

PARSHAT VA'ERA -- "ANI HASHEM"

Should Bnei Yisrael's redemption from slavery be 'unconditional'?

According to God's original promise to Avraham Avinu at Brit Bein ha'Btarim (Breishit 15:13-15), it certainly seems that way.

Furthermore, the opening lines of Parshat Va'era also leave us with this impression that the forthcoming redemption will be unconditional – after all, could God have any higher expectations from a nation that had endured so many years of oppression?

In the following shiur, we re-examine those psukim (i.e. Shmot 6:2-9) - to show how and why Israel's redemption from Egypt emerges as a more 'reciprocal' process.

INTRODUCTION

In our study last week of the 'burning bush' narrative, we explained how Moshe Rabeinu received a 'double mission' - as God instructed him to both:

* **INFORM** Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill His promise to the Avot to take them to Eretz Canaan.

AND

* **ORDER** Pharaoh to allow Bnei Yisrael to journey a three day distance into the desert - to worship their God.

At first glance, Moshe's mission to Pharaoh appears to be much more difficult than his mission to Bnei Yisrael. After all, Moshe must **convince** the Egyptian ruler to do something against his will; while Bnei Yisrael need only to be **told** 'good tidings'.

However, as the story continues, we will see how Moshe's 'mission' to Bnei Yisrael becomes no less difficult, and how that mission emerges as a primary theme of Sefer Shmot!

To explain how and why, we must first consider the setting as Parshat Va'era begins.

GETTING BETTER, OR GETTING WORSE

Recall from Parshat Shmot, how Bnei Yisrael immediately believed Moshe's tidings of their forthcoming redemption:

"...and the people believed that God had come to redeem His people..." (see 4:29-31).

However, this initial enthusiasm quickly turned bitter after Pharaoh doubled their workload (in reaction to Moshe's opening request /see 5:18-21). Understandably, the people accuse Moshe - their new leader - for aggravating their condition; whereupon Moshe turns to God in prayer, asking:

"Why have you made things worse for this people, why have you sent me! From the time I have gone to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, their situation has only gotten worse, and You have not saved Your nation!" (5:22).

It is precisely at this point when Parshat Va'era opens, i.e. as Moshe awaits God's answer concerning what to tell the people. As the people raise a rather 'legitimate' complaint, Moshe needs to know how to respond.

Note how God's response to this complaint is found in the opening eight psukim of Parshat Va'era (i.e. 6:2-9) - and how it divides into two sections:

- 1) What God tells Moshe (see 6:2-5), and hence:
- 2) What Moshe must tell Bnei Yisrael (see 6:6-8).

In our shiur, we will focus on God's answer to Bnei Yisrael (i.e. 6:6-8), while our additional shiur on Parshat Va'era (to follow) will discuss how and why God first mentions "brit Avot" in his preliminary remarks to Moshe in 6:2-5.]

ANI HASHEM

Review the opening line of God's response to Moshe (see 6:2), as it appears to contain a rather superfluous statement: "And Elokim spoke to Moshe, and told him: **ANI HASHEM**".

Even though Moshe Rabeinu already knows who God is (see Shmot 3:6-7 & 3:13-15), nonetheless, God finds it necessary to preface his response with this statement of "Ani Hashem".

Similarly, the message that God instructs Moshe to convey to Bnei Yisrael begins (and ends!) with this same statement of 'ANI HASHEM' (see 6:6-8). To clarify this, note our emphasis of this point as we quote these psukim:

"Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael:

ANI HASHEM,

and I will take them out from their suffering in Egypt...
and I will save them from their enslavement,
and I shall redeem them with an outstretched arm....
and I shall take them for Me as My Nation
and I will be their God... then they shall know that:

ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM

who has taken them out of Egypt.

And I will take them to the Land...

and I will give it to them as an inheritance...

ANI HASHEM."

(see 6:6-8, read carefully!)

Clearly, God wants Bnei Yisrael to hear this 'message' of "Ani Hashem". But how does this 'statement' answer the people's complaint? Would the repetition of this phrase, together with yet another promise of redemption lighten their workload?

[Recall, Bnei Yisrael never asked for redemption, they simply desired less work! (see 2:23)]

As we see in the next pasuk, this message did not convince them, and precisely for this reason - that it did not alleviate their heavy workload:

"And Moshe spoke these words to Bnei Yisrael, **but they did not listen** to Moshe, due to their crushed spirit and **their hard labor**". (see 6:9).

So what was the purpose of God's message of "Ani Hashem", if it didn't work?

A STATEMENT, or A COMMAND?

