

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET
ON PARSHAS VA'EIRAH - 5756

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From: "Ohr Somayach <ohr@jer1.co.il>"
To: CShulman, " " Highlights of the Torah weekly port...
Date: 1/13/96 2:56pm
Subject: Torah Weekly - Vaera

Mazel Tov to Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair and family on the birth of a son & to Lev Seltzer and family on the birth of their "Bechor" (first-born son)

Summary

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt, however the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem then commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aaron shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy the miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh not to grant Moshe's request. However, after the plague of lice, even Pharaoh's magicians concede that only the one true G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave Egypt, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses to let them go.

Commentaries

POWER FROM THE PEOPLE

"Moshe spoke before Hashem saying - Behold, the Children of Yisrael have not listened to me, so how should Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips." (6:12)

The power of a spiritual leader flows from the people. In every generation Hashem promises us there will be spiritual leaders, the great Torah sages, who are given the ability to advise and direct the nation. But, when the Jewish People refuse to listen to these spiritual giants and follow after politicians who have no more insight than the rest of us then our spiritual leaders become powerless to influence or to help the people. Thus, if the Children of Yisrael had listened to Moshe, his lips would have been opened and his words would have affected even Pharaoh, but since they did not listen - Moshe's "lips were sealed".
(Based on the Sfes Emes)

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

B'S'D' "Take your staff and throw it before Pharaoh. It will be a snake." (7:9)
Nothing influences a person more than his surroundings. Even the most decadent and corrupt soul will change for the better when placed in a positive and elevating environment. And even the most noble soul will suffer spiritual decline and eventual collapse when subjected to an atmosphere of corruption and degradation.
Moshe wished to convey to Pharaoh that even though the Jewish People had been reduced by the corruption of Egypt to the point where they were barely recognizable as human, nevertheless, when freed from this spiritual cesspool they would ascend to the highest levels to be giants of the soul. Moshe demonstrated this to Pharaoh by taking 'the staff of G-d,' - a symbol of the highest spiritual elevation which was used in performing the greatest signs and miracles and on which was carved the Shem Hameforash (the explicit Name of Hashem) - and casting it down, throwing it onto the floor. But Moshe did not just throw the staff anywhere, he threw it 'before Pharaoh' - the human embodiment of everything that Egypt stood for - and the staff turned it into a snake - a symbol of everything lowly and noxious. This same snake, groveling in the dirt, was restored once again to its former self, the great staff of G-d, when Moshe stretched out his hand and raised it up again. How great is the influence of the company we keep!
(Adapted from HaGaon Mahara"m Shapira M'Lublin z"l in Mayana shel Torah)

THE MASTER OF MIXTURE

"And I will place a separation between my people and your people." (8:19)
The fourth plague that Hashem brought on the Egyptians has a very strange name. It's called Arov which means 'mixture'. Why is that all the other plagues had names which described what they were - the first plague was called 'blood', the second 'frog' etc. - while the fourth plague was called 'mixture' rather than 'dangerous animals,' which would have been more descriptive?
Hashem's ability to control events is not limited to the existence of absolute states; rather He can also allow opposites to coexist. For example, the plague of blood included not just that all the water in Egypt turned to blood, but also that, miraculously, there was unaffected water for the Jews. In the unlikely event of a Jew and an Egyptian both drinking from the same glass of water through straws, the half from which the Jew was drinking would remain water and the half from which the Egyptian drank - blood. Similarly, during the plague of darkness, while the Egyptians were enveloped by a palpable darkness the Jews had light in their homes. And in the plague of hail, inside every piece of hail was fire - opposites combined. In other words, the ability to change nature, but at the same time and under specific circumstances to leave nature unchanged - to allow the coexistence of opposites - revealed a higher level in Hashem's power. The miracle of Arov was that the wild animals attacked only the Egyptians and not each other. They were maintained as a mixture and did not degenerate into their natural state of mutual antagonism.
"And I will place a separation between my people and your people." This fourth plague marked a transitory moment in the life of the Jewish People. Even though they were almost inextricably trapped in the spiritual mire of Egypt, Hashem separated them from the Egyptians, like blood from water, like fire from ice. And at exactly the moment that Hashem was separating them, He brought a plague called "Mixture" - demonstrating that even while He is separating the inseparable, He is combining that which knows no natural unity - the wolf and the lion, the snake and the scorpion. Hashem is the Master of Mixture.
Often one hears a person described as a Ba'al Midos - literally a 'Master of Character Traits.' To be a Ba'al Midos doesn't just mean that a person

