

For Your Eyes Only
By Rav Yair Kahn

I. Before Your Eyes

Throughout *Sefer Devarim*, Moshe stresses the fact that the nation about to enter Canaan saw Hashem's miracles with their own eyes. Already in the first chapter, Moshe tells the people not to fear the powerful Canaanites, for Hashem will go to battle on their behalf just like He did in Egypt "**before your eyes**" (1:30). When Moshe urges the people to follow the commandments he adds, "**Your eyes** have seen what Hashem had done at Ba'al Pe'or, for Hashem destroyed whoever strayed after Ba'al Pe'or from your midst. However, you who have clung to Hashem your God, are all alive today" (4:3-4). Moshe warns the people not to forget *ma'amad Har Sinai*, saying, "Take heed and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget those things that **your eyes** saw..." (4:9). When Moshe describes the unique history of Yisrael, he says, "Has God ever tried to extract one nation from the midst of another nation, with trials, with signs and with wonders and with war ... as all that Hashem your God did for you **before your eyes**. You have been shown to know that Hashem is the Lord, there is none beside Him" (4:34-35). Later, when Moshe instructs the people how to respond to the children who question the Torah and its commandments, he says, "And you shall say to your son we were servants to Pharaoh in Egypt and Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And Hashem placed upon Egypt, Pharaoh and his entire household signs and wonders, great and terrible, **before our eyes**" (6:21-22). Further on, Moshe explains why we should worship Hashem: "He is your glory, and He is your God, that has done for you these great and tremendous things, which **your eyes have seen**" (10:21). Upon gathering the entire nation in preparation of the covenant to be forged in the plains of Moav, Moshe begins: "You have seen all that Hashem has done, **before your eyes**, in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, all his servants and his entire land. The great trials which **your eyes** have seen, those great signs and wonders" (29:1-2). In fact, *Sefer Devarim* ends describing the great wonders that Moshe did "**before the eyes of all Yisrael**" (34:12).

This phrase, in its various forms, which is common in *Sefer Devarim*, appears in the rest of the Torah only once ([Bereishit 45:12](#)). Thus, we can safely posit that "before your eyes" is one of the themes of Moshe's speech.

The most expansive treatment of this theme appears in *Parashat Eikev*:

And know you this day; for I speak not with your children that have not known, and that have not seen the chastisement of Hashem your God, His greatness, His mighty hand, and His outstretched arm and His signs, and His works, which He did in the midst of Egypt unto Pharaoh the king of Egypt, and unto all his land; and what He did to the army of Egypt, to their horses, and to their chariots; how He made the water

of the Red Sea to engulf them as they pursued after you, and how Hashem has destroyed them unto this day; and what He did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place; and what He did to Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, the descendant of Reuven; how the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and every living substance that followed them, in the midst of all Yisrael; but **your eyes have seen** all the great work of Hashem which He did. (11:2-7).

Here, Moshe not only gives an extensive list of miraculous events personally witnessed by the nation, but also draws from that fact an important conclusion: "Therefore you shall keep all the commandments which I command you this day, **lema'an** (in order that) you may be strong, and go in and possess the land, whither you go over to possess it" (11:8). The personal testimony of the people is critical in the preparations to cross the Yarden and possess the land. There will be many challenges along the way, but the fact that your eyes have seen such great miracles will enable you face and overcome them all.

The term "*ya'an*" refers to a reason ("because"), while the term "*lema'an*" describes an objective ("so that"). In *Sefer Devarim*, Moshe makes extensive use of this latter term. Of the seventy-seven times it appears in the Torah, forty-seven are found in *Sefer Devarim*! When Moshe wants to drive home the ultimate purpose of his speech, he uses the term "*lema'an*." There are numerous times that Moshe prefaces the goal of possessing Canaan with the term "*lema'an*:" Yisrael are told to follow the laws and statutes of Hashem *lema'an* they should live, enter, and possess the land (4:1). They are told to do that which is righteous and good *lema'an* it should be good for them and they will enter and possess the good land (6:18). Moshe tells the people to be diligent regarding all commandments *lema'an* they should live and multiply and enter and possess the land (8:1). He tells them to pursue justice *lema'an* they should live and possess the land (16:20). Moshe commands the people to write the Torah on large stones upon arriving in Canaan *lema'an* they should enter the land (27:3).

From here we learn that one of Moshe's primary objectives is to ensure that the generation raised by Moshe in the wilderness should succeed in conquering and possessing the land of Canaan under the leadership of Yehoshua. Therefore, Moshe repeatedly focuses on the personal experiences unique to that generation, which will serve as a source of strength and help them overcome the challenges that they will face.

II. Children That Have Not Seen

Based on the above, the continuation of Moshe's speech is perplexing. "*Lema'an* you may prolong your days upon the land, which Hashem swore unto your fathers to give unto them and to their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey" (11:8). A quick survey of additional uses of the term

"*Iema'an*" reveals an additional objective of Moshe – that future generations will continue to live in the land (see 4:40, 5:15, 6:2, 11:21, 25:15). Moshe is concerned with the initial phase, that Yisrael, under the leadership of Yehoshua, will succeed in crossing over the Yarden and engaging the Canaanites in battle to eventually possess the land. However, he also invests a lot of energy in strengthening the future generations in an attempt to prevent destruction and exile.