To answer this question, we contend that the phrase 'ANI HASHEM' (in the context of these psukim) should not be understood as simply a '**statement**' – promising imminent redemption, but rather as a '**command to accept Hashem**' – i.e. demanding improved behavior – **to enable redemption!**

Even though this interpretation may not appear to be the simple meaning of this phrase, a careful reading of this entire section in Sefer Shmot, with a little help from Sefer Yechezkel, will help us prove this conclusion.

To do so, let's take a careful look at Bnei Yisrael's **response** (in 6:9) to God's message (in 6:6-8):

"And Moshe relayed this [message] to Bnei Yisrael...

- ve'**lo SHAM'U** el Moshe mi'kotzer ruach u'm'avoda kasha-
But they did not **LISTEN** to Moshe, due to their crushed spirits and hard work. (see 6:9).

In our quotation of this pasuk, we have translated the phrase of "ve'lo sham'u" as they did not 'listen'. However, as we shall now explain, this translation is problematic.

'TO BELIEVE' OR 'TO OBEY'?

To interpret the phrase "ve-lo SHAM'U", let's consider the possible meanings of the verb "lishmoa", which can imply to either hear; comprehend; listen, or obey – and contemplate how it would relate to the context of these psukim:

* They did not **HEAR** what Moshe said.

That can't be its meaning in this pasuk, as they obviously

heard what Moshe said. [If not, he could have simply raised his voice, and repeated it again.]

- * They did not **COMPREHEND** what he said.
This would also seem unlikely, for nothing in Moshe's statement seems particularly complex or intellectually demanding.
- * They did not **PAY ATTENTION** to what Moshe told them.
Based on its context, this seems to be the simplest understanding; the problem only being that this is not what the word "sham'u" usually implies.
- * They did not **BELIEVE** (or accept) what Moshe told them.
Even though this is the popular interpretation (of this pasuk), this translation is problematic as well, for the Torah should have used the phrase "ve-lo he'eminu", as this is the word Chumash usually employs to describe belief – just as it did to describe Bnei Yisrael's original belief in God's first promise of redemption - see 4:30-31.
- * They did not **OBEY** what Moshe told them.
Although this is the most common translation of 've-lo sham'u' elsewhere in Chumash [see for example Devarim 28:15 & Vayikra 26:14], such a translation in our context seems entirely untenable, as Moshe's remarks contained no commandment or imperative for the people to obey!
Or did they?

Based on the above analysis, the best translation for "ve-lo sham'u" would be - that the people did not 'obey' - but if so, it would require that we identify some sort of commandment in God's statement to the people, as recorded in 6:6-8.

To explain how and why the statement of ANI HASHEM could be understood as a commandment – that must be obeyed; we must study a parallel source that describes these same events, as recorded in the book of Yechezkel.

A PROOF FROM YEHEZKEL

[Before continuing, it is recommended that you first read Yechezkel 20:1-12 and carefully compare it to Shmot 6:2-13; noting the obvious textual parallels, e.g. 20:5-6 w/ 3:6-8.]

Yechezkel chapter 20 opens in the seventh year [i.e. seven years after the Exile of King Yehoyachin and the aristocracy from Jerusalem], as the elders of Yehuda (the leaders of the Exile in Bavel) visit Yechezkel to inquire in regard to their predicament.

[Based on chapter 28 in Yirmiyahu, we can assume that rumors of Bavel's imminent fall are spreading (as Egypt will come to their rescue/ see also Yirmiyahu 37:1-10), kindling [false] hope among the people that God may soon redeem the Exile and return them to Jerusalem.]

In response to their inquiry, God tells Yechezkel that the people need to hear rebuke (rather than 'good tidings' /see 2:4).

In that rebuke, God instructs Yechezkel to remind the people that they are not worthy of redemption, just as their forefathers in Egypt did not deserve redemption! [See 20:5-10.]

As your review these psukim, note how Yechezkel describes the set of events that took place just prior to the Exodus, and their obvious parallels to the opening psukim of Parshat Va'era:

"And you shall say to them... on the day that I chose Israel ... [va-ivada lahem -] when I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt... and I stretched out My Hand to them saying ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM".

[Compare with Shmot 6:3 & 6:6]

"... on that same day ["nasa'ti et yadi"] I lifted out My Hand to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey" (Yechezkel 20:5-6),

[Compare with Shmot 6:8 and 3:7-8].

Note especially the repetition of the phrase of ANI HASHEM as well as "ve-lo avu l'shmo'ah".

TAKING 'EGYPT' OUT OF THE JEWS

However, the most important piece of information in these psukim, that (for some reason) were left out of Sefer Shmot, is the COMMANDMENT that God had given Bnei Yisrael at that time:

"And I said to them [at the time of Yetziat Mitzrayim]: - "Each man must rid himself of his detestable ways and not DEFILE himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM" (see 20:7).

