



What's in a Name

By Rabbi Raphi Mandelstam

Just last week as we were preparing for Parashat Shemot, my 5 year old daughter remarked that next week's Parashah is so exciting as it's the one with the Makkot. Indeed, our Parashah is among the most exciting as we read about the first seven Makkot Hashem brought upon Egypt. Yet right before the Makkot begin, the story is interrupted with what seems like tangential details describing the lineage of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohein. Why is this the appropriate time for the family tree? Additionally, the genealogical list begins (Shemot 6:14) describing the families of Reuven and Shimon, culminating with Shevet Levi. Now, as Rashi clarifies, the purpose of this list is to establish the background of Moshe and Aharon, making the mention of Reuven and Shimon's completely unnecessary. Why didn't the Torah simply establish the relevant family history of the new leaders of Klal Yisrael as descendants of Levi without mentioning anyone else?

Many Mefarshim grapple with the issue. Rashi, for example, explains that Yaakov Avinu chastised these three Shevatim in Parashat VaYechi; thus, the Torah wants to remind us that despite such rebuke these families are still "Chashuvim," important. However, I suggest that when we look closely at the Pesukim, we will find a critical contrast between Levi and his older brothers that can explain the significance of mentioning the family trees of Reuven and Shimon now and what it takes to lead Klal Yisrael out of slavery.

There's one word that's added when introducing the Bnei Levi that's omitted when describing the Bnei Reuven and Shimon, and what a significant word it is.

Rabbi Jachter's new book, *Opportunity in Exile: An In-Depth Exploration of Sefer Daniel*, is out now! It can be purchased on Amazon.com, get yours today!

"*Ve'Eileh Shemot Bnei Levi*," "these are the **names** of Levi's children" (Shemot 6:16). Although the Torah describes a list of names, only the children of Levi are introduced with the phrase "these are the names." What's behind this contrast? Why do some names deserve to be referred to as Shemot while others don't? As we will demonstrate, a Shem is not only a name, it represents an identity and purpose. Someone aware and confident in their direction in life can be said to have a Shem; after all, the letters Shin and Mem also spell the word "Sham," there, perhaps hinting that one with a Shem is someone who has a destination to reach. In fact, if you noticed in last week's Parashah, the Parashah of names, we find a list of the Shemot of the twelve Shevatim, while when we fast forward it seems like no one else has a name. Let's see some examples. "*VaYeilech Ish MiBeit Levi VaYikach Et Bat Levi*," "A man from the house of Levi marries a girl from the house of Levi" (Shemot 2:1). When Amram and Yocheved have a son, they don't explicitly name him. "*Ish Mitzri Makeh Ish Ivri*," "An Egyptian man smote an Israelite man" (Shemot 2:11). When Moshe saw the two Jewish men fighting, their names weren't mentioned. Again and again, we find the characters nameless, and perhaps the reason is that when we are enslaved, we struggle to find our true identity or our true purpose. Yet, when two brave midwives stand up to Paroh to defend our right to live, they are given names, Shifrah and Pu'ah, and when Bat Paroh was overtaken with compassion for the lost Jewish child, she does not establish her own identity; she is even able to name another, giving Moshe his name.

When we begin the story of our redemption we must be aware of the character it takes to make it happen: confidence, self-awareness, the courage to face adversity to achieve your destiny and live up to your name. Time and time again, Shevet Levi demonstrates a willingness to risk all to stand up for what's right. The only Shevet to protest against the golden calf and the Shevet to bring about the Chanukah miracle, Bnei Levi, in contrast to their brothers, have a Shem, a purpose, and a mission. Let us all realize and live up to our God-given Shem.

Signs and Wonders: The Narrative

Structure of the Makkot

By Mr. Aryeh Tiefenbrunn

The episode of the ten Makkot as related in Shemot 6-11 raises many thematic and structural questions. Why did the Makkot need to be accompanied by such open miracles? What was so important about the Makkot that Hashem “hardened Paroh’s heart” in order to prolong the ordeal and maintain the necessity for more Makkot? Is there a pattern to the Makkot? Many commentators and others have struggled with these questions over the centuries. The Malbim has many deep and fascinating insights that provide answers to them, and it is mainly his approach that will be discussed here. In order to understand it, we must first gain some insights into the structure of the Makkot narrative.

