various forms – how, indeed, would they be able to endure? (A question, which, incidentally, has baffled many an observant historian.) The fact that they would endure was a clear matter – as symbolized by the bush’s resistance to becoming consumed (and by our

continued presence – in contradistinction to many of our tormentors – on the world scene). What vexed Moshe, however, was how such a feat was possible.

Contemplating the matter, Moshe discovered the secret. Indeed, a nation experiencing such a magnitude of “burning” and true bitterness could not withstand the onslaught. Rather, he realized that his initial perception must have been mistaken. That is, it must be that it only *appeared* as if “the bush” was burning; but, in fact, *it was not burning at all*. “*Lo yivar hasneh.*”

In other words – R’ Gifter explains – Moshe now understood that all of the happenings that Yisrael would endure, while they appeared to be (what people would call) “bad,” were in fact not bad at all. They certainly seemed difficult at the time, but – as will be revealed in the future – each and every “travail” was somehow a blessing in disguise, calculated for the furtherance of Yisrael’s welfare and not their detriment.

The Blessings of Hindsight

We discover a similar idea emerging from the laws governing the blessings on receiving tidings. These are related in the Mishnah (*Berachos 9:2*), which states:

על בשורות הטובות אומר בְּרוּךְ הַטוֹב וְהַמְטִיב, וְעַל שְׂמוּעוֹת רָעוֹת אֹמֵר בְּרוּךְ דֵּין הָאֱמֶת.

“On glad tidings, one recites: ‘Blessed... (is He) Who is good, and performs goodness (*Hatov V’hameitiv*).’ On unpleasant news, he recites: ‘Blessed... (is) the True Judge (*Dayan Ha’emes*).’”

The Gemara (*Pesachim 50a*) draws an important distinction regarding the above. It asserts that the arrangement mentioned in the Mishnah is only a temporary measure; it is only in This World that there are different blessings upon receiving different kinds of reports. But in the future, there will be only one blessing; on any tidings, only “*Hatov V’hameitiv*” will be recited. One may have assumed that this distinction is a product of a technicality; that is, it results from the altered landscape of the World to Come. Since at that time death will be banished and only positive things will occur, there will never arise a need to recite “*Dayan Ha’emes*.”

However, the Noda B’Yehudah points out the flaw in this understanding. The implication of the Gemara, he explains, is that the future will bring about an *inherent* change. In other words, it is not simply that there will be no opportunity to recite “*Dayan Ha’emes*”; this intimates that, theoretically, had the situation called for it, the blessing would still be applicable. Rather, the Gemara seems to imply that the blessing itself will no longer be in force.

Why is this so? The Noda B’Yehudah provides an explanation that runs along the lines of the above. It is not just that “bad” things will no longer happen; rather, in light of the great revelations to take place in that era, man will see – retroactively – that no “bad” things *ever happened to him in the past*. He will understand how every aspect of his existence was truly an act of sheer benevolence – to the point that he will have to recite new blessings. Anything upon which he previously had recited “*Dayan Ha’emes*,” he will now – in light of his newfound wisdom and outlook – have to recite “*Hatov V’hameitiv*” with a deep sense of gratitude (*Tzlach, Pesachim ibid.*).