"But they REBELLED against Me - 've-lo avu l'ISHMOA eilai' - and they did not want to listen to Me (i.e. **obey**) - for no one rid himself from his detestable ways, nor did anyone give up the fetishes of Egypt, and I resolved to pour out My anger upon them..." (see 20:8).

It becomes quite clear from Yechezkel, that when God told Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael ANI HASHEM (as recorded in Parshat Va'era), this included an implicit COMMAND as well - to rid themselves from Egyptian culture- a command which Bnei Yisrael DID NOT OBEY.

Much to our amazement, Sefer Yechezkel states explicitly that which Sefer Shmot only alludes to. God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus, to cleanse themselves from the "tum'a" of their Egyptian culture - in preparation for their redemption. Unfortunately, at that time Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY ["ve-lo avu l'ISHMOA" / see 20:8] and thus deserved to be destroyed in the land of Egypt.

Nevertheless, as Yechezkel explains in the next pasuk, the redemption process did continue, but it was only for the 'sake of God's Name' (see Yechezkel 20:9-10).

[These psukim in Yechezkel support the popular Zohar that explains how Bnei Yisrael in Egypt had reached the 49th level of 'tum'a' before the redemption began. See Further Iyun section for additional sources that are based on (or quote) these psukim in Yechezkel.]

Thus, these psukim in Yechezkel can help us understand the deeper meaning of the phrase 'Ani Hashem' in Parshat Va'era. God's instruction to Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael – 'Ani Hashem' - implies not only that they must accept God, but they must also reject any other gods (and/or culture). Basically, God is telling His nation that He will indeed redeem them from Egypt, as they request; but this redemption demands that they become a 'committed partner' in this relationship.

If this understanding is correct, then Bnei Yisrael's response of "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" could definitely be understood that 'they did not OBEY' – for they rebelled against God (as Yechezkel explained) continuing their evil ways by clinging to their Egyptian culture!

A LOGICAL 'KAL VA-CHOMER'

Additional support for this interpretation [that they did not 'obey'] can be inferred from the next three psukim that follow in Parshat Va'era:

"Then God told Moshe, go speak to Pharaoh... that he should SEND Bnei Yisrael from his land. [Clearly, a command!]

Then, Moshe retorted [employing a 'kal va-chomer'], saying:

"hein Bnei Yisrael LO SHAM'U eilai – [If even B.Y. did not 'listen' to me] – ve-eich YISHMA'ENI Pharaoh - why should Pharaoh 'obey' me?" (see 6:10-12).

As you review this pasuk in Hebrew, note how the Torah uses the word 'sham'u' on each side of the 'kal va-chomer'.

In the context of Pharaoh's refusal to comply with God's command - 'sham'u' definitely means to OBEY - for Moshe commands Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael permission to leave Egypt (to worship their God). Therefore, for this 'kal va-chomer' to make sense, the verb 'sham'u' in both halves of the pasuk must carry the same meaning. Thus, if 'sham'u' in the second half of the pasuk means 'obey', then 'sham'u' in first half of the pasuk - in reference to Bnei Yisrael - must also mean to OBEY.

In other words, the 'kal va-chomer' implies: "Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY me!"

Once again, we find proof that the phrase 've-lo sham'u' in 6:9 should be understood as: Bnei Yisrael did not **obey**.

TO KNOW or TO INTERNALIZE

Based on this conclusion, "ANI HASHEM" must now be understood as a **command**; and not as a **statement** (as we originally assumed). In this context, "Ani Hashem" encompasses much more than pure intellectual knowledge, rather it constitutes a precept that must be INTERNALIZED – and hence requires the rejection of any other god.

As Parshat Va'eyra begins, Moshe Rabeinu has been charged with the responsibility to become an 'educator', and not simply the bearer of good tidings. In this capacity, he must help prepare Bnei Yisrael for their redemption – by changing their ignoble culture – leading them in the path of God. It will also remain as his primary job for the next forty years!

THE FIRST TWO 'DIBROT'

This interpretation can help us appreciate the deeper meaning of the first two of the Ten Commandments that Bnei Yisrael receive when they arrive at Har Sinai.

The first commandment: "ANOKHI HASHEM ELOKECHA asher HOTZEITICHA me-eretz Mitzrayim..." (see 20:2-3, compare w/6:6!) is simply a more emphatic form of "Ani Hashem"; and the next commandment: "lo yihyeh lachem elohim acherim al panai..." - not to follow any other gods – reiterates this warning that accepting God requires the rejection of decadent cultures.

This can also explain why some commentators consider Anochi and Lo Yihyeh as one commandment, for the first statement automatically implies the second (like two sides of the same coin!)

