

## פרשת שמות

Early on in the event of the סנה, the 'burning bush', we read excerpts (Sh'mos Perek 3/P'sukim 11-12; 16; Perek 4/P'sukim 1-9) of the dialogue that ensued between Moshe Rabbenu and HaKodosh Boruch Hu:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים... לֵקִים מִי אֲנֹכִי כִי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל פְּרַעֲהַ וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה לָּךְ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים... לֵקִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה:

Moshe said to G-d, 'Who am I that I should go to Par'o and I should take B'nei Yisroel out of Egypt?' Hashem said, 'Because I will be with you and this is the sign that I sent you: when you will take the people out of Egypt you shall serve G-d on this mountain.'

Moshe is given a sign. What is the power of that sign and what is it expected to accomplish?

The dialogue continues:

לָךְ וְאֶסְפֹּת אֶת זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אָבֹתֵינוּ נִרְאָה אֵלַי אֶל... לֵקִי אֲבָרְהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר פְּקֹד פְּקֹדֹתַי אֲתֹכֶם וְאֶת הָעֲשׂוֹי לָכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם:

וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַהֲנִי לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקִלִּי כִי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה': וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו ה' מִה זֶה בְּיָדְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה: וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלִיכֵהוּ אַרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלַכְהוּ אַרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנַחֲשׁ וַיִּנָּס מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵיו: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה שְׁלַח יָדְךָ וְאַחַז בְּזַנְבוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיִּחַזַּק בּוֹ וַיְהִי לְמִטָּה בְּכַפּוֹ: לְמַעַן יֶאֱמִינוּ כִּי נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אָבֹתֵנוּ אֶל... לֵקִי אֲבָרְהָם אֶל... לֵקִי יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לוֹ עוֹד הֵבֵא נָא יָדְךָ בְּחִיקָךָ וַיֵּבֵא יָדוֹ בְּחִיקוֹ וַיּוֹצֵא וַהֲנִי יָדוֹ מִצְרַעַת כְּשִׁלְגָה: וַיֹּאמֶר הַשֵּׁב יָדְךָ אֶל חִיקָךָ וַיִּשֵׁב יָדוֹ אֶל חִיקוֹ וַיּוֹצֵא מִחִיקוֹ וַהֲנִי שָׁבָה כְּבָשָׂרוֹ: וַהֲנִי אִם לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ לָךְ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקִל הָאֵת הָרִאשׁוֹן וְהֶאֱמִינוּ לְקִל הָאֵת הָאַחֲרוֹן: וַהֲנִי אִם לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ גַם לְשֵׁנֵי הָאֵתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקִלְךָ וְלִקְחַת מִמִּימֵי הַיָּאֵר וְשִׁפְכֵת הַיְבֻשָּׁה וְהָיוּ הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר תִּקַּח מִן הַיָּאֵר וְהָיוּ לְדָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא:

[Hashem said to Moshe] 'Go and gather the elders of Israel and you shall say to them, Hashem the G-d of your fathers appeared to me, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov saying, 'I have surely remembered you and that which was done to you in Egypt.'

Moshe answered and he said, 'They will not believe me and they will not listen to my voice because they will say, "G-d did not appear to you".'

Hashem said, 'What is that in your hand?' Moshe said, 'A staff'. Hashem said, 'Cast it to the ground' and he cast it to the ground and it became a snake and Moshe fled from it. Hashem said to Moshe, 'Send out your hand and grasp it by its tail' and he sent out his hand and he grasped it and it became a staff in his hand. [Hashem said] 'In order that they will believe that Hashem appeared to you, the G-d of their fathers; the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov.' Hashem said more to him, 'Bring your hand into your chest' and he brought his hand into his chest and he took it out and behold his hand was leprous like snow. Hashem said, 'Return your hand into your chest' and he returned his hand into his chest and he took it out from his chest and behold it returned to his flesh. [Hashem said], 'It will be if they will not believe you and they will not listen to the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the last sign. And it will be that if they will not believe also to these two signs and they will not listen to your voice then you will take from the waters of the Nile and pour upon the dry land and the water that you will take from the Nile will be blood on the dry land.'

Israel are given signs. What is the power of those signs and what are they to accomplish? Doesn't it seem strange that the Ribbono Shel Olom, whose mastery over the world will be demonstrated by the Ten Plagues and the Exodus, will give a sign that may not be convincing and thus He has to back up the first sign with a second sign. Isn't it even stranger that the Ribbono Shel Olom gives two signs and they may prove to be insufficient and thus He has to give a third sign?