is kind because that's his nature. It means that he also has the ability to be unkind. His kindness comes, not because he can't be anything else but kind, but rather that he's a Master of Kindness, not that kindness masters him. Similarly because a person's nature is to be generous doesn't necessarily make him a Ba'al Tzedaka. It may be that it is only his nature to always give. Only when one is capable of being both generous and careful with money, and knows when to apply each character trait, may one truly be called a Ba'al Midos.

Sing, My Soul! Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Mah Yedidus- "How Beloved..."

"...to indulge in the delights of fatted fowl, quail and fish."

One of the traditional ways of expressing oneg Shabbos - the pleasure of the Sabbath - is to eat fish if possible at every meal. Many reasons are offered for the significance of eating fish on this day:

1. In the Torah's account of Creation we find the Creator blessing man, fish and the Sabbath. When man eats fish on the Sabbath he earns a threefold blessing.
2. A fish has no eyelids so its eyes appear to always be open. This reminds us that the eyes of Hashem are always open and watching us to provide us with our needs - an awareness that is especially important on the day when we rest from our creative labors.
3. The celebration of the righteous in the World to Come is described as the "Feast of the Leviathan" when they will dine on the flesh of the giant fish which became extinct soon after Creation. Since Shabbos is a taste of the World to Come we eat fish to remind us of the big treat in store for us.

From: "Mordechai Kamenetzky <ateres@ppppmail.nyser.net>"
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Date: 1/15/96 10:32pm

DRASHA -- PARSHAS VAEIRA LOST IN EGYPT 1/19/96
Volume 2 Issue 14

Negotiating redemption is not a simple process. You must deal with two different sides and send two different messages to opposite parties. First, you must speak to the oppressors. You must be demanding and firm you can not show weakness or a willingness to compromise. Then you have to break the news to the oppressed. That should be easy: in a soft and soothing manner you gently break the news that they are about to be liberated. They will surely rejoice at the slightest hint that their time has come.

That is why I am struck by a verse in this week's portion that directs Moshe to send the exact same message to Pharaoh and the Jewish people, as if Pharaoh and the Jews were of one mind, working in tandem. Exodus 6:13 "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Ahron and commanded them to speak to the children of Israel and to Pharaoh the King of Egypt, to let the children of Israel leave Egypt"

I was always perplexed by this verse. How is it possible to encompass the

message to the Jews and Pharaoh in one fell swoop? How can you compare the strong demand to Pharaoh to the soft, cajoling message necessary for the Jews? Pharaoh, who does not want to hear of liberation, has to be warned and chastised and even plagued. The Jews should jump at the mention of redemption! Why, then, are the two combined in one verse and with one declaration?

There are those who answer that the Jews in this verse actually refer to the Jewish taskmasters who were appointed by Pharaoh as kapos to oppress their brethren. Thus the equation is clearly justified.

However, I would like to offer a more homiletic explanation:

There is a wonderful old story of the poor farmer who lived under the rule of a miserable poritz (landowner) in medieval Europe. The landowner provided

shelter in exchange for a large portion of the farmer's profits. The farmer and his wife toiled under the most severe conditions to support their family with a few chickens that laid eggs and a cow that gave milk.

Ultimately, time took its toll and hardship became the norm. The farmer and his wife had their bitter routine and never hoped for better.