Even though Bnei Yisrael did not internalize this 'commandment' of ANI HASHEM before they left Egypt (as 6:9 implies), as God had hoped; their redemption process would not be complete until they do – as will unfold in the events that follow in the rest of Chumash.

A DIFFICULT MISSION

From this perspective, Moshe's mission to Bnei Yisrael becomes more difficult than his mission to Pharaoh. His assignment involves not only informing the people, but also EDUCATING them - to prepare them for their redemption. Just as Pharaoh must be convinced to recognize God, Bnei Yisrael must be convinced that they must become worthy for their redemption by God.

This interpretation can also explain the interesting wording of God's response to Moshe's objection in 6:11-12:

"Then God spoke to Moshe & Aharon, and **COMMANDED** them [va-yetzavem] **TO** Bnei Yisrael **AND TO** Pharaoh the king of Egypt to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt" (6:13).

God once again gives Moshe a double mission - to command Pharaoh to allow them to leave, AND to command Bnei Yisrael to 'become worthy' of that redemption.

[See Ramban's interpretation of this pasuk!]

SOME HELP FROM SEFER VAYIKRA

So what were Bnei Yisrael doing in Egypt that was so terrible? Considering that these events took place before the Torah was given, what did they need to do 'teshuva' from?

A possible answer can be found in Parshat Acharei Mot, where we find once again an interesting textual and thematic parallel to Yechezkel chapter 20 and Shmot chapter 6.

In Vayikra chapter 18 (which just so happens to be the Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon, and not by chance), God bids Bnei Yisrael not to follow the corrupt lifestyle of the Egyptians. Note once again the repetition in these psukim of the phrase 'ANI HASHEM':

"And God spoke to Moshe: speak to Bnei Yisrael and **TELL** them ANI HASHEM!

Do not act as the Egyptians do... and do not follow their customs. Follow My laws instead... for ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM.

Keep My laws, for by them man lives... ANI HASHEM" (see Vayikra 18:1-5).

This short introduction is followed by a long list of forbidden marital relationships [better known as the 'arayot'], which had apparently become common in the Egyptian and Canaanite cultures (see 18:24-25!). Thus, God's call for 'teshuva' may have included a demand that Bnei Yisrael's refrain of their decadent Egyptian lifestyle, and accept instead whatever mitzvot God may command.

A THEME IN SEFER SHMOT

This interpretation not only helps us understand the phrase "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" in 6:9, it also explains a whole series of events that take place up until Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai.

Recall that God had originally planned (at the 'sneh') for Bnei Yisrael to travel a three-day journey directly to Har Sinai immediately after the Exodus (see 3:12-18). Instead, they arrive at Har Sinai only some six weeks later. Why?

Based on the excerpt quoted from Sefer Yechezkel, the answer is quite simple. As the prophet explained, God saved Bnei Yisrael for the 'sake of His Name' - even though they were undeserving at that time (see 20:8-9). Hence, the redemption process could not continue, i.e. Bnei Yisrael cannot travel on to Har Sinai, until something is done to improve their spiritual readiness.

Therefore, even before Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, they must offer a special Korban [Pesach] to affirm their faithfulness. [See our TSC shiur on Parshat Bo.] Then, after their first 'three-day journey' into the desert, they must pass the test at 'Mara' (see 15:22-26), where they are given one more chance to accept what they had earlier rejected in Parshat Va'era. Note what God commands Bnei Yisrael at MARA:

"And He said - IM SHAMO'A TISHMA - If you OBEY the voice of the Lord your God, do what is upright and listen to His commandments, then the afflictions that I brought upon Egypt [which you deserved as well!] I will not bring upon you, for ANI HASHEM, your Healer" (16:26).

[This topic will be discussed in greater detail in our shiur on Parshat Beshalach.]

Finally, immediately upon their arrival at Har Sinai, God again demands as a PRE-REQUISITE for receiving the Torah a similar 'pledge of allegiance':

"And now, IM SHAMO'A TISHME'U BE-KOLI - if you agree to obey My instruction and keep My covenant..." (see 19:3-6).

Of course, this time Bnei Yisrael agree to follow God and 'listen' [obey] to whatever He may command them (see 19:7-8).

Finally, as we explained above, this explains why the very first DIBUR of the Ten Commandments is "ANOKHI [=ANI] HASHEM ELOKECHA who took you out of Egypt - LO YIHIYEH... Do not have any other gods INSTEAD of Me" (see 20:2).

As we saw in Sefer Yechezkel, these two statements - ANI HASHEM and LO YIHIYEH - act as 'two sides of the same coin' - for the statement of ANI HASHEM automatically implies that you shall have no other gods.

