

טועמיה - חיים

לחיות עם הזמן בשבת קודש

Parsha Naso 5788

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What will the Goyim say?

It looks like a repeat of a story we know well, but this time Hashem tells Moshe that enough is enough:

עַד אַנְהוּ יִנְאַצְרֵי הָעַם הַזֶּה וְעַד אַנְהוּ לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ בִּי... אֲנִי בְדַבֵּר וְאוֹרֶשְׁנוּ וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אֹתְךָ לְגוֹי גָדוֹל וְעַצוֹם מִמֶּנּוּ.¹

And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me, and how long will they have no faith in Me despite all the signs that I have performed in their midst?"

There was a similar story just over a year ago – the sin of the golden calf חטא העגל. Then, on the 17th of Tamuz, Hashem said to Moshe

הֲרַף מִמֶּנִּי וְאֶשְׂמִידֵם וְאֶמְחָה אֶת שְׁמֵם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶעֱשֶׂה אוֹתְךָ לְגוֹי עַצוֹם וְרַב מִמֶּנּוּ.²

Let Me alone and I will destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven, and I will make you a nation far more numerous than they."

This time, as well, Moshe answers and Hashem promises to forgive. The 13 attributes of mercy are mentioned again too

ה' אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד נִשְׂא עוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים עַל שְׁלִשִׁים וְעַל רְבָעִים.³

'The LORD! slow to anger and abounding in kindness; forgiving iniquity and transgression; yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children, upon the third and fourth generations.'

There is a big difference between the stories: In the first Moshe says

... לָמָּה ה' יַחַרְרָ אַפָּךְ בְּעַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גְּדוֹל וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה. לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר בְּרָעָה

הוֹצִיאָם לְהָרִג אֹתָם בְּהָרִים וּלְכַלְתָּם מִעַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה...⁴

"Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand. Let not the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that He delivered them, only to kill them off in the mountains and annihilate them from the face of the earth.'

In other words, Moshe makes 2 points: The first "Am Yisrael!" they are the source of all I do – how can you plan to replace them with me? Everything I have done I have done in their name. The second point is there will be a חילול ה' - a desecration of God's name with the goyim.

This time it is different

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי הֵעֲלִיתָ בְּכַחַךְ אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם. וְאָמְרוּ אֵל יוֹשֵׁב הָאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת שָׁמְעוּ כִּי אָתָּה ה' בְּקִרְבְּ הָעַם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂינוּ בְּעֵינֵינוּ נִרְאָה אֹתָהּ ה' וְעַבְדְּךָ עֲמַד עֲלֵהֶם וּבְעַמֶּד עָנָן אֹתָהּ הֲלֹךְ לִפְנֵיהֶם יוֹמָם וּבְעַמֻּד אוֹשׁ לַיְלָה. וְהִמַּתָּה אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד וְאָמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת שְׁמֵךָ לֵאמֹר. מִבְּלֹתַי יָכַלְתָּ ה' לְהַבִּיא אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָאֲבוֹתָם וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם בְּמִדְבָּר.⁵

¹ במדבר י"ד, י"ב-י"ג.

² דברים ט', י"ד.

³ במדבר שם, י"ח.

⁴ שמות, ל"ב, י"א-י"ב.

⁵ במדבר שם, י"ג-ט"ז.

But Moses said to the LORD, "When the Egyptians, from whose midst You brought up this people in Your might, hear the news, they will tell it to the inhabitants of that land. Now they have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people; that You, O LORD, appear in plain sight when Your cloud rests over them and when You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. If then You slay this people to a man, the nations who have heard Your fame will say, 'It must be because the LORD was powerless to bring that people into the land He had promised them on oath that He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

In other words here he uses only the second argument. The goyim will react badly, so Am Yisrael should be forgiven. Was this the only argument Moshe could make in Israel's merit, "what will the goyim say"? Not one word is mentioned in Israel's merit?

This could be because of the magnitude of the sin, but still, why? We will see the Chassidic answer, that is based on the simple reading of the text.

The argument "why is God continuing his anger with his people" is request for Hashem to give the people another chance after sinning for the first time. This was relevant then, at the golden calf. But now Hashem says

'עַד אָנָה יִבְאָצְנִי הָעַם הַזֶּה וְעַד אָנָה לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ בִּי'

And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me, and how long will they have no faith in Me despite all the signs that I have performed in their midst?"

In other words they return to bad deeds again and again, even if you give them another chance, it won't help. In other words we are talking about an addiction that is so severe that only one thing can be done for the good of Israel, destruction, God forbid. It is in their own good so they will not live lives of suffering and punishment, their deaths will atone for them, and allow their spirit, the spirit of Israel to enter the world to come for everlasting.

Moshe Rabeinu, in his wisdom, knows that he will find a way to persuade Hashem and leave Israel in this world, that they should be able to continue despite their terrible addiction, that seemed to have only one solution – being taken out of this world. For this reason he cannot say "forgive them for the good of Israel", because he knows it is in their good to receive the death penalty. The only thing left for him to say is "And Egypt will hear...and the goyim will say...God is unable to bring his people to The Land" – prevention of a chillul Hashem. This is how much Moshe loves Israel

This is maybe the answer to the question asked by all the commentators – Why the Torah uses very strong language

מִבְּלֹתַי יִכְלֹת ה' לְהַבְיֵא אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם בַּמִּדְבָּר

, 'It must be because the LORD was powerless to bring that people into the land He had promised them on oath that He slaughtered them in the wilderness.'

Slaughtering is something done to animals only. Why is the language so strong?

Moshe is telling us that there is a difference between a dead and a slaughtered animal. A dead animal is a "neveila" treif, a slaughtered one is kosher food for Jews. Shechita, slaughtering is a raising up from a previous standing to another higher one, but not here in reality. This will be what the goyim will say, Moshe fears: "Hashem is unable to continue the existence of Israel in this world, so he will take his everlasting people, and allow their everlasting existence, but only after sechita – that purifies but kills".

So he says

וְעַתָּה יְגִדֵּל נָא נְחַ אֲדֹנָי בְּאִשְׁרֵי דְבַרְתָּ לְאָמֹר.⁶

Therefore, I pray, let my Lord's forbearance be great, as You have declared, saying,

Only when Hashem hears this he says not just 'I have forgiven' but 'as you said'.