

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Lech Lecha 5769

And He said to Avram, “Know you shall know that your descendents will be strangers in a land not theirs and they will enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years.” (15:13)

The Midrash comments on the double expression “know you shall know”: “Know that I scatter them, you shall know that I will gather them. Know that I pledge them, you shall know that I will redeem them. Know that I enslave them, you shall know that I will save them.” (Bereishis Rabbah 44:18)

The Satmar Rav asked: What is so unique about this? Every believer knows that all things in the world are done by G-d. That is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith: that G-d alone did, does and will do all things. And the Ramban writes at the end of Parshas Bo that a person has no portion in the Torah of Moshe unless he believes that all events, public or private, are miracles, not natural. And the Rambam in his Laws of Fasts (1:3) explains that that is the meaning of the Torah’s warning, “And if you walk with Me with chance” (Vayikra 26:27) – that if G-d brings a punishment upon us and we say it was just a chance occurrence, He will be doubly angry at us. We must believe that nothing is just chance. If so, there was no need for G-d to tell Avraham that when enslavement and redemption occur, he must know that G-d is behind it. Of course He is!

The answer is that the Midrash is not coming to say that when enslavement and redemption occur, G-d is behind it. It is coming to say that we are forbidden to take enslavement and redemption into our own hands. “You shall know that I will redeem them” – and not you on your own; you may not make any efforts toward redemption.

This is indeed a unique prohibition, because in all other areas of life, although G-d does everything, the Torah tells us to make efforts: “So that Hashem your G-d may bless you in all the works of your hands that you do” (Devarim 14:29). We do not sit back and wait for G-d to give us food, clothing and good health. It is well-known that “one must not rely on a miracle” (Taanis 20b). The Ramban (Devarim 11:13) writes, “Know that miracles, for the good or for the bad, are performed only for completely righteous people or completely wicked people, but average people are treated by G-d through the medium of nature, in accordance with their deeds.” When the Ramban states in Parshas Bo that all events are miracles, he means miracles disguised as nature. Since things happen in an apparently natural way, G-d wants us to make our own efforts. Not so when it comes to redemption, where only G-d has the right to act, and we have no permission to make any efforts other than repentance and good deeds. (Vayael Moshe 1:45)

In a letter sent in 1939 to all the towns of Hungary, the Satmar Rav similarly explains the words of the Shabbos morning prayer: “There is none besides You, our Redeemer, in the days of the moshiach.” Why is it necessary to say this? How could one think that there will be another redeemer besides G-d? The answer is that in the previous redemptions from Babylonia, Media and Greece, there was a certain amount of human effort involved. G-d hid His presence and did not communicate directly with Mordechai, Esther, Ezra, and the Hasmonians. Thus although G-d ultimately makes everything happen, humans were considered partners in the act, just as it says, “There are three partners in a man: G-d, his father and his mother” (Kiddushin 30b). But the future redemption will be accomplished only by G-d Himself, without any human action. (Moshian Shel Yisroel v. 7, p. 142).

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