ELIYAHU AT LEIL HA-SEDER

In closing, the conclusions of this week's shiur can also help us appreciate our custom to 'invite' Eliyahu ha-navi to our 'seder table'. On Pesach night, as we commemorate the events of Yetziat Mitzrayim, we conclude the SEDER with our hope for the final redemption. However, before we begin Hallel & Nirtza, we first invite Eliyahu. Most likely, this custom is based on the final pasuk of Mal'achi, which promises:

"Behold I am sending you Eliyah the prophet, BEFORE the great and awesome day of the Lord, and he will return the hearts of sons to their fathers, and the hearts of fathers to their sons, lest I come and smite and land instead."

In the final redemption, just as in the first redemption, our obligation to perform 'teshuva' is as important an ingredient as God's readiness to redeem us. After all, what purpose would there be in our redemption if we were not ready to fulfill our covenantal obligations?

In order for redemption to succeed, a constant recognition of ANI HASHEM must become not only a 'frame of mind', but even more so, it must become a 'way of life'.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

1. Review Shmot 2:23-25. Note how Bnei Yisrael cry to Hashem for salvation. In your opinion, does this indicate that they did teshuva, or was this simply a cry for help.

See Ibn Ezra (2:23 / aroch), Ramban (2:25), and Seforno (2:23-24) on these psukim, noting how they all relate to this question, and how they all relate to the psukim in Yechezkel 20:1-9 as well!

2. See Seforno's introduction to Sefer Shmot (in some Chumashim it is found in the first volume of Sefer Breishit, where Seforno provides and intro to all five books of Chumash).

Note how his commentary on what transpires in Sefer Shmot is based on what is described in Yechezkel chapter 20!

Note also how he relates to this information in Sefer Yechezkel in his commentary on almost every pasuk in Shmot chapter one, as well as his commentary on 2:23-24.

3. See Amos 5:18! There he claims that it would be better for Bnei Yisrael not to desire a YOM HASHEM. Based on the context of that pasuk (considering the people's behavior during the time period of Uziyahu) and the conclusions of this week's shiur, explain Amos' warning in that pasuk

. See also Yirmiyahu 29:10-14, and relate it to the above shiur!

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND SOURCES

The Forty-nine 'sha'arei tum'a'

The concept that Bnei Yisrael plummeted to the forty-ninth 'gate of impurity' appears in the Zohar Chadash, vol. 1, Parshat Yitro 52a. The Zohar there writes that while Hashem had promised Avraham Avinu only that He will redeem his offspring from bondage, He in fact did much more: He took them from the forty-nine 'gates of impurity' and raised them to the forty-nine 'gates of wisdom'. This, explains the Zohar, is why Hashem constantly reminds Bnei Yisrael, "I am Hashem your God who took you from Egypt", to emphasize that He did more than fulfill His promise to Avraham Avinu.

The Zohar adds that the forty-nine days we count between Pesach and Shavuot commemorate this elevation from the forty-nine 'gates of impurity'. This concept is developed later by the Ramchal, in Choker U-mekubal, 18. "Ve-lo Sham'u El Moshe" (6:9)

Our explanation, that this pasuk refers to Bnei Yisrael's unwillingness to give up their idolatrous practices, appears explicitly in several Midrashim. The Mechilta, Parshat Bo - Mesechta De-pischa 5 and Shemot Rabba 6:5 explain that Bnei Yisrael could not extricate themselves from idolatry, and the Midrashim make reference to Yechezkel 20 as evidence. Targum Yonatan Ben Uziel also explains this pasuk as suggesting Bnei Yisrael's refusal to abandon idolatry, though he adds as well the element of 'kepidut rucha', anger and frustration. Perhaps this means that the intensified labor that resulted from Moshe's initial meeting with Pharaoh contributed in no small measure to the people's refusal to heed his call for teshuva.

It is worth noting that we find two different approaches in the Midrashim as to why Bnei Yisrael resorted to avoda zara: either for theological reasons, or due to circumstances they deemed out of their control. The Torah Shleima quotes a "Midrash Aggada" that Bnei Yisrael lacked faith and claimed that Hashem did not

have the ability to save them. They thus resorted to avoda zara, on ideological grounds. The Midrash Hagadol, by contrast, records the following response of Bnei Yisrael to Moshe's call for their return to monotheism: "Where do you find a slave who acquires for himself two masters? We are slaves to Pharaoh; how can we violate his decrees - we are afraid!" Their subjugation to Pharaoh precluded the possibility of their service to Hashem.