Furthermore, the sign that HaKodosh Boruch Hu gives Moshe Rabbenu:

וְזֶה לָּךְ הָאוֹת כִּי אֶנֶּכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים... לְקִיּוֹם  
עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה:

And this is the sign that I sent you; when you will take the people out of Egypt you shall serve G-d on this mountain'

would seem to be particularly ineffective. If the purpose of the sign is to show the people that Moshe Rabbenu is a true messenger of Hashem, then a promise of what will come later, much later, would seem to be able to have little impact at the most. Such a promise could be inspiring if only they already had confidence in

Moshe Rabbenu<sup>1</sup> – and if they already had confidence, why would any sign be necessary.<sup>2</sup>

*Or HaChaim HaKodosh* has already pointed out the uncertainties that exist in the events that occurred at the *s'neh*. As he writes (Perek 3/Posuk 12):

אין ידוע האות

The identity of the sign is unknown.

And, thus, a plethora of commentators deal with the various signs that are noted in these P'sukim. A review of some of the comments will present us with an opportunity to suggest a consistent overview for our understanding.

Rashi (ibid.) tells us that the promise given to Moshe Rabbenu that B'nei Yisroel will eventually serve Hashem at Sinai was not the sign that the verse discusses.

On the contrary, the word *וזו*-*this* would be very difficult to explain as referring to *Mattan Torah*. Throughout *Chumash*, Rashi emphasizes Chazal's teaching (Masseches Shabbos 63 b) that

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<sup>1</sup> Rambam writes in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (Perek 7/Halachah 7):

הנביא...כשמשלחים אותו נותנין לו אות ומופת כדי שידעו העם שהא...ל שלחו באמת, ולא כל העושה אות ומופת מאמינים לו שהוא נביא, אלא אדם שהיינו יודעים בו מתחלתו שהוא ראוי לנבואה בחכמתו ובמעשיו שנתעלה בהן על כל בני גילו והיה מהלך בדרכי הנבואה בקדושתה ובפרישותה ואחר כן בא ועשה אות ומופת ואמר שהא...ל שלחו מצוה לשמוע ממנו שנאמר (דברים יח/טו) אליו תשמעון...

The prophet – when they send him, they give him a sign or a wonder [to perform] so that the people will know that G-d truly sent him.

Not everyone who performs a sign or a wonder is to be believed that he is a prophet. Only a person who we know that from the very beginning that he was fit to be a prophet because of his wisdom and because of his deeds that make him superior over all of his peers and he behaved like a prophet with sanctity and asceticism and then he came and performed a sign or a wonder and he says that G-d sent him – there is a Mitzvah to listen to him as the verse says, 'You shall listen to him'.

<sup>2</sup> If the purported prophet intends to change a *Halachah* in the category of *הוראת שעה*, a temporary instruction, then the imprimatur is required. If it is an issue of faith and belief – and that was what Moshe Rabbenu brought Israel, then they could believe him by his word.

## אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוטו

The verse does not deviate from its *p'shat*.

The word *זה*-*this*, therefore, needs to have a specific antecedent to justify the Torah's use of *זה*. *זה* is a direct designation. That is why Rashi says that the *p'shat* of the Torah's first Mitzvah to Israel appears to be a *drash*, not the *p'shat*.

The Torah writes in Parshas Bo (Sh'mos Perek 12/Posuk 2):

הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֹאשׁ חֳדָשִׁים רִאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:

This new moon will be for you the head of the months; it is the first of the months of the year for you.

What is the *זה* in the verse? Rashi writes:

הזה - נתקשה משה על מולד הלבנה באיזו שיעור תראה ותהיה ראויה לקדש, והראה לו באצבע את הלבנה ברקיע,

*Ha'zeh* – Moshe had difficulty in understanding the designation of the new moon's appearance – he did not understand what had to be seen in order to determine that the moon was appropriate to be sanctified. Hashem pointed to the moon in the sky.

In Parshas Ki Siso we learn of the Mitzvah of the annual giving *machatzis ha'shekel*. The Torah writes there (ibid. Perek 30/Posuk 13):

זֶה יִתְּנוּ כָּל הָעֶבֶר עַל הַפְּקָדִים מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֶשְׂרִים גֵּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל תִּרְוַמָּה לָהּ:

This they shall give: anyone who has been counted in the census shall give a half-shekel with the weight of the holy shekel; the shekel is equivalent to twenty *gerah*; a half-shekel as a gift to G-d.

Again we see the word *זה* and again we read Rashi:

זה יתנו - הראה לו כמין מטבע של אש, ומשקלה מחצית השקל, ואומר לו כזה יתנו:

*This they shall give* – Hashem showed Moshe a type of fiery coin, the weight of which was one-half shekel. Hashem said to Moshe, 'Like this they shall give.'