The Shemot narrative seems to describe the Makkot in chronological order. Recitals of the Ten Makkot, in the order in which they occurred, have become part of our liturgy in the Pesach Haggadah; indeed, Jewish children of very young ages are taught to rattle off these Makkot. As it says in the Haggadah, Rabi Yehuda even created a mnemonic device for the ten Makkot (דַּצֵּךְ עִשָּׂה בְּאֵחָב), which he intriguingly chose to split into three parts. This is interesting in light of Rashbam's commentary on Shemot 7:26. There, he constructs the Makkot as having occurred in three segments, with Makkat Bechorot as an addendum at the end (which the commentators generally agree was meant to finally break down Paroh’s resistance totally). Each segment consisted of three Makkot, the first two of which were preceded by a warning delivered to Paroh through Moshe. The third Makkah of each segment, Rashbam says, was delivered against Mitzrayim without warning. However, the Rashbam does not elaborate on the importance of this structural element. Why the three segments, and what’s the significance of every third Makkah coming without warning?

Now we have a foundation upon which Malbim’s approach can be built. These comments are summarized in his commentary on Tehillim 78 and 105, which will be explored in the second installment of this article. He starts with the same structural theme as the Rashbam: three sets of three Makkot, each set having two with a warning prior and a third without. Hashem refers multiple times to the Makkot as “Otot” and “Mofetim” while speaking to Moshe; the Malbim defines these terms as referring to those two types of Makkot. An “Ot”

(literally “sign”) would be any one of the Makkot that was preceded by a warning, as these were meant to be the didactic tools through which Mitzrayim would come to “know” Hashem. Each of the three sets of Makkot was meant to teach a different aspect of knowledge of Hashem- the first set His existence and Omnipresence, the second set His supervision of detail, and the third set His supreme, unmatched power. These are hinted to by the phrasings of several Pesukim in which Hashem says, “Mitzrayim will know... that I am Hashem”, “... that I am Hashem in the midst of the land”, and “... that there is none like Me in all the land”. To serve as “witnesses” to these ideas, each set of Makkot began with two “otot” which symbolized that set’s aspect. The third Makkah in each set, which arrived suddenly, was not meant to educate the Mitzrim. The Malbim says that these three Makkot (Kinnim, Shechin, and Choshech) were the “Mofetim” (literally “wonders”): miraculous and devastating phenomena meant to punish Mitzrayim for not learning the lesson of that set of Makkot. To quote the Malbim on Tehillim 78:43, “‘the Otot were in Mitzrayim’, for they were meant to teach that nation one of the cornerstones of faith, and ‘the Mofetim were in the field of Zoan’, for they were brought not to teach, rather to smite the land in its entirety”.

So, the structure of the ten Makkot in chronological order tells a story of the attempted teaching of three lessons, with repercussions for Mitzrayim’s refusal to learn, culminating in a final blow that shattered Paroh’s resistance once and for all and forced him to begrudgingly admit defeat. There are, however, two other Makkot narratives in Tanach, which appear in Tehillim 78 and 105. Part 2 of this article will explore the implications of these narratives and the ways in which their structures differ from the narrative found in Sefer Shemot.

Hashem to Moshe: Trust the Process

By Eitan Barenholtz (23)

In Parashat Va'Eira, we start to see miracles occurring which begin the process of Hashem taking the Jews out of Egypt. But before the ten Makkot - the “main meal,” - we get three smaller signs performed for just Paroh and his sorcerers. Why does Hashem bother sending Moshe on this seemingly unimportant task instead of just going straight to the ten Makkot?

Rashi comments that these מופתים were to prove that there was a power sending Moshe to save the Jews (Shemot 7:9 Rashi s.v. “Mofeit”). However, that is difficult to understand, because later Rashi writes that the

Egyptians only admitted that the Makkot were from Hashem and that Moshe wasn't a sorcerer by Kinim, the third Makkah, a long time after this original incident (8:15 Rashi s.v. "Etzba Elokim Hi"). Ramban expands that they were compelled to acknowledge Hashem because He created new matter at Kinim which they could not replicate, but the previous Makkot and מופתים they could replicate (8:15 Ramban s.v. "VaYomeru HaChartumim"). So the question remains: if these מופתים didn't prove Hashem was helping Moshe Rabbeinu redeem the Jews, what was their purpose?