The Netziv, in his comments to Shmot 13:9, finds what he considers a clearer source in Chumash for Bnei Yisrael's involvement in avoda zara. The pasuk there instructs them with regard to the mitzva of tefillin and concludes, "for with a mighty hand Hashem took you out from Egypt". The Netziv explains this clause as a response to the anticipated question as to why Hashem must issue so many commandments to ensure Bnei Yisrael's trust and belief in Him. He answers by reminding the people that they agreed to leave Egypt only after witnessing Hashem's mighty hand. Although they happily welcomed Moshe's initial announcement of their freedom (4:31), they rejected his second proclamation because, as we noted in the shiur, it required them to accept Hashem as their God. Only after witnessing the miracles in Egypt did they agree to forsake idolatry and accept Hashem.

VE-LO SHAM'U EL MOSHE

By and large, the "mefarshim al derech ha-pshat" interpret "ve-lo sham'u el Moshe" differently. We list here the three general directions taken by the mefarshim:

BELIEVE

They did not believe: We dismissed this approach in the shiur, but several prominent mefarshim adopt - either explicitly or implicitly - this interpretation. The Rashbam contrasts the nation's response here with their reaction to Moshe's initial announcement, as recorded in Parshat Shmot - 4:31. Although then, they believed Moshe ("Va-ya'amen ha-am"), having seen their hopes crushed by the decree of more intensive labor they no longer believed. In quoting this pasuk in Parshat Shmot, the Rashbam may have implicitly addressed the possible objection to this approach, as we asked in the shiur: why did the Torah not say, "Ve-lo he'eminu"? The answer may be that in that very pasuk the Torah writes, "va-yishme'u ki pakad Hashem et Bnei Yisrael..." There, 'va-yishme'u' seems to parallel 'va-ya'amen', to mean 'they believed'. Other mefarshim who claim that Bnei Yisrael did not believe Moshe include the Ralbag and Seforno.

PAY ATTENTION

Another group of mefarshim explain 've-lo sham'u' to mean a rough equivalent of, 'they did not pay attention'. For one of several reasons, Bnei Yisrael did not or could not pay attention to Moshe as he spoke to them - either because of the pressure of their workload, their emotional distress, or because Pharaoh had already ordered them to disregard the 'words of falsehood' spoken by Moshe and Aharon (5:9).

This approach is taken (though in slightly different forms) by the Ramban, Chizkuni, Abarbanel, Netziv and Meshech Chochma in their commentaries on this pasuk. One interesting variation of this approach appears in the work of Rav Hirsch. He explains, along the same general lines as our analysis in the shiur, that in Moshe's speech he does more than inform the people of redemption; he charges them with a mission, the destiny and purpose of Am Yisrael. Due to the pressures of their work, however, Bnei Yisrael had no patience for such lofty ideas and concepts. All they could concentrate on was the immediate tasks at hand; they therefore could not pay any attention to Moshe's description of their spiritual mission as a free nation.

CONSOLATION

The final approach is that of Rashi: "They did not accept consolation." Unlike our explanation in the shiur, Rashi apparently understood Moshe's address as simply an attempt at consoling the people whose lives had become even more unbearable as a result of Pharaoh's new decree. Rashi expresses this interpretation of the pasuk in other writings, as well. In Sefer Hapardes (compiled by Rashi's students) and in Siddur Rashi (414), this pasuk is cited as proof that those who

seek to offer consolation should do so 'me'at me'at', by expressing modest hopes for better things to come. In Rashi's words, one who does not do so: "is like one who says to a beggar, 'Tomorrow you will be a king' - he does not believe him." Here, too, Bnei Yisrael suffered from physical torment, and Moshe consoles them with promises of a glorious life as God's nation in the land of Canaan. This offered them little consolation; they wished only for a respite from their current hardship.

The Malbim (on our pasuk) explains along these lines, as well, that Moshe here was to console Bnei Yisrael, but did not succeed.

TESHUVA IN EGYPT

In sharp contrast to the line taken in the shiur, Ibn Ezra in his peirush Ha-aroch(2:23) says that the words "Va-yeanchu Bnei Yisrael min ha-avoda va-yiz'aku" implies that they did do teshuva and thus were worthy of being redeemed from Egypt.

'Ani Hashem'

The centrality of this phrase within this opening unit of Parshat Va'era is demonstrated by Nechama Leibowitz (*Studies*, Parshat Va'era 1). She shows that within this segment, which consists of Hashem's speech to Moshe (6:2-8), 'Ani Hashem' appears at either end (6:2&8) as well as in the middle (6:6). Clearly, the notion of 'Ani Hashem' comprises the most important message Moshe is to convey to Bnei Yisrael at this point.