In Parshas B'haalosecha (B'midbar Perek 8/Posuk 4) we will read:

וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמְּנֹרֶה מִקְשָׁה זָהָב עַד יְרֵכָה עַד פְּרֻחָהּ מִקְשָׁה הוּא כַּמְרָאָה אֲשֶׁר הִרְאָה  
ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה כִּן עָשָׂה אֶת הַמְּנֹרֶה:

This is the action of making the Menorah: it will be beaten out from one piece of gold from its base to its decorative flowers; beaten out from one piece that Hashem showed Moshe, so he made the Menorah.

Rashi makes his point explicitly:

וְזֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הַמְּנֹרֶה - שֶׁהִרְאָהּ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּאֶצְבַּע לְפִי שֶׁנִּתְקַשָּׁה בָּהּ, לְכַךְ  
נֹאמַר וְזֶה:

*This is the action of making the Menorah – Hashem pointed it out to Moshe because he had difficulty in understanding it; that is why it says v'zeh.*

Therefore, in our Posuk when Hashem says *zeh* referring to the sign that He is giving, the reference cannot be to Mattan Torah. Mattan Torah was an historical event that had not yet occurred. There was nothing at which to point and it had not yet occurred. What, then, is the *os*-sign according to Rashi? He writes:

וְזֶה הַמְּרָאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתָ בַּסֵּנֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנִי שֶׁלַחְתִּיךָ

This vision that you saw in the bush is a sign for you that I Hashem am sending you.

The word *Zeh* in our Posuk does has a specific focus. The focus is the milieu in which Moshe is found at that moment. The bush is still burning. And the bush remains intact. Moshe, in addition to being in the presence of HaKodosh Boruch Hu and standing upon holy ground<sup>3</sup>, is also visually witnessing the miracle of the bush. That is the *zeh*!

What then is the impact of the announcement that Israel will serve G-d at Sinai? Rashi continues:

וְשֶׁשָׂאֵל מֶה זְכוּת יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁיִּצְאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם, דְּבַר גְּדוֹל יֵשׁ לִי עַל הוֹצָאָה זוֹ, שֶׁהָרִי  
עֲתִידִים לְקַבֵּל הַתּוֹרָה עַל הָהָר הַזֶּה לְסוּף שְׁלוֹשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים שִׁיִּצְאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם.

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<sup>3</sup> We read as part of Hashem's introduction to Moshe (Sh'mos Perek 3/Posuk 5):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל תִּקְרַב הֵלֶם שֶׁל נַעֲלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲתָה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדָמַת קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:  
Hashem said to Moshe, 'Do not draw near here. Remove your shoes from upon your feet because the place that you are standing upon is holy ground.

You, Moshe, asked, what merit does Israel have to be taken out of Egypt? I Hashem have prepared a great matter for this Exodus: they will ultimately receive the Torah on this mountain three months after they leave Egypt.

But there is another point to make as we read Rashi carefully.

זֶה הַמְרָאָה אֲשֶׁר רָאִיתָ בַּסֵּנֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנִי שֹׁלְחֶיךָ

This vision that you saw in the bush is a sign *for you* that I Hashem am sending you.

This dialogue between the Ribbono Shel Olom and Moshe was not to serve as a transcript to be given over to B'nei Yisroel at that time<sup>4</sup>. It was a 'personal' conversation between G-d and Moshe.

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<sup>4</sup> In fact, Moshe himself did not always understand that the dialogue to which he was a partner was for him personally and not to be transmitted unless he was told to do so.

We read at that time (Perek 3/P'sukim 13-14):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים... לְקִים הַיְהוָה אֲנִי בָּא אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֲנִי... לְקִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שֹׁלְחֶנִי  
אֲלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ לִי מַה שְּׁמוֹ מַה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי... לְקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה  
תֹּאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שֹׁלְחֶנִי אֲלֵיכֶם:

Moshe said to G-d, 'Behold I come to B'nei Yisroel and I will say to them, "The G-d of your fathers sent me to you", and they will say to me, "What is His Name?" What shall I say to them?'

G-d said to Moshe, 'I will be Who I will be'; and He said, 'So you should say to B'nei Yisroel, "אהיה-I will be sent me to you."'