One day the husband came back upset from the market. "What's the matter?"

cried his wife, "you look as if the worst calamity has happened."

"It has," sighed the anxious farmer. "They say in the market that the Moshiach is coming. He will take us all to the land of Israel. What will be of our cow and our chickens? Where will we live? Who will provide shelter for us? Oy! What is going to be?"

His wife, who was steeped with faith in the Almighty, answered calmly. "Don't worry my dear husband. The Good Lord always protects His people. He

saved us from Pharaoh in Egypt, He redeemed us from the evil Haman and has protected us from harsh decrees throughout our exile. No doubt he will protect us from this Moshiach too!"

Hashem understood that the Jewish people were mired in exile for 210 years. They had decided to endure slavery rather than abandon it. Moshe had to be as forceful with those he was planning to redeem as he was with those who had enslaved them.

Often in life, whether by choice or by chance, we enter into situations that we ought not be in. As time progresses, however, we get accustomed to the situation, and our worst enemy becomes change. We must tell the Pharaoh within each of us, "let my people go!" Let us not continue on the comfortable path but rather get on the correct one. That message must be told to the victim in us with the same force and intensity as it is told to the complacent.

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From: "Menachem Leibtag <ml@etzion.org.il>"
To: CSulman " " Chumash shiur...
Date: 1/18/96 1:51pm
Subject: PARSHAT VA'EYRA

According to the popular Midrash, Bnei Yisrael had fallen to the 49th level of "tumah" (spiritual impurity) in Egypt. In contrast, there appears to be no foundation for this criticism in either Parshat Shmot or Va'eyra. What is the basis for this harsh condemnation? In this week's shiur, we will discover the biblical source for this Midrashic censure. In doing so, we will not only enhance our understanding of several difficult psukim in Parshat Va'eyra, we will also arrive at a better perception of the nature of Moshe Rabeinu's "shlichut" (mission) to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt.

BACKGROUND / REVIEW

Last week's shiur discussed the double mission which Moshe Rabeinu received at the burning bush:

- 1) To INFORM Bnei Yisrael that God has come to fulfill His promise to the Avot, i.e. to take them to Eretz Canaan.
- 2) To COMMAND Pharaoh that he must allow Bnei Yisrael to journey into the desert and worship God.

Moshe's task to COMMAND Pharaoh was a 'mission' in the fullest sense of the word. It required repeated warnings, negotiations, as well as the performance of miracles. However, Moshe's task to INFORM Bnei Yisrael can hardly be considered a 'mission'. All Moshe needs to do is provide Bnei Yisrael with relevant information.

Despite the apparent simplicity of this task, Parshat Shmot is replete with detail of precisely WHAT Moshe must say and HOW he is to relate God's message to Bnei Yisrael. Furthermore, at the beginning of Parshat Va'eyra, God instructs Moshe yet another time to inform Bnei Yisrael that He is taking them out of Mizraim:

"... Therefore TELL Bnei Yisrael that I AM GOD, and I will take them out... and I will save them from their bondage... and I will bring them into the Land..." (6:6-8)

Considering that Moshe is merely providing Bnei Yisrael with information, why does God insist that Moshe restate this message?

To answer these questions, we must examine more closely the nature of Moshe's "shlichut" to Bnei Yisrael. In doing so, we will show that Moshe's mission consists of much more than him becoming the official 'fortune teller' for Bnei Yisrael.

We begin by 'painstakingly' analyzing the psukim which describe Moshe's shlichut in Parshat Shmot. This may seem a bit tedious, but as you will see, it will be well worth it.

Our point of departure will be (where last week's shiur left off) the strange question that Moshe asks immediately after he receives his "shlichut" at the burning bush:

"Moshe said to God: When I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you' and they ask me 'WHAT IS HIS NAME?', what shall I say to them?"
(3:13)

What provokes this question? Why is Moshe so sure that Bnei Yisrael will inquire as to the nature of God's Name?