In the shiur we suggest that 'Ani Hashem' involved an educational message, that Bnei Yisrael must rid themselves of Egyptian culture and prepare themselves spiritually for redemption. This approach appears in the works of two twentieth-century writers, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin (*Oznayim La-Torah*) and Rav Yoel Leib Herzog (*Imrei Yoel*). They both claim that 'Ani Hashem' was meant as an admonishment that Bnei Yisrael relinquish their attachment to idolatry. Rav Sorotzkin adds that Bnei Yisrael could not accept the fact that the same God who brought about this bitter exile would also come to their assistance and redeem them. They fell under the influence of pagan ideology and so believed in the existence of different gods with different powers. Moshe was thus to teach them the message of 'Ani Hashem', that there is only one God who governs every force in the universe. Indeed, the same God who subjected them to hardship will lead them to a life of freedom.

This interpretation of 'Ani Hashem' may shed light on the passage in the Zohar mentioned earlier. The Zohar asks, why does Hashem so often remind Bnei Yisrael that "Ani Hashem Elokeichem asher hotzeiti etchem me-eretz Mitzrayim" (or similar)? After all, by taking them out of Egypt, Hashem simply fulfilled the promise He had made to Avraham; why does this act merit such emphasis? The Zohar answers that these proclamations stress the fact that Hashem went beyond His promise to Avraham. He had promised Avraham only to redeem his offspring from bondage, not to raise them from the quagmire of the forty-nine 'gates of impurity'. Why must Hashem emphasize this point? Is He trying to 'brag'?

In light of our discussion, the answer becomes clear. Hashem constantly reminds Bnei Yisrael of the commandment He issued to them when they were in Egypt, 'Ani Hashem' - the commandment that they failed to heed. It is as though He reminds them, "You did not internalize this message in Egypt, so I must reiterate it to you again and again!"

We list here three alternative explanations that appear in the Midrashim and mefarshim as to the meaning of 'Ani Hashem' in this context:

The Midrash Hagadol and Mechilta De-Rashbi understand 'Ani Hashem' as a disclaimer of sorts. Hashem here declares that although He knows the future, and thus foresees Bnei Yisrael's future abandonment of Hashem, He will nevertheless redeem them.

Several mefarshim interpret the phrase as a source of encouragement for Bnei Yisrael, underscoring Hashem's unlimited power that enables Him to redeem them. This approach appears in various forms in the commentaries of Rashi, Seforno and Abarbanel. The Ibn Ezra posits a slight variation of

this approach, that 'Ani Hashem' emphasizes the nature of the Almighty's promise; as He is God, Bnei Yisrael may confidently trust that He will fulfill His guarantee of redemption.

The Malbim explains that Hashem here informs Bnei Yisrael that He will redeem them with the divine attribute of 'Shem Havaya', entirely outside the bounds of the natural order. Amos Chacham, in Da'at Mikra, takes a similar approach, as does Rav Chayim Yaakov Goldvicht (*Asufat Ma'archot - Haggada Shel Pesach*, p.113).

"Va-yetzavem El Bnei Yisrael..." (6:13)

The glaring problem in this pasuk, as noted by many commentaries, is the absence of any content to this 'command' Hashem issued to Moshe and Aharon. We claim that this refers to the spiritual preparation of Bnei Yisrael for redemption. This appears explicitly in two Midrashim - the Mechilta cited earlier, and the Midrash Lekach Tov on our pasuk. This may be the deeper meaning of two other Midrashim as well. One Midrash brought down in the Sefer Ha-mivchar (as quoted in the Torah Shleima on our pasuk) says that Moshe commanded Bnei Yisrael to prepare wood for the construction of the Mishkan. This may symbolize Bnei Yisrael's preparation for hashra'at ha-Shechina - Hashem's residence within the nation. Secondly, the Yerushalmi in Masechet Rosh Hashana 3:5, based on the pasuk in Yirmiyahu 34:13, explains this command as referring to the obligation to free one's slaves. (Apparently, as Rav Menachem Kasher notes in Torah Shleima - milu'im to Parshat Va'era, 3, there were noblemen among Bnei Yisrael who, not only were excused from slave labor, they themselves owned servants.) As the Torah explicitly writes in Vayikra 25:42, the laws concerning the freeing of slaves relate to the notion that Bnei Yisrael are ultimately subservient to Hashem alone. Before realizing their freedom from bondage, Bnei Yisrael must internalize this critical lesson, that they are freed from slavery in order to become the servants of Hashem.

Three other general approaches to this pasuk appear in the mefarshim:

The Sifrei in Parshat Beha'alotcha (91), quoted by Rashi here, understands the command to Moshe and Aharon as urging them to exercise patience when dealing with Bnei Yisrael and speak respectfully when they address Pharaoh. Though Rashi views this explanation as drash, as the pasuk makes no mention of patience and respect, this approach does accommodate the context of this pasuk. Moshe had just expressed his frustration over Bnei Yisrael's refusal to listen and the likely prospect of a similar reaction on Pharaoh's part. Hashem thus urges him and Aharon to retain their composure despite the intransigence of both the people and Pharaoh. This explanation appears in the Zohar Ha-chadash (2:26) as well as in the Rambam's Mishneh Torah (Hilchot Sanhedrin 25:2), and in a slightly different form in the Pesikta De-rav Kahana (14). In a similar vein, the Ibn Ezra quotes a Karaitic exegete, Yeshua, who explains this pasuk as a charge to Moshe and Aharon not to become angry as a result of their growing frustration. Whereas in his peirush ha-katzar the Ibn Ezra mentions this possibility without any further comment, in his peirush ha-aroch he writes that 'there is no need' for this interpretation. (This approach brings to mind an interesting comment by the Ralbag on the immediately preceding pasuk. He claims that the 'kotzer ruach' which led Bnei Yisrael not to listen to Moshe refers to Moshe's - rather than Bnei Yisrael's - frustration. His growing impatience led him to speak irritably, and his words thus met upon deaf ears. If so, it would then stand to reason that Hashem must urge Moshe to exercise more patience.)

The Akeidat Yitzchak interprets 'va-yetzavem' here as referring to the conferral of a given status, rather than the issuance of a command. Citing examples from Tehillim 33:9 and Melachim I 17:4, the Akeidat Yitzchak explains that Hashem granted Moshe and Aharon prominence and respect among both Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh's court, such that their words would be heard. Other mefarshim adopting this approach include the Abarbanel (as his first suggestion), the Or Hachayim (though he adds as well the third approach that we will soon see) and the

Tzror Hamor.

Several mefarshim see this pasuk's mention of Aharon as the key to its meaning. Moshe had just expressed his discouragement, compounded by his poor verbal skills (see 6:12), and so Hashem calls upon Aharon and commands both brothers to return to Bnei Yisrael and to speak to Pharaoh. This was Hashem's answer to Moshe's complaint - that he take Aharon with him and address the nation (for a second time) and then the king. The Ibn Ezra (peirush ha-aroach), Chizkuni, Rabenu Yosef Bechor Shor and Abarbanel (as his second approach) explain along these lines. The Jerusalem Publication Society Bible also seemed to have this approach in mind when it translated this pasuk.

Inviting Eliyah Hanavi to the Seder

We suggest in the shiur that Eliyahu's 'participation' in our seder reminds us that before the final redemption we must perform teshuva, and for this reason Eliyahu will come before the unfolding of the redemption. Just as Hashem called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent before leaving Egypt, so must we correct our ways in anticipation of the final redemption.

The Rema - Orach Chayim 480 - mentions the custom of opening the door at the seder and cites the explanation of the Mahari Brona that this demonstrates our belief in Pesach night as a 'leil shimurim' - a night of watching, when Hashem grants us special protection. The Maharal, in his Haggada "Divrei Negidim" rejects this explanation and claims that we open the door to publicize our belief in the coming of Eliyahu Hanavi prior to the final redemption. (See also Aruch Hashulchan.) He does not, however, relate this to the concept of teshuva, as we suggest in the shiur.

Though our explanation does not appear explicitly in earlier sources, it may relate to the approach taken by the Netziv to explain the fifth cup poured at the seder. As we know, the four cups drunk at the seder correspond to the four expressions describing Yetzi'at Mitzrayim in the beginning of Parshat Vaeyra ('ve-hotzeiti', 've-hitzalti', 've-ga'alti', 've-lakachti'). The Netziv, in his "Ha-amek Davar" commentary to 6:7, suggests that the fifth cup - which we pour but do not drink - commemorates the promise, "and you shall know that I am Hashem your God who takes you out from Egypt". According to the Netziv, this promise speaks of a level of comprehension unattainable by the masses; it refers to the unique knowledge and insight acquired by the nation's spiritual elite. Therefore, given the exclusive nature of this 'knowledge', we do not drink this fifth cup.

In contemporary times, Rabbi Eliezer Ginsburg, in his "Shirat Yehuda" commentary on the Haggada, associates the Netziv's explanation with the common reference to this fifth cup as 'kos shel Eliyahu' (see, for example, Mishna Berura 480:10). Eliyahu will come before the final redemption to teach, guide and inspire, such that we may all attain this lofty level of "you shall know that I am Hashem your God", and we thus appropriately name this fifth cup after Eliyahu Hanavi. This closely relates to our suggestion, that the inclusion of Eliyahu at the seder reminds us of the spiritual growth required before the final redemption.