Of course, the repetition done by Hashem and the change of what He said from אהיה אשר אהיה to אהיה alone requires explanation. Rashi gives us that explanation:

אהיה אשר אהיה - אהיה עמם בצרה זו אשר אהיה עמם בשעבוד שאר מלכויות. אמר לפניו רבוני של עולם, מה אני מזכיר להם צרה אחרת דיים בצרה זו. אמר לו יפה אמרת, כה תאמר וגו':  
*I will be Who I will be* – 'I Hashem will be with them in this trouble and I will be with them in the troubles of all kingdoms who will rule over Israel.'  
Moshe said before Him, 'Master of the Universe, why should I mention to them other troubles. This trouble is enough by itself?'  
Hashem said, 'You are speaking correctly. This is what you should say, "אהיה – I will be with them for this trouble."'

And, as we go back to the Posuk itself we see that Rashi was only emphasizing that which the verse itself said:

## זֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת

This is a sign for *you*!

The fact that Hashem gave Moshe Rabbenu a personal sign of the Burning Bush and personal information regarding Israel's merits should not come as a surprise as long as we do not forget the context of this episode.

The entire episode of the Burning Bush was the appointment of Moshe as G-d's emissary. And thus, until almost the end, HaKodosh Boruch Hu responded to Moshe's queries and objections<sup>5</sup>.

However, there was an additional hurdle that Moshe erected in order to avoid this appointment. It would not be enough for him to accept this task of taking Israel out of Egypt. It would not even be enough that Hashem was sending him. Moshe

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If we look at the verse, we can distinguish between its two parts. In the first, Hashem was speaking to Moshe; His words were for him alone. Only afterwards did He say, **כֹּה תֹאמַר** –this is what you should say.

We see from here that it was not necessarily clear to Moshe Rabbenu what information was for him alone to know and that which he was expected to impart to Israel.

In fact, this idea seems to be stated clearly in Chazal. We read in Masseches Yoma (4 b):

אמר רבי מנסיא משמיה דרבה רב: מניין לאומר דבר לחבירו שהוא בבל יאמר, עד שיאמר לו לך אמור - שנאמר (ויקרא א/א) וידבר ה' אליו מאהל מועד לאמר.

Rabi Menasia said in the name of Rabba: From where do we know that if one person tells something to another person that that second person is forbidden from saying it to a third-party unless the first person said **לאמר**, 'to say'? It is from the verse, 'Hashem spoke to Moshe from the Ohel Moed to say'.

<sup>5</sup> However, the conclusion of the seven-day event was marked by Hashem's anger towards Moshe Rabbenu. We read (Perek 4/Posuk 14):

וַיִּחַר אַף ה' בְּמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא אֶהְרֵן אַחִיךָ הִלּוּי יְדַעְתִּי כִּי דַבֵּר יְדַבֵּר הוּא וְגַם הִנֵּה הוּא יֵצֵא לִקְרֹאתְךָ וְרָאָךְ וְשִׂמַח בְּלִבּוֹ:

Hashem was angry at Moshe and He said, 'Is it not that Aharon your brother, the Levite – I know that he can speak certainly speech and behold he is also going out to meet you and he will see you and he will be happy in his heart.'

did not doubt that Hashem could overpower Par'o. But he did doubt that Israel would be willing and courageous enough to follow his leadership.

That concern focussed both on the leadership of Israel as well as upon *amecha* – the people at large.

Regarding the leadership, Moshe was told to use a specific formula in addressing them and they would recognize that formula and accept him as their leader.

Those were Hashem's words early on at the *s'neh*. We read them above, and we read additionally in the verse that follows:

לך ואספת את זקני ישראל ואמרת אליהם ה' א...ל"קי אבתיכם נראה אלי א...ל"קי אברהם יצחק ויעקב לאמר פקד פקדתי אתכם ואת העשוי לכם במצרים: ושמעו לקלך ובאת אתה וזקני ישראל אל מלך מצרים ואמרתם אליו ה' א...ל"קי העבריים נקרה עלינו ועתה נלכה נא דרך שלשת ימים במדבר ונזבחה לה' א...ל"קינו:

[Hashem said to Moshe] 'Go and gather the elders of Israel and you shall say to them, Hashem the G-d of your fathers appeared to me, the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov saying, 'I have surely remembered you and that which was done to you in Egypt. They will listen to your voice and you will come, you and the elders of Israel, to the King of Egypt and you will say to him, "Hashem the G-d of the Hebrews appeared to us and now let us go a journey of three days in the wilderness and we will make offerings to Hashem our G-d.'

Rashi writes:

ושמעו לקלך - מאליהם, מכיון שתאמר להם לשון זה ישמעו לקולך, שכבר סימן זה מסור בידם מיעקב ומיוסף שבלשון זה הם נגאלים. יעקב אמר (בראשית נ/כד<sup>6</sup>)

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<sup>6</sup> The verse reads in its entirety:

ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אנכי מת וא...ל"קים פקד פקדתי אתכם והעלה אתכם מן הארץ הזאת אל הארץ אשר נשבע לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב:

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am dying and G-d will surely remember you and He will take you up from this land to the land that He swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov.