The מופתים were not about proving Hashem's existence; he is always easy to find for one who looks. They were about enhancing Moshe Rabbeinu's self-esteem and proving his worth to Bnei Yisrael. Rashi comments that Hashem commands Moshe to take his staff to perform these miracles, because Hashem is letting him change nature at His behest (4:17 Rashi s.v. "Asher Ta'aseh Bo"). Sforno expands saying that these מופתים are showing Bnei Yisrael their new leader (7:9 Sforno s.v. "Tenu Lachem Mofeit").

The lesson to learn from this story is that the greatest success stories start with humble beginnings. If Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest human, had to slowly grow into his role as the savior of the Jews, it shows that we can also take things slowly until we realize our potential. Nothing comes easy in life, but through hard work, nothing is impossible. Sam Hinkie, the former general manager for the Philadelphia 76ers, once said: "Trust the process", and maybe Moshe Rabbeinu heard that from him, too.

Looking at the Daily "Stop Signs"

By Jacob Becker ('22)

Parashat Va'Eira records the first seven Makkot. The ten Makkot are broken down by Rabi Yehuda (as we recite at the Seder) into three sets of three, plus Makkat Bechorot. We will focus on the first three Makkot: Dam, Tzfardei'ah, and Kinim. In what way do these three Makkot connect and what do these three Makkot teach us?

To answer this we need to consider what the first three Makkot represent. According to the Maharal, the number one represents unity and oneness regarding the first set of Makkot. In what way was unity displayed during these Makkot?

The Ibn Ezra on Shemot 8:13 (s.v. "VaYa'asu Kein") says that during Makkat Dam, when the river was stricken in one spot, all the water in Egypt turned into blood instantly. The same took place during Makkat Kinim where Aharon struck the sand in one spot and all

of Mitzrayim's sand turned to lice. Similarly, the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 10:4) and Gemara (Sanhedrin 67b and is cited by Rashi) say that at first only one frog was struck but then swarms emerged from the original frog as a result. Also, during Makkat Tzfardei'ah, according to Rabi Eliezer, one frog arose and began to croak, signaling the other frogs to join it and Tzfardei'ah began. There is a sort of unity on display during these first three Makkot.

On the other hand, there is a much deeper unity which took place during the first three Makkot. Paroh and his Chartumim were unified toward the same goals. They were all magicians, they all wanted to prove Hashem wrong, and had many more common goals. Paroh consistently wanted the Chartumim to try to perform exactly what Moshe and Aharon were doing. They replicated the first two Makkot with their sorcery, but when they weren't able to replicate Makkat Kinim they realized that it was "Etzba Elokim Hi," realizing that it was from Hashem.

In addition, Paroh failed to realize something that was essential. The Pasuk (Shemot 7:23) says that "Paroh turned away and went to his palace and paid no regard to this" after the Chartumim performed Makkat Dam with their sorcery. The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 9:11) says that Paroh paid no attention to what had transpired and did not even comprehend that the Makkah was from Hashem. He thought that it was a mere act of sorcery performed by Moshe and Aharon rather than the works of Hashem. Therefore, he paid no attention to what he had just seen and refused to let the Jews go as a result.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz, the Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva when it was in Belarus, applies this Midrash to all of the Makkot and says Paroh's resistance led only to more destruction. The Ramban (Shemot 7:16) says that Paroh was already afraid of the Makkot, but he hardened his heart to overcome these fears as recorded in the Pesukim many times. What did Paroh do to harden his heart to overcome his fears?

Based on the Midrash, Rav Yerucham explains that it is not what Paroh did, it was what he did not do. He paid no attention to them. He refused to even think about what he had just seen and experienced. Had he contemplated what he had just seen, he would have arrived at the conclusion or at least considered that these were acts of Hashem. As an expert in sorcery, Paroh could have easily realized that these were acts of Hashem, but Paroh refused. He returned to his daily routine; he chose not to reflect. As a result, he suffered greatly, ignoring what was in plain sight. The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 13:3) says that Reish Lakish applies a Pasuk in Mishlei to Hashem hardening Paroh's heart. The Pasuk in Mishlei says that "if one is drawn to the scoffers Hashem will make him scoff," and explains that Hashem warns a

sinner repeatedly that he must repent. If the sinner does not fix his ways then Hashem will harden his heart against doing Teshuvah. How is continuing the Aveirah in such a case “scoffing” and why is hardening the heart against repenting the punishment that they deserve?