To appreciate Moshe's question, we will briefly review a primary theme of Sefer Breishit, namely the two covenants between God and the forefathers.

BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM AND BRIT MILAH

God had established two covenants with Avraham Avinu, promising the Land of Israel to his offspring. Each covenant ("brit") related to a special aspect of Hashem's relationship with Am Yisrael, reflected in the two respective Divine Names - Havaya and Elokim - by which they were initiated:

- 1) Brit Milah (17:1-14), b'shem Elokim.
- 2) Brit Bein Ha'Btarim (15:1-20), b'shem Havaya.

BRIT MILAH

"And I will fulfill My covenant with you - 'I'hiyot lachem 'Elokim' - [to be your God], and for your offspring after you...and I have given you... Eretz Canaan..." (17:7-8)

This covenant (b'shem Elokim) emphasized God's special relationship with Am Yisrael on the INDIVIDUAL level, i.e. a special closeness with God, manifested through natural events.

Within the framework of this covenant, Bnei Yisrael expected to return from Egypt to Eretz Canaan:

When Yaakov departed Eretz Canaan to re-unite the family with Yosef in Egypt, God (b'shem Elokim) promised him that He would be WITH HIM in Egypt, make his offspring a great nation there, and ultimately bring them back (see 46:3-4). Yaakov passed this tradition on to Yosef (48:21), and later (at the conclusion of Sefer Breishit), Yosef passed this tradition to his brothers:

"PAKOD YIFKOD ELOKIM etchem" God will surely remember you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov" (50:24)
[See shiur on Parshat Va'yigash for a complete discussion]

BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM

"And He (b'shem Havaya) said to Avram: Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a LAND NOT THEIRS, and they shall be ENSLAVED and OPPRESSED ["v'avadum v'inyu otam"], four hundred years... then I will PUNISH THE NATION THEY SHALL SERVE, and in the end, they SHALL GO FREE WITH GREAT WEALTH... on that day 'Havaya' made a covenant with Avram saying: To your offspring I assign this land..."
(Breishit 15:13-20)

This covenant, b'shem Havaya, emphasized the historical aspect of the development of the NATION: its bondage in a foreign land, the punishment of its oppressor, followed by Israel's conquest ('yerusha') of the Promised Land - the land of the Cnaani, Chiti, Emori, etc.

Brit Bein Ha'Btarim does not specify precisely where this foreign land is, nor when the '400 year clock' starts ticking. However, it clearly foresees a severe oppression followed by a glorious redemption including the punishment of the oppressor and the attainment of great wealth, all culminating with the conquest of the Promised Land.

Within the framework of this covenant, Bnei Yisrael expected to be redeemed from their oppression in Egypt.

A FAMILY TRADITION

Both these family traditions, (1) a specific one regarding returning from Egypt b'shem Elokim, and (2) a more general one regarding a miraculous redemption from bondage b'shem Havaya, were ingrained in the heart and soul of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt. As both of these traditions were passed from generation to generation, it is reasonable to assume that Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were waiting for these Divine promises to be fulfilled.

BACK TO THE BURNING BUSH

With this background, Moshe's question is simple - His query regarding God's Name (3:13) relates precisely to these two family traditions. He wants to know which Divine Promise is being fulfilled, i.e. will the redemption be only b'shem ELOKIM (1), within the framework of Brit Milah, (as promised to Yaakov); or will it ALSO be b'shem HAVAYA (2), within the framework of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim.

This question is not merely a technicality, it relates to the very nature of Yetziat Mitzraim:

If their redemption is only b'shem Elokim (1), then Bnei Yisrael should expect a natural process ("hashgacha nisteret"), similar to the manner in which Yaakov was saved from Lavan (see Br. 31:9-13,24-29 & 48:15-16!). Furthermore, they should not expect the Egyptians to be punished, nor to receive great wealth [an important 'nafka mina' (practical difference)].