See the following note.

וא...ל"קים פקוד יפקוד אתכם, יוסף אמר להם (בראשית נ/כה)<sup>7</sup> פקוד יפקוד א...ל"ים  
אתכם:

*They will listen to your voice* – On their own [without a need for persuasion].  
When you will speak to them with these words they will listen to your voice.  
This sign was already handed over to them from Yaakov and from Yosef that  
this will be the expression used when they are being redeemed.

Yaakov said, 'Hashem will surely remember you.' Yosef said to them,  
'Hashem will surely remember you.'

But what about *amecha* – the people at large. *Amecha* were not privy to the  
*masorah* of the elders. *Amecha* would have a reason to be impatient, as we read  
somewhat further on after Par'o increases the back-breaking labor of Israel (Sh'mos  
Perek 6/Posuk 9):

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<sup>7</sup> The verse reads in its entirety:

וַיִּשְׁבַּע יוֹסֵף אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פֶּקֶד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלֵתֵם אֶת עַצְמוֹתַי מִזֶּה:  
Yosef imposed an oath upon B'nei Yisroel saying, 'G-d will surely remember  
you and you should take up my bones from this place.'

Rashi tells us that both Yaakov and Yosef told the elders of Israel the formula that  
Israel's redeemer would use when the time of the redemption would arrive and he  
Rashi notes two separate P'sukim.

However, as is readily apparent, both of these verses, said back to back, were said by  
Yosef, close to one-half century after the death of Yaakov Ovinu.

Additionally, these two verses, written one after the other, present their own  
difficulty. Seemingly Yosef is saying the same thing twice vis a vis the 'redemption  
formula'. Why was he repetitive?

Among the answers suggested we find that of Rav Chaim Paltiel, from the era of  
Tosfos, who writes:

וא...ל"קים פקד יפקוד אתכם. ואם תאמר תרי זימנא למה לי פקד יפקד, ויש לומר שכך אמר יוסף  
קבלה היא בידי מאבי שהגואל שיעמוד לכם הקדוש ברוך הוא יאמר לכם בלשון פקידה שתי פעמים:  
*G-d will surely remember you* – You can ask, why is word 'remember' repeated  
twice (פקד יפקד)? The answer is that this is what Yosef said, 'I have a *mesorah*  
from my father that the redeemer that Hashem will appoint for you will say  
the formula in this fashion: 'remember' two times.

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִקְצֵר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

Moshe spoke thus to B'nei Yisroel and they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit and because of hard work.

That then takes us to the next stage of the signs that Moshe was instructed to show Israel.

The Torah tells us of three signs: the staff transforming into a snake and the transformation's reversal; Moshe being stricken with leprosy and that plague's reversal and the water turning into blood.

It is clear from the P'sukim that these three signs are being presented incrementally. Let us see how HaKodosh Boruch Hu expressed His presentation of the signs. We read above:

לְמַעַן יֶאֱמִינוּ כִּי נִרְאָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ ה' אֵל לִיקֵי אֲבֹתֵם אֵל לִיקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֵל לִיקֵי יִצְחָק וְאֵל לִיקֵי יַעֲקֹב:

[Hashem said] 'In order that they will believe that Hashem appeared to you, the G-d of their fathers; the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov.'

The words are clear. In and of themselves they do not require clarification. However, their placement in the series of events requires thoughtful consideration.

I would have expected that as a preamble to the three signs that were to be presented to Israel, Hashem would have said this verse immediately before the onset of the signs. That is, Hashem would have said something to Moshe to the effect that 'I Hashem am giving you signs to show Israel so that they will believe in you and accept your leadership'. Following such a declaration, Hashem then would demonstrate the first of the signs.

But, that is not the sequence of events. First, Moshe encounters the staff/snake and is terribly shaken. We read above:

: וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלַכְהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ וַיִּנָּס מֹשֶׁה מִפָּנָיו:

Hashem said, 'Cast it to the ground' and he cast it to the ground and it became a snake and Moshe fled from it.

Only following Moshe's emergency reaction and then the staff's restoration to its original state, only then did Hashem say that that event will serve as sign.

When we learn these verses for the first time? When we read of this frightening apparition that confronted Moshe we didn't know it was to be a sign. Moshe didn't know it was to be sign.

The staff/serpent event threatened Moshe Rabbenu; that is why he fled. A powerful force that was external to him was perceived to be threatening his life.

