



דעת THE SECRET OF

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ATARA KEEHN (23')

CHANA SCHANDELSON (22')

BRIANNA SHAMAH (23')

AIDEN FRANK (23')

The second pasuk of this week's parsha (Shmot 6:3) states: "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov with [the name], שְׁקִי, but [with] My name 'ה', I did not become known to them (לא נודעתי להם)." (The text in the original image is partially obscured by the list of names on the left.)

The concept of *da'at* (דעת), knowledge, also comes up throughout this parsha, including in a cryptic way with the plague of the frogs. The nature of the word frog (צִפְרִידָּה) is perplexing in itself. Most Hebrew words have a two or three letter root...what then is the shorash of the word צִפְרִידָּה?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 67b) recalls an argument between Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya and Rabbi Akiva regarding how the frog multiplied. In the pesukim leading up to and following Shmot 8:2, the term frog is written in plural, but the actual action of Aharon bringing up the frogs is in the singular. One solution to this discrepan-

cy is the well-known midrash that there was originally just one frog, but as the Egyptians struck it, it produced swarms of frogs that filled the land. Analyzing the Hebrew word for frog more closely, one can see that it's actually a compound word: צִפְר דַּע -- a bird of knowledge. The hitting of the frog, thereby spawning many frogs, alludes to the nature of knowledge: one idea can spread quickly to many people. And a bird has two vantage points (air and ground), just like a frog has two vantage points (water and ground). Similarly, a Jew also has two views of the world -- spiritual and physical.

While divrei Torah on this parsha usually focus on the ten plagues, we will spend the rest of this article examining the attribute of *da'at* (דעת), knowledge. The mishna in Pirkei Avot (3:14) states: "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known (נודעת) to him that he was created in the image...Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of G-d; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they are called children of G-d...Beloved are Israel, for they were given a precious article; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they were given a pre-

cious article.” A major theme expressed here is the preciousness of knowledge -- a concept Chazal felt was so important that it comprises the main subject of the first bracha of the weekday amidah (ברוך...חונן הדעת).

Applying this to the current health situation, one can view the pandemic through the lens of *da'at*, thereby drawing a conclusion that the fundamental problem facing us today is *not knowing* who is currently infected with COVID. For if it were apparent to all as easily as identifying any other visual feature, the virus would be mostly gone after one short round of quarantine. In Kabbalah, *da'at* is the third of the ten supernal *sefirot*; the upper aspect of *da'at* unites *chachmah* (wisdom, a seminal idea) with *binah* (understanding, expounding that idea into its particulars), while the lower aspect of *da'at* facilitates the absorption of intellect into the lower seven *sefirot*, often referred to as the emotive middot (*chesed, gevurah, tiferet, netzach, hod, yesod, and malchut*). When explaining these concepts, the Alter Rebbe (Tanya ch. 3) utilizes the reference that Adam knew (יָדַע) Chava (Bereshit 4:1), thereby equating *da'at* with attachment and union.

Later in his seminal work on Chassidut (Tanya ch. 48), the Alter Rebbe includes an amazing concept: “G-d’s thoughts and knowledge, which know all created beings encompass each and every created thing... for example, His knowledge encompasses the entire Earth, together with all that is in it, for *this knowledge constitutes the vitality of the whole of the Earth and its creation ex nihilo*.” To summarize, **the whole earth was originally created and continues to be created ex nihilo as a result of G-d’s knowledge of it.**

This message is echoed by the Rambam in the very beginning of his magnum opus (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Yesodei Hatorah 1:10): “The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know (לִידַע) that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being.” This passage, along with the above quote from the Alter Rebbe, helps to bring a new layer of understanding regarding what the Rambam writes in the next perek (ibid. 2:10): “The Holy One, blessed be He, recognizes His truth and knows it as it is. He does not know with a knowledge which is external to Him in the way that we know, for ourselves and our knowledge are not one. Rather, the Creator, may He be blessed, He, His knowledge, and His life are one from all sides and corners, in all manners of unity.” During the past few decades an idea in physics termed

“it from bit” has been picking up steam, where the fundamental component of reality is not energy ($E=mc^2$), nor quantum fields, but rather information. This concept stems from quantum mechanics where **a conscious being, through the act of observing the collapse of a wave function (i.e., knowing which quantum state an object now encapsulates), brings about the existence of that object.** Professor John Wheeler, the PhD advisor of the famous (Jewish) Nobel laureate Richard Feynman, extends this concept even further via a delayed choice quantum eraser, in so much as an observer has the power to bring an object into being with an entire history that becomes retroactively created at the time of observation! Since there is not enough space to continue to elucidate these matters in this article, my hope is for the reader to explore further on his/her own and perpetuate to others the knowledge s/he comprehended in this writing. Through this may we merit to speedily bring the Messianic era into fruition, where after reflecting on the opening pasuk stated at the beginning of this writing, we can hopefully appreciate even more the impending future when “the land shall be full of knowledge (דַּעַה) of Hashem as water covers the sea bed” (Yeshayahu 11:9).

GROWING PAINS

ATARA KEEHN (23')

Picture a person lying in his hospital bed after just having had a heart attack. He’s recovering and he’s in a lot of pain. He commits to eating healthier, working out more, and taking some time off of work, but when the pain wears off he goes back to all of his old habits. In this week’s parsha, Hashem tells Moshe that he will free the Jewish people from Mitzrayim. When Moshe goes to ask Pharaoh for the freedom of the Jewish people, Pharaoh refuses. It is only after Pharaoh and the Egyptians feel the pain of the 10 plagues that Pharaoh agrees to let Bnei Yisrael go. However, when Hashem stops the plagues and the pain is over, Pharaoh hardens his heart and does not listen to them.

Clearly, in the moment of pain, it is so easy to commit to a certain behavior. It is easy to say you will throw away all your old habits. But when the pain goes away, do you still have that same motivation? That pain strengthens your motivation to change. When the pain wears off so does the motivation.

Inspiration works the same. Every day we are learning and working on ourselves to become the best people we can be. It is our job to take the pain and take the inspiration we have that enhances our motivation and

strengthen that motivation to the point where we do not need to rely on the pain to get us somewhere. The biggest lessons we can learn from are our mistakes. Don't let the failing moment pass. When we make mistakes, it's important to keep that moment in our minds so that the next time a situation like that happens, you can remember the aftermath of that event. Remember that moment and the pain you felt from that mistake so you'll never have to make it again.

TRUST ME

CHANA SCHANDELSON (22')

Last week's parsha, Parshat Shmot, ends on a dramatic note in the middle of a conversation between Hashem and Moshe. Moshe has come to Hashem to ask why Bnei Yisroel are still suffering so much and have yet to be saved. The conversation continues in this week's parsha, Parshat Va'eira. Hashem responds to Moshe's comments by saying:

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ה' וְאַרְאֶה אֶל אֲבִרְהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב בְּקֹל שֵׁ קוֹי וְשָׁמִי ה' לֹא נֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם:

"God spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as Kel Sha-kai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name Hashem'" (Shmot 6:2-3).

In these pesukim, Hashem points out the use of His different names through references to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. What are Hashem's different names, what do they mean and what can we derive from Hashem's message to Moshe?

The Ramban explains that Hashem's name "קל שקי" is a reference to Hashem not disrupting the laws of nature. In all the times Hashem revealed Himself to our Avot, it was always in a subtle manner (yet the Avot still recognized Hashem's greatness). Rashi holds that the name "קל שקי" represents God making promises, whereas the name "ה'" is used when Hashem wants to show His trustworthiness for carrying out His promises. Although the Avot technically knew the name "ה'", they did not get to see what it represents, which is Hashem fulfilling His promises. Instead, the Avot only get to see Hashem make those promises to them. In this week's parsha, when Hashem uses his name 'ה', He is telling Moshe that this generation will finally see the fulfillment of the promise of giving Bnei Yisrael the land of Israel.

Hashem always fulfills His promises, but it often takes time. Although Moshe was given the role to lead Klal Yisrael out of Mitzrayim, he didn't realize that it was going to be a process that would take time and thus he

cried out to Hashem in frustration. This is unlike the Avot who showed full faith in what Hashem told them, including the future promise of Eretz Yisroel. What is the lesson from all of this? Hakadosh Baruch Hu is telling Moshe everything will work out and he has to trust that. We can often find ourselves wanting to be in control, yet we have to remember that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the one who runs the show behind the scenes. Like Rabbi Akiva said, "*Kol d'avid Rachmana l'tav avid*," everything Hashem does, He does for the good" (Brachot 60b). Whether Hashem is helping us through a more natural way like He did for the Avot, or in a more direct and bold way like He did for Moshe, Hashem will always have our backs and do what is best for us. I think this is especially true today amidst a global pandemic and in *galut*. There is so much suffering in the world but we have to stay strong and trust that Hashem has a plan to save us from our pain. May we all have the *zechut* to continue to strengthen our relationships with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Shabbat Shalom!

HUMAN HEROES

BRIANNA SHAMAH (23')

At the beginning of Parshat Va'eira, a thorough family tree of Shevet Levi is listed right before the start of all the makkot. The tree goes from Levi all the way down to Moshe and Aharon's generation. After the family tree it states

הוא אהרן ומֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה' לָהֶם הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל צְבָאֲתָם: הֵם הַמְּדַבְּרִים אֶל פֶּרְעֵה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם הוּא: "This was the Aharon and Moshe to whom Hashem said: Take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their legions. They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh the king of Egypt to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt, it was Moshe and Aharon" (Shmot 26:6-7).

These two pesukim specify three times that it was Moshe and Aharon from this family tree who took the Jews out of Egypt, but why? What is the reason for providing us with this family tree now and how can that help us figure out why there is such emphasis on these two men?

One way to explain the purpose of the family tree is to remind us that Aharon and Moshe were just humans like us. They had grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins...a big family! From this explanation we can begin to see that the emphasis on Moshe and Aharon is to show us once again that they are human. They are going to do crazy miracles soon and the family tree

and pesukim serve as a reminder that just because they seem so holy, they are not gods! They are regular, imperfect human beings. In this week's parsha, we see Moshe and Aharon, the Ne'viim of Hashem, begin to implement miraculous makkot upon Mitzrayim. All the miracles that Moshe and Aharon do might make us forget that they, just like us, were human beings. We learn later on in the Torah that Moshe and Aharon were not perfect. They do mess up, but they were also able to reach an unsurpassed and tremendous level of holiness. What I find so great about this is that Hashem is trying to convey the message that He intentionally created us imperfect; we don't have to be perfect, it's impossible. And sometimes people like Moshe and Aharon will make us forget that humans are not perfect. They are there to teach us that even we, as normal people, can reach a level like them if we try!

MASTERPLAN

AIDEN FRANK (23')

Parshat Va'eira starts off with Hashem speaking to Moshe. The pasuk says:

וּלְקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וַיְדַעְתֶּם
כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת
מִצְרַיִם: וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת
יְדֵי לָתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ
לָכֶם מִוְרָשָׁה אֲנִי ה'

“And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God. And you shall know that I, the LORD, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and I will give it to you for a possession, I am Hashem” (Shmot 6:7-8).

Then the pesukim go on to say that when Moshe told this to Bnei Yisrael, they did not listen because their spirits were crushed by cruel bondage. I believe that this response from Bnei Yisrael is meant to teach us a lesson.

Often, there are times where we think that no one can help us or that we are alone. Sometimes people do offer us help and we do not accept. It is important to remember that Hashem is different from people. Hashem will always be there for us through any trial or tribulation and we often ignore the help He tries to offer us because we think our plan is the best plan. If we would just open our eyes and see the help He is trying to offer, even if it is in a way we did not at first expect, our *emunah* and relationship with Hashem would be much greater and stronger.

Bnei Yisrael had every right to question what Moshe was saying. They were tired and burnt out. If they had only opened their eyes and trusted that Hashem had their backs, all of their doubt would have vanished. Let's all try to trust Hashem's process over our own. Good Shabbos.

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