Rav Yerucham says that the root of the word in the Pasuk “Leitzanut”, “scoffing or making light,” is a lack of contemplation. One who does not think about what is before him will not be inspired. Rather, he will fail to see its significance and dismiss it as not important to him. The punishment for not contemplating measure for measure is the inability to do so. The Pasuk (Yeshayah 40:26) says “Hashem’s wonders exist! All we have to do is raise our eyes!” When we see, we must do so with our hearts as much as our eyes. In Devarim 32:46-47, Moshe himself said “apply your hearts to all the words that I testify against you today... for it is not an empty thing for you for it is your life”. While Paroh didn’t take to heart what he should have, we can apply our hearts to what we see. It is the purpose of our lives.

We can learn so much from these types of unity presented to us during the first three Makkot. We see that although unity is so powerful, it can be very damaging. Even though the Makkot were acts of Hashem and unity was involved, Mitzrayim was heavily damaged. The same took place between Paroh and his Chartumim. This unity can be compared to that of the unity of the Dor HaFlagah. They were unified towards the same goal and they were punished. We learn from here that when we join other people it should be directed towards growth and not destruction. We should always be with the right people, in the right place, at the right time.

There is another important message to derive from this situation. Sometimes we fail to see that which is in front of us. Sometimes we’re unified for the wrong purpose and damage ourselves and others as a result. That’s the kind of unity that took place between Paroh and the Chartumim. The Chartumim were in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong person. However, the Chartumim extracted themselves from that situation. How did they do it?

They got out by doing what Paroh did not. They contemplated what was transpiring and considered the source behind everything. Sometimes we fail to think about the things thrown before us. We tend to overlook that which we should consider. Sometimes we harden our own hearts; we need to look for the signs that Hashem is throwing our way, whether big or small, and we need to realize their significance. We need to contemplate everything that takes place. Only then can we recognize signs from Hashem; only then can we be like the Chartumim and realize “*Etzba Elokim Hi*”.

The Dramatic Tragedy of Rabi Yishmael Kohen Gadol’s Son and Daughter

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

A Poignant Story

Gittin 58a presents a poignant story that both Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews incorporate into their respective Kinnot on Tish’a Be’Av (William Davidson edition of the Talmud).

Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: There was an incident involving the son and the daughter of Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha the High Priest, who were taken captive and sold into slavery to two different masters. After some time the two masters met in a certain place. This master said: I have a male slave whose beauty is unmatched in all of the world, and that master said: I have a female slave whose beauty is unmatched in all of the world.

The two masters said: Come, let us marry these two slaves to one another and divide the children born to them between us, as they will certainly be very beautiful. They secluded them in a room. This one, the son, sat in one corner, and that one, the daughter, sat in the other corner. He said: I am a priest and the descendant of High Priests. Shall I marry a female slave? And she said: I am the daughter of a priest and the descendant of High Priests. Shall I be married to a male slave? And they wept all through the night.

When dawn arrived they recognized each other and saw that they were brother and sister. They fell on each other and burst into tears until their souls departed due to their great distress. And with regard to them and others like them, Jeremiah lamented: “For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water” (Eichah 1:16).

There are many stories about the Churban, but only a precious few are presented in the Kinnot. What distinguishes this story that makes it so compelling to Jews of each generation until the Churban?

Self Control, Sinat Chinam, and Self Esteem

Shaarei Orah’s Naftali Mellul suggests that we celebrate the protagonists’ control of the Yetzer Hara.

Binyamin Jachter suggests that the story serves as an example of Sinat Chinam. They each judged their counterpart as unworthy without investigating the facts.

I note the significance of their refusing to compromise their self-esteem despite their miserable circumstances. They regarded themselves as royalty despite being designated as slaves. Rabbanim during the

Sho'ah similarly urged their followers to recite the Brachah "*SheLo Asani Aved*," "thank you Hashem for not making me a slave". The Rebbeim preached maintaining "inner freedom" despite the extreme suffering and degradation.

The Jewish people throughout our exile have maintained our dignity and high self-esteem despite the majority culture demeaning us to various degrees. Rashi's commentary on the Torah continually plays a crucial role in reminding us that we are the "*Mamlechet Kohanim*," "the nation of priests amongst the nations". The Nevi'im of the Churban, Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, and Yechezkel continuously reinforced this vital message as well.