When the next sign occurred, even when it was perceived already as a sign, the danger was not external to Moshe's body. His body itself transformed in a moment to being leprous and all of the physical threats that leprosy presented<sup>8</sup>.

And, the final sign was not a threat to Moshe alone; it could impact upon all living creatures if water would no longer be accessible.

And this brings us to Rashi's commentaries on the first two 'signs' that, in fact, victimized Moshe.

He writes:

ויהי לנחש - רמז לו שסיפר לשון הרע על ישראל ותפש אומנותו של נחש:

*It became a snake* – Hashem hinted to Moshe that he spoke *lashon ha'ra'* against Israel and did a practice that belonged to the serpent.

מצרעת כשגג - אף באות זה רמז שלשון הרע סיפר באומרו (פסוק א) לא יאמינו לי, לפיכך הלקהו בצרעת, כמו שלקתה מרים על לשון הרע:

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<sup>8</sup> After the Torah is given, leprosy becomes a Halachic matter with laws governing its onset, with the status of *tum'a* that it brings and laws governing its completion, restoring the individual to *tahara*-purity. At the conclusion of his *Hilchos Tzora'as*, Rambam (Perek 16/Posuk 10) discusses the distinction between Halachic leprosy and the medical condition of leprosy.

It could very well be that the leprosy with which Moshe was stricken was medical, not Halachic because Moshe was not required to follow the Mitzvos of purification that the Torah designates.

On the other hand, since Rashi attributes a reason for this leprosy, as we will bring shortly, perhaps it was Halachic leprosy which, prior to Mattan Torah at least, Hashem could purify Moshe without the latter having to follow the Torah's prescriptions in Parshos Tazria and Metzora?

*Leprous like snow* – also with this sign Hashem hinted that Moshe spoke *lashon ha'ra'* when he said 'they will not believe me'. Therefore Hashem smote him with leprosy just like Miriam was smitten with leprosy for *lashon ha'ra'*.

והאמינו לקל האת האחרון - משתאמר להם בשבילכם לקיתי על שספרתי עליכם לשון הרע יאמינו לך שכבר למדו בכך שהמזדווגין להרע להם לוקים בנגעים, כגון פרעה ואבימלך בשביל שרה:

*They will believe the voice of the last sign* – when you will tell them 'it was because of you that I was smitten because I spoke *lashon ha'ra'* about you' they will believe you because they had learned already that those who join to do bad are smitten with plagues – such as Par'o and Avimelech because of Sarah.

ולקחת ממימי היאור - רמז להם שבמכה ראשונה נפרע מאלהותם:

*You shall take from the waters of the Nile* – He hinted to them that for the first plague Hashem will first bring punishment to their gods.

Now Malbim has already explained the influence these signs are to have upon Israel. He writes:

למען יאמינו. שבזה יראו כי יש כח ביד האיש האלהי הוא הקדוש להרים את הנחש והרע שבו אל הא...ל'קות והרוחנית, עד שלא יעכב בידו מלהתדבק בעליונים ולעשות אותות ומופתים במטה הא...ל'קים הזה שהוא בגופו אשר נעשה קדש ורוחני, ועל כן נראה אליך ה', כי משה הכניע את הנחש שבו וגם כחות החומריות שבו נעשו קדש ורוחני ומוכנים אל הנבואה והדבוק הא...ל'קי

*In order that they will believe* – With this they will see that there is power in the hand of a holy person to lift the serpent and its attendant evil to divine spirituality to such an extent that that it cannot help but cleave to the heavens and to perform with it signs and wonders with this 'staff of G-d' in which its body became holy and spiritual. Thus, the people will know that 'G-d appeared to you', to Moshe. Moshe subjugated the serpent that was within the staff and all the physical strengths that were within it and they became holy and spiritual, prepared for prophecy and to cleave to G-dliness.

That is, explains Malbim, the staff which will be so intertwined with the events of the Exodus and throughout the years in the *midbar* will serve as a perpetual symbol

of G-d's reign and majesty. It will not be forgotten, Malbim says, that this staff contains a serpent which was the very symbol of evil.

And yet, Moshe is being reprimanded by the first two signs. It is likely that he demonstrated the first sign, the staff and serpent, before Israel. The second sign, that of leprosy, he did not demonstrate but his telling of his experience to Israel was to have been forcefully impressive.

HaKodosh Boruch Hu is setting guidelines for the individual whom He has selected to be his representative before Par'o. That individual must be so dedicated to his cause that he will ignore that which he may think will undermine his mission.

If one goes on a mission that was a personal undertaking or because one is representing someone else, misgivings, if those misgivings are factual and objective they may very well be in place. That could be a realistic approach.

