

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

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פֶּרֶשֶׁת לֶךְ לְךָ תִּשָּׁפ"ז

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וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקִים בְּמָה אֵדַע כִּי אֵירָשָׁנָה. (פרק טו' ח)

(Avraham said to Hashem): "My Lord, Hashem/Elokim: Whereby shall I know that I am to inherit (the Land)?"

Our pasuk follow a series of pesukim where Hashem tells Avraham that, "אֵל תִּירָא אֲבָרָם... *fear not, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great.*" And, Hashem promises him offspring and that, "אִם אֲנֹכִי יֵצֵא מִמֶּעִיךָ הוּא, *only him that shall come forth from within you shall inherit you,*" and finally he is told to, "הִבֵּט נָא הַשָּׁמַיְמָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם תּוּכַל לִסְפֹּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ כֹּה יִהְיֶה זִרְעֶךָ, *Gaze now, toward the Heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them,*" and He said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Incredibly positive and upbeat promises. Incredulously, Avraham asks Hashem, בְּמָה אֵדַע כִּי אֵירָשָׁנָה? Many Mefarshim question this. As Rav Hirsch* puts it: "This cannot mean, 'By what sign shall I know that I will possess it?' Just now it said of Avraham that his whole life consisted of אֱמוּנָה בַּה', unreserved confidence in G-d's guidance. It is inconceivable that he would ask for a sign of assurance about a promise that had been repeated several times." The (R' Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg, 1785-1865) says it this way: כִּי חֲלִילָה לְאַהֲבֵהוּ ה' לְהַסְתִּיפֵק בְּאַמְתֵּת דְּבוּרוֹ וַתִּבְרָךְ. וּבְקִיּוּמוֹ.

Perhaps because of this difficulty, Rashi offers an alternative explanation that, "When Avraham asked, 'בְּמָה אֵדַע,' he was not requesting a sign of Him. Rather, he said before Him, 'Let me know through what merit (my offspring) will last in (the Land).' HKBH said to him, 'Through the merit of the קְרִבְנוּת.'" RADAK says the following: "The meaning of the words בְּמָה אֵדַע cannot be that the same man who had just been given credit for his utter faith in Hashem now has developed doubts, nothing having occurred to cause such doubts. He wanted to know how he could be certain that when his (offspring) would inherit the land that it would remain theirs forever. Perhaps, due to a sin, future generations might forfeit their claim to the land of *Canaan*, just as the present occupants had forfeited their claim through their sins. Unless they had, why would Hashem want to dispossess them? He hoped that just as Hashem had shown him the stars as an illustration that his offspring would be people of great substance, so Hashem would show him a further illustration of a means by which his offspring would reinforce their title to that Land once they had settled in it."

Rav Meir Simcha presents an explanation of בְּמָה אֲדַע based on concepts that he repeatedly utilizes in his Sefer. That is, that a prophecy revealed by Hashem to a *Navi* concerning someone else, cannot be altered in any way. If there is any change, that *Navi* is deemed an imposter with all the ramifications of the accusation. If the *Navi* is told by Hashem of something to occur to *himself*, that outcome may change. How so? He refers us to his Rebbe, Rambam's explanation of this very sensitive subject in הקדמת הרמב"ם: "Regarding the matter of Yaakov's fear after HKBH promised Him good proclamations, as it is stated, וְהָיָה אִתְּךָ עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמְרְתִּיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ / *Behold, I am with you; I will protect you wherever you go*, and yet he feared lest he die, as it is stated, וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב / *Yaakov was greatly frightened and he was distressed*, חַז"ל said about this... in that Yaakov מֵעוֹן, was afraid of sin, lest it cause him death. And that is what חַז"ל said..., 'שָׁמָּה יִגְרוּם הַחֲטָא'. This teaches that HKBH promises good, and yet the sins overcome it and this good does not materialize. But it is to be known that this matter is only between HKBH and the *Navi*. However, that HKBH should say to the *Navi* to promise a good proclamation to other people in an absolute statement without any condition and it *does not* materialize, such a thing is null and is impossible for it to be. As otherwise there would be no room for us to establish the trustworthiness of a *Navi*, and HKBH gave us in our Torah the fundamental principle that a *Navi* is tested when his promises are validated."

With this important principle established, Rav Meir Simcha returns to our pasuk and Avraham's query. Avraham had no doubt that what Hashem told him regarding his offspring, וְהָיָה לְךָ בָּנִים וְהָיָה אִתְּךָ עִמָּךְ / *and that they will conquer Eretz Yisrael, will occur-for after all, he was a Navi* and as Rambam told us, "that HKBH should say to the *Navi* to promise a good proclamation to other people... and it not materialize, such a thing is null and it is impossible for it to be"-and he did not require any sort of sign for this. If it *were* his question, he would have asked Hashem, בְּמָה אֲדַע *period* i.e., show me a sign for everything You have promised me and my children. Avraham though was concerned about a matter "that was only between HKBH and a *Navi*" i.e., what Hashem told him about *himself*-his inheritance of *Eretz Yisrael*. בְּמָה אֲדַע and I will be removed from the equation. That is an extremely sincere and *non*-doubting concern from the ultimate דְּבָרָא דְּבִרָא / *who was totally committed* בְּה'!

*With permission of the Editors.

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
 לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
 לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
 ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל
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