Rav Soloveitchik's Explanation

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l contrasts our story with other Kinnot that lament the horrific things that happened to communities and Am Yisrael at large, comes our Kinnah. Our story, by contrast, is a story of individuals. Judaism recognizes and values mourning for regular, normal and everyday people. "We mourn for a boy and girl who were not leaders or scholars and who did not play any major public role" (The Lookstein Edition Kinnot p 443). "Telling a story of individuals accomplishes a twofold goal," continues Rav Soloveitchik. "Firstly, it demonstrates that our mourning is not just for large numbers, communities and other large-scale events. We care for and mourn for individuals as well. Our sadness on Tish'a Be'Av is both caused by events that heavily impacted us nationally, as well as by individual people."

Beyond that, Rav Soloveitchik suggests that mourning for individuals has a secondary accomplishment as well. It enables the mourner to better connect with the events that have transpired. It's much easier to identify and sympathize with the pain of one person in trouble rather than a story of a national crisis. Human nature allows us to relate to stories of individual people better than large scale numbers or events.

To this second advantage of recalling a story of individuals, Rav Soloveitchik found support from a Midrash found in BeReshit Rabbah (33:5). It describes how Rabi Akiva, while visiting Ginzak (a city), told the people there both about the Mabul (flood) narrative, one that reports the destruction of the world, as well as the heartbreaking events of Iyov (Job). The reaction from the people to Iyov's tribulations was significantly greater; for after hearing about him, they broke out into tears. While after the No'ach story, the people's reaction was significantly less intense.

Rav Jesse Horn

Rav Jesse Horn of Yeshivat HaKotel argues that "there is, however, a small problem with Rav Soloveitchik's approach to this Kinnah". It is somewhat

difficult to imagine that these two children were selected as paradigmatic examples of no-name individuals. After all, they were the children of the Kohen Gadol. Certainly, other people, maybe with a less well-known lineage, and family background, could have been selected. And if no other story drives home the message as well as this one does, the Paytan should have left out that particular information. If the Kinnah truly wanted to stress that these people were common people, it should have told the story anonymously.

However, it is true that this Kinnah is very unique in so far as it tells such a long and detailed story of individuals. Perhaps, beyond what Rabbi Soloveitchik suggested or maybe slightly differently from what he had suggested, there is another profound element to the message of this Kinnah. This Kinnah intentionally uses individuals from aristocracy and superb pedigree. Their tragic decline serves as a paradigm for a parallel phenomenon on a national level. All Jews suffered, even the Jews from the most respected and significant families.

There are many allusions and supports to this slightly alternate approach. The story of how people were to be bred like animals really illustrates our newly developed theory. What could be more expressive of Klal Yisrael's demise than its most respected citizens from its most respected family being enslaved and bred for sale?

When crying all night long, Rabi Yishmael Kohen Gadol's son says, "How will a grandson of Aharon marry a slave-girl," and his daughter wonders how "a daughter of Yocheved (can) marry a slave?" The characters themselves are undoubtedly grieving this exact point. They aren't selfishly concerned with their own fate. They are mourning how Bnei Yisrael has fallen so severely. This is even more clear when taking into account the fact that, in this Kinnah, both the son and the daughter speak only once. Presumably, the Paytan has them communicate something of great importance. They are recognizing Am Yisrael's collapse.

A People of Extremes

We add that our story also expresses a powerful point made by the Gemara (Megilla 16a). The story of the son and the daughter of Rabi Yishmael Kohen Gadol shifts from an extreme high to an extreme low. Our suffering as a people is also extreme, as Eichah states (1:12) "*Im Yeish Machov KeMachovi*," "Is there a pain like mine?"

Final Thought

The story ends on a disturbing note. The son and daughter cannot tolerate their terrible fall and they both die in despair. The Jewish people after its many trials and tribulation could have easily fallen into this trap. However, as an expression of our collective strength, we do not succumb; we rebuild.

The Jewish communities with the largest population growth in the immediate aftermath of the Sho'ah were the Displaced Persons camps. Almost immediately after their liberation, many if not most survivors married and started to build (or in many cases rebuild) their families. Unlike the protagonists of our story, we Jews refuse to capitulate to our sorrow. Instead, we draw upon our collective strength and we rebuild and eventually thrive with Hashem's help and support.

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