However, when HaKodosh Boruch is sending that individual, He has informed that individual of what the objective reality is in fact. People can err; G-d does not. The *lashon ha'ra'* that Moshe spoke indicated that he was attending to his perception of reality and not voiding his perception in the face of the prophecy he received.

The third sign, which was directed towards the Egyptians, really carried the same message.

Moshe, in the Name of HaKodosh Boruch Hu, was going to present objective reality to Par'o and to the Egyptian people. Ignoring that objective reality, rejecting it in face of their idolatries and sorceries, would be doing so at their own peril. And the reality of their peril was presented to Par'o and to his people with utmost clarity.

Thus, these latter signs, at least, served multiple purposes.

First they were to assuage the concerns of Moshe Rabbenu regarding Israel's willingness to listen to him and to adhere to his words. That is how Ibn Ezra understands the successive signs and the seeming uncertainty of 'if they will not listen'. It wasn't Hashem's uncertainty of course; it was that of Moshe.

And Malbim (Perek 4/Posuk 9) points out that, in fact, the 'ifs' and uncertainty proved to be true. He writes:

ואם לא יאמינו. רוצה לומר שהגם שתחלה האמינו על ידי שני האותות לבד ועל זה אומר (ד/ל-לא<sup>9</sup>) ויעש האותות לעיני העם ויאמן העם, מכל מקום אחר שבא אל פרעה ופרעה הכביד עליהם העבודה חזרו ולא האמינו כמו שכתוב ולא שמעו אל משה מקוצר רוח, ואז ולקחת ממימי היאר, בזה הראה להם המכה הראשונה שיביא על מצרים שיהפכו המים לדם שאז התחילו להאמין שנית,

*If they will not believe* – Hashem is saying that even though at the beginning B'nei Yisroel believed based on the first two signs alone, and that is the meaning of the Posuk, 'Moshe performed the signs before the eyes of the people and the people believed'. Nevertheless, after Moshe came to Par'o and Par'o increase the burden of Israel's labor, their belief ceased and they no longer believed, as the verse says, 'they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of spirit'.

At that point, Moshe took the waters of the Nile and demonstrated to Israel the first plague against Egypt that G-d would bring against Egypt – that the waters would turn into blood – and then they began to believe a second time.

But the signs were a message to Moshe as well. They were not punishments per se. Rather, as Rashi wrote, they were hints to Moshe Rabbenu that his leadership of Israel, his dedication to the mission to which Hashem was appointing him could not have any weakness whatsoever; Moshe could not waver.

And there was the purpose of initial preparation of Israel for their encounter with HaKodosh Boruch Hu.

That encounter required preparation. If they were attracted to Egyptian paganism, if they were pulled towards sense that the gods were all powerful, towards a sense that Par'o himself was a deity, then they had to internalize the fact that all powers that they recognized and were fearful of, all of them were naught in the presence of G-d Who is the Ribbono Shel Olom – the true Master of the World.

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<sup>9</sup> The verses read in their entirety:

וַיְדַבֵּר אֲהֲרֹן אֶת כָּל הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעַשׂ הָאֹתוֹת לְעֵינֵי הָעָם: וַיֵּאֱמֵן הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי  
פָקַד ה' אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת עֲנָיִם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:

Aharon spoke all of the words that Hashem spoke to Moshe and he did the signs before the eyes of the people. The people believed and they heard that Hashem remembered B'nei Yisroel and that He saw their affliction; they kneeled and they prostrated themselves.

And when we again learn the *Sefer HaGeula* – the Book of Redemption, as Ramban refers to Sefer Sh'mos, what message are we to take away for ourselves. What understanding should we seek to internalize?

Let us consider one of the possibilities.

Moshe Rabbenu beheld a wonder. We will read this week (Sh'mos Perek 3/P'sukun 2-3):

וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ ה' אֵלָיו בְּלֶבֶת אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּינָה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּינָה בֹעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּינָה אֵינָנו  
אֹכֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הַמִּרְאָה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא יִבְעַר הַסִּינָה:

The angel of G-d appeared to Moshe in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush and Moshe saw and behold the bush was burning with fire and the bush wasn't consumed. Moshe said, 'I will turn quickly and see this great vision – why isn't the bush burning up?

The bush, small and seemingly insignificant, is symbolic of Israel. the Torah writes (D'vorim Perek 7/Posuk 7):

לֹא מֵרַבְּכֶם מִכָּל הָעַמִּים חֶשֶׁק ה' בְּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם כִּי אִתְּם הִמְעַט מִכָּל הָעַמִּים:

It is not because you are more than all of the other nations that Hashem desires you and that He chose you; It is because you are the least of all of the other nations.