There are various methods that Moshe can use to strengthen future generations. However, there is one tool that cannot work: "your eyes have seen." Not only can't it work, but stressing the importance of personal testimony actually has a negative impact on the children that have not seen. Nevertheless, in *Parashat Eikev*, Moshe focuses on personal testimony of the miraculous events in the wilderness, apparently to achieve both objectives (*Iema'an*) – to possess the land and to remain on the land. How can we explain this?

III. Our Eyes Saw, No One Else's

In last week's *shiur*, we discussed the position of the Rambam that our faith in the prophecy of Moshe and, by extension, the entire Torah, is not based on miracles, but rather upon *ma'amad Har Sinai*:

It was *ma'amad Har Sinai* that made them believe in Moshe, when our eyes, and no-one else's, saw, and our ears, and no-one else's, heard... Therefore, if a prophet arose and performed great signs and wonders, and tells us to deny the prophecy of Moshe our Teacher, we do not listen to him... The prophecy of Moshe was not dependent upon signs, so the signs of this prophet cannot outweigh the signs of Moshe, for we saw and heard it, just as he did. This is similar to two witnesses who testify to an individual contrary to what that individual saw with his own eyes. He does not accept what they say, but knows that they are false witnesses. Therefore, the Torah said that if a prophet comes with signs and wonders, we do not listen to him, for he is coming to deny that which we saw with our eyes. (*Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah* 8:1-3)

It is clear that the Rambam is building upon Moshe's statement of "your eyes have seen." In fact, as we noted in last week's *shiur*, the Rambam uses the Rambam's argument to explain Moshe's warning, "Take heed and guard your soul diligently, lest you forget those things that **your eyes** saw ... the day that you stood before Hashem your God in Chorev" (4:9-10). But if our faith in Moshe's prophecy and the entire Torah is rooted in personal testimony, how can that apply to later generations that never stood at the foot of Har Sinai? What is the basis over our faith in the Torah?

Before trying to resolve these problems, let us consider an additional difficulty with section in *Parashat Eikev*. Speaking to the generation about to enter Canaan, Moshe notes that their eyes witnessed the miracles in Egypt and the splitting of Yam Suf. Although a small part of the population may have been old enough, the vast majority of the people had no personal memory of those events. How then can Moshe appeal to the personal testimony of events that only a small portion of the population witnessed?

Based on this difficulty, it seems reasonable that Moshe is not speaking to individuals and is not referring to their personal testimony. Moshe is speaking to the entire nation and is referring to the collective testimony of Yisrael. The nation standing before Moshe had seen the miracles in Egypt with their own eyes; although many individuals had not been born at that point, the nation as a collective was unequivocal in their testimony.

IV. As If You Had Gone Out of Egypt

This idea of collective testimony can be applied to future generations as well. Consider Moshe's warning that the people never forget the things their eyes had seen at Har Sinai. Moshe then adds: "And you shall make them known to your children and your children's children." In other words, the generation that witnessed Sinai is obligated to transmit that collective experience as a living tradition to their children and their grandchildren. Moreover, future generations, who received the tradition from their parents, must then in turn transmit that *mesora* to subsequent generations. *Ma'amad Har Sinai* must be engraved in the collective memory of the nation, as the living *mesora* is transmitted from father to son and from Rebbi to *talmid*: "Moshe received the Torah from Sinai and bequeathed it to Yehoshua ..." ([Avot 1:1](#)). The fact that the Rambam considers Moshe's warning not to forget *ma'amad Har Sinai* to be one of the 613 biblical commandments proves that it is a *mitzva* that applies to all generations.

We find a parallel regarding the miracles experienced by Yisrael in Egypt. Moshe instructs the people how to respond to future generations when they question the Torah: "And you shall say to your son we were servants to Pharaoh in Egypt and Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. And Hashem placed upon Egypt, Pharaoh and his entire household signs and wonders, great and terrible, **before our eyes**" (6:21-22). At first glance, it appears that Moshe offers a response that will become obsolete after the passing of the generation that entered Canaan. However, our Sages taught that in every generation a person is obligated to view himself as if he himself left Egyptian bondage. Within the context of this obligation, Rava introduced the *pasuk* found in [Devarim \(6:23\)](#): "And we were taken out of there (Egypt)" into the Passover *haggada* ([Pesachim 116b](#)). It is clear that Rava understood that *yetziat Mitzrayim*, as a collective living experience that took place before our eyes, must be passed on from generation to generation.

In conclusion, when speaking to the generation poised to enter Canaan, Moshe prepared them for the future challenges they will face by stressing their collective testimony of the miraculous events they had witnessed, from *yetziat Mitzrayim* till the crossing of the Yarden. However, the idea of collective testimony was not meant to be limited to that particular generation. The argument of "before your eyes" was not only "*Iema'an*" for that generation to conquer and possess Canaan; the idea of "before your eyes" is also "*Iema'an*" that future generations should remain in the land and never suffer destruction and exile. "Before your eyes" is not only a fact, but a challenge as well – we are charged with receiving a living *mesora* from our ancestors and passing it on to our descendants. We are charged with taking past events and bringing them back to life, and thereby eternalizing the collective experience of "before your eyes."