If their redemption will also be b'shem Havaya (2), then Bnei Yisrael should expect a miraculous process ("hashgacha glu'ya") including the punishment of Mitzraim, attaining great wealth, and finally the conquest of the fullest borders of the Promised Land.

Knowing by which specific Name God has come to redeem His people, Moshe will understand the nature of the forthcoming redemption.

God's immediate answer appears at first to be vague:

"E'heh'yeh asher e'heh'yeh" [I Will Be what I Will Be], go tell Bnei Yisrael that "E'heh'yeh" has sent you" (3:14) [Rashbam encrypts his explanation of this pasuk in "at- bash"; de-code it, and note how it relates to our explanation!]

God expounds His answer in the next pasuk:

"... Thus tell Bnei Yisrael: HAVAYA [who is] ELOKEI AVOTEICHEM... has sent me... this is My Name..." (3:15)

God answers that He is coming not only b'shem Elokim, but also b'SHEM HAVAYA, i.e. He has come to fulfill BOTH covenants!

Accordingly, God instructs Moshe to relay this message to the elders (3:16-17):

"Gather the elders of Israel together and tell them: HAVAYA [who is] ELOKEI AVOTEICHEM appeared to me... saying:

(1) "PAKOD PA'KADTI ETCHEM..." [Brit Milah/ see Br. 50:24]

(2) "I will bring you up M'ONI MITZRAIM to ERETZ HA'CNAANI V'HACHITL..." [Brit Bein Ha'Btarim/ see Br.15:13,20]

Next, God instructs Moshe to take the elders with him to Pharaoh (this makes Moshe the official representative of Bnei Yisrael) and command him that he permit them to worship God in the desert (3:18). The fact that Pharaoh will not agree (3:19), sets the stage for the fulfillment of two additional elements of Brit Bein Ha'Btarim, namely punishing the oppressor and great wealth:

"I will stretch out My Hand and SMITE Egypt...after that he

shall let you go... When you go, you will not go empty handed: Each woman will borrow... vessels of SILVER and GOLD and clothing [compare Br. 15:14]..." (3:20-22)

At the conclusion of God's lengthy answer, Moshe still remains doubtful whether Bnei Yisrael will truly believe that Shem Havaya has appeared to him (4:1). To solve this problem, God (obviously now b'shem Havaya) provides Moshe with several "otot" (signs/ mini-miracles) to prove that a 'miraculous' redemption is indeed forthcoming (4:2-9).

[See further Iyun Section - for an explanation why the "nachash" symbolizes the forthcoming redemption b'shem Havaya!]

At first, Bnei Yisrael fully believe God's message (4:31). However, their double work load - the consequence of Moshe's first confrontation with Pharaoh - dampens any hopes that Moshe had raised. Moshe's plea at the end of Parshat Shmot best summarizes this situation:

"Why did you bring harm to this people? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people..." (5:22-23)

BACK TO VA'EYRA

Our above analysis of Parshat Shmot now enables us to understand the significance of God's response to Moshe.

At the beginning of Parshat Va'eyra, God clarifies once again the purpose of Yetziat Mitzraim, i.e. the fulfillment of both Brit Milah AND Brit Bein Ha'Btarim.

We proceed now by explaining one pasuk at a time:

The opening pasuk constitutes a 'fitting' introduction:

6:2 "And ELOKIM spoke to Moshe - and said to him I am HAVAYA"

Although God appeared (b'shem Havaya) numerous times to the Avot, He had never performed miracles for them in the eyes of other nations ("hashgacha nig'leyt"). Instead, He watched over them from the perspective of shem Elokim, (alternately - shem Kel Shaddai, i.e. "hashgacha nisteret"):

6:3 "And I appeared unto Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov as Kel Shaddai, but in MY Name HAVAYA I did not make Myself known to them"

Once again, God emphasizes that the forthcoming redemption will be b'shem Havaya, in a manner unprecedented in the time of the Avot.