Rashi writes:

לא מרבים - לפי שאין אתם מגדילים עצמכם כשאני משפיע לכם טובה לפיכך חשקתי  
בכם:

*It is not because you are more* – Because you do not aggrandize yourselves when I Hashem shower goodness upon you; therefore I desire you.

כי אתם המעט - הממעטין עצמכם, כגון אברהם, שאמר (בראשית יח/כז<sup>10</sup>) ואנכי  
עפר ואפר, וכגון משה ואהרן שאמרו (שמות טז/ח<sup>11</sup>) ונחנו מה, לא כנבוכדנצר שאמר

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<sup>10</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיַּעַן אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֵל אֲדֹנָי וְאֶנְכִי עֹפָר וָאֵפֶר:  
Avraham answered and he said, 'Behold, please, I have begun to speak to G-d and I am dust and ashes.

<sup>11</sup> The entire verse reads:

(ישעיה יד/יד<sup>12</sup>) אדמה לעליון, וסנחריב שאמר (שם לו/כ<sup>13</sup>) מי בכל אלהי הארצות,  
וחירם שאמר (יחזקאל כח/ב<sup>14</sup>) אל אני מושב אלהים ישבתי:

*Because you are the least – You make yourselves small. Like Avraham who said, “I am dust and ashes.’ And for example Moshe and Aharon who said, ‘What are we?’. But not like Nevuchadnetzar who said, ‘I am like the supreme being’ and not like Sancherev who said, ‘Who is like me among all the gods of the lands?’ and not like Chiram who said, ‘I am god; I sat in the sitting place of god.’*

Fires and conflagrations are in an indelible part of our history from time immemorial. And yet, we have not been consumed?

Why not? Because Hashem has put His angels among us so that we have, as a people, a nature of invulnerability.

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וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה בְּתַת ה' לָכֶם בְּעֶרְב בָּשָׂר לֶאֱכֹל וְלֶחֶם בַּבֶּקֶר לְשַׂבַּע בְּשִׂמְעֵ ה' אֶת תְּלִנְתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם מְלִינִם עָלָיו וְנַחְנוּ מָה לֹא עָלֵינוּ תְּלִנְתֵיכֶם כִּי עַל ה':

Moshe said, ‘When Hashem gives meat to you in the night and bread in the morning for satiation, when Hashem hears your complaints that you complain against him; what are we? Your complaints are not against us; they are against Hashem.’

<sup>12</sup> The entire verse reads:

אֶעֱלֶה עַל בְּמִתֵּי עַב אֲדָמָה לְעֵלְיוֹן:  
I will ascend to the altars of the clouds, I will be like the supreme being.

<sup>13</sup> The entire verse reads:

מִי בְּכָל אֱלֹהֵי הָאָרְצוֹת הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּילוּ אֶת אֶרְצָם מִיָּדִי כִּי יִצִּיל ה' אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַם מִיָּדִי:  
Who among the gods of these lands that saved their land from my hand, who is it that Hashem will save Yerushalayim from my hand?

<sup>14</sup> The entire verse reads:

בֶּן אָדָם אָמַר לְנֶגִיד צַר כֹּה אָמַר אֲ...דְנִי ה' יַעַן גְּבַה לְבָבְךָ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵל אֲנִי מוֹשֵׁב אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁבְּתִי בְּלֵב יָמִים וְאַתָּה אָדָם וְלֹא אֵל וַתִּתֵּן לְבָבְךָ כְּלֵב אֱלֹהִים:  
Son of man, say to the ruler of Tyre, ‘So said Hashem G-d the Master, “Because your heart is haughty and you said, ‘I am god, I sat in the sitting place of G-d in the heart of the seas’, but you are a person and not a god and you made your heart as if it was like the heart of god.

Moshe had no one to teach him but through his holiness he saw a vision that no one else could see; he saw the angel. At first, Moshe did not recognize what he was seeing, until Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe

But that revelation was not for Moshe alone. It was a revelation that should accompany us as a people throughout our generations and accompany us as individuals throughout our lives.

And at that momentous and historical occasion Hashem presented three everlasting signs to his people.

He taught us the danger of maligning Am Yisroel and that we must flee from such a situation. He taught us that when we do not flee from that type of situation our very bodies can be permeated with sin.

And He taught us that He ultimately protects His people.

When we learn and analyze, we must make sure that our knowledge of Torah does not remain external to us.

When we contemplate the Torah's lessons and make them part of who we are, a dynamic part of our consciousness, then the promises that HaKodosh Boruch Hu gave 3300 years ago will remain viable and vital for us and for all of Klal Yisroel as we await the Sefer HaGeulah of our own day and age.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock