

Parashat Shemot 5783, 2023:

“Now You Will See”

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon HaKohane, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Gittel Malka bat Moshe, Alexander Leib ben Benyamin Yosef, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The final three *pasukim* of Parashat Shemot are difficult to understand, as they seem to portray a disheartened Moshe Rabbeinu complaining to Hashem:

So, Moshe returned to Hashem and said, “O L-rd! *Lamah haraota l'am hazeh*—Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your people.” And Hashem said to Moshe, “*A'tah teireh*—Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for with a mighty hand he will send them out, and with a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.” (*Sefer Shemot* 5:22-23, 6:1, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, with my emendations)

In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105), following *Midrash Tanchuma*, Parashat Va'era 6, states that Moshe was, indeed, protesting Hashem's apparent harm to His people: *Lamah haraota l'am hazeh?* “And if You [Hashem] ask, ‘What is it to you?’ [I answer,] ‘I am complaining that You have sent me.’” He follows this approach, as well, in his gloss on “*a'tah teireh*,” wherein the Almighty takes Moshe to task for rejecting the manner in which He runs the world:

You have questioned My ways [which is] unlike Avraham, to whom I said, “For in Yitzchak will be called your seed” (*Sefer Bereishit*. 21:12), and afterwards I said to him, “Bring him up there for a burnt offering” (*Sefer Bereishit* 22:2), yet he did not question Me. Therefore, *a'tah teireh*—now you will see. What is done to Pharaoh you will see, but not what is done to the kings of the seven nations when I bring them [the children of Israel] into the land [of Israel]. (Based on *Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin* 111a and *Midrash Shemot Rabbah* 5:23)

In sum, according to Rashi, although Moshe will bear witness to the *Makkot* and *Yetziat Mitzraim* (the Exodus) his question, *lamah haraota l'am hazeh*, permanently barred his entrance to *Eretz Yisrael*.

A completely different interpretation is presented by Rabbeinu Chananel ben Chushiel (980-1055), a great 11th century North African Torah commentator:

For the expression, “*lamah haraota l'am hazeh*,” is not an expression of complaint and insolence, but, rather, a question that was asked before the Holy One blessed be He: “Why does the *middah* (action-based characteristic) of *tzaddik v'rah lo, v'rasha v'tov lo*—the righteous one to whom evil transpires and the evil one who receives that which is good— [exist in the world?] For Moshe saw the Jewish people in the midst of great and powerful servitude coupled with unending misery, while the evil Egyptians, who rejected Hashem’s very existence, he saw in the midst of great success and tranquility... (Cited in Rabbeinu Bahya ben Asher ibn Halawa’s *Commentary on the Torah*, this, and the following translations my own)

For Rabbeinu Chananel, *lamah haraota l'am hazeh* is not an impudent declaration, but rather a question regarding the existence of *tzaddik v'rah lo, v'rasha v'tov lo* in the world. He extends his line of reasoning by underscoring Moshe’s concern that Hashem had allowed Pharaoh’s evil to stand against the Jewish people:

Therefore, when Moshe saw from the day he came to Pharaoh as Hashem’s representative, Pharaoh made his yoke heavier upon them (the Jewish people) ... he asked Hashem, may He be blessed, “Why have You allowed this evil to befall this people, is it not within Your power to save them? Yet You have not saved them!” ... So, too, with [the question,] *lamah haraota*, which we can now understand as meaning, why have You allowed this evil to stand? For I [Moshe] am afraid lest he [Pharaoh] will increase his evil [upon Your people].

At this juncture, Rabbeinu Chananel provides a novel elucidation of *a'tah teireh* that differs markedly from Rashi’s presentation:

And this is what *a'tah teireh* connotes, namely, the success and tranquility that Pharaoh [and his nation enjoy] only serves to double the punishment on their punishment, this is why the text states, “what I will do to Pharaoh,” that is, I [Hashem] have already prepared the *Makkot* for him. Moreover, this is precisely the reason that I [Hashem] have allowed the servitude to become more noisome since the day I sent you, in order to redouble their punishment, and to increase and amplify the Jewish people’s reward when they stand firm and bear these trials and tribulations in love [and devotion to Me].

In Rabbeinu Chananel's view, Hashem is explaining to Moshe that the ultimate purpose of His actions will be understood the moment He strikes the Egyptians with the 10 *Makkot*, for then, their punishment will be doubled according to the ever-increasing burdens they placed upon our people. Moreover, our forebears' reward will expand, in kind, for having borne these trials in love and devotion to the Almighty.

May Hashem continue to guard us from all evil. As *Dovid HaMelech* proclaimed so long ago:

Behold the Guardian of Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. Hashem is your Guardian; Hashem is your shadow; [He is] by your right hand. By day, the sun will not smite you, nor will the moon at night. Hashem will guard you from all evil; He will guard your soul. Hashem will guard your going out and your coming in from now and to eternity. (*Sefer Tehillim* 121:5-8)

V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

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