According to the guidelines of His two covenants (6:4-5), God now presents His primary message (6:6-8):

6:4 "I also established My covenant [-BRIT MILAH-] with them to give them the LAND OF CANAAN..." (compare Br.17:8)

6:5 I have NOW heard the cries of Bnei Yisrael, for Egypt is OPPRESSING them, and I have remembered My covenant [-BRIT BEIN HA'BTARIM -] (compare Br. 15:13)

[Note Rashi on Shmot 6:4 -5!]

6:6 "Therefore, tell Bnei Yisrael that I am HAVAYA, and I will take them out... and save them from their BONDAGE, and I will redeem them with an outstretched hand and GREAT PUNISHMENTS (e.g. the Ten Plagues)" [Bein Ha'btarim]

6:7 "And I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God..." [Brit Milah, Br. 17:7-8 - l'hiyot lachem l'Elokim]

Finally, as both covenants are being fulfilled:

"And you shall know that: I am HAVAYA ELOKEICHEM who is

taking you out from your suffering in Egypt."

6:8 "And I will bring you into the Land which I promised to give to Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov [in Brit Milah], and I will give it to you as a possession - 'MORASHA' ["yerusha", as in Br. 15:7-8] for I am Havaya [Brit Bein Ha'Btarim]"

NOBODY LISTENS

Moshe conveys this message to Bnei Yisrael (6:9), but they do not 'listen':

"And they did not LISTEN to Moshe ["v'lo SHAMMU el Moshe"], due to their crushed spirits and their hard work." (6:9)

The use of the word "shammu" (listened) in this pasuk is problematic. What precisely does "lo shammu" imply?

Did they not HEAR what Moshe said?

They obviously heard (physically) what he said.

Did they not COMPREHEND what he said?

Nothing in Moshe's statement appears to be very difficult to comprehend.

Did they not BELIEVE in what Moshe told them?

If so, the word "v'lo he'eminu" should be used, and not "v'lo shammu"! (see 4:30-31)

Did they not OBEY when Moshe told them?

Moshe's statement to Bnei Yisrael is informative in nature. It does not imply that the people need to actually do something.

Even more confusing is the "kal va'chomer" which Moshe employs in the next pasuk. Immediately after God instructs Moshe to go to Pharaoh and demand that he permit Bnei Yisrael to leave Egypt, Moshe retorts:

"If Bnei Yisrael did not listen to me, how then should Pharaoh listen to me..."

["heyn Bnei Yisrael LO SHAMMU ay'li, v'aych YISHMA'EYNI Pharaoh..."] (6:12)

The word "shammu" ostensibly is used differently on each side of the "kal va'chomer": To Pharaoh, "shammu" implies OBEY, while to Bnei Yisrael it implies LISTEN. In other words, Moshe argues:

"Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei did not LISTEN to me." This "kal v'chomer" would be more logical if the "shammu" had the same meaning in both halves of the pasuk, i.e. "Why should Pharaoh OBEY me, if Bnei Yisrael did not OBEY me..."

Earlier, we rejected the possibility that "shammu" implied 'obey', for Moshe was merely providing Bnei Yisrael with information. However, the "kal v'chomer" suggests that we reconsider that rejection.

ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM

Even though there is nothing in God's message of "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" (6:6-8) which is EXPLICIT regarding what Bnei Yisrael must obey, there is something IMPLICIT.

The recognition by Man of "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" encompasses more than intellectual knowledge. It is a fact that must not only be understood, but also internalized. A true recognition of "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" should result in an immediate inner drive to perform His will - the willingness to OBEY any command which God may request. [It is not by chance that this very same phrase later becomes the opening statement of the Ten Commandments (20:1-2)!]

Therefore, the recognition by Bnei Yisrael that their

redemption is to be b'shem Havaya requires their spiritual preparation. Although no specific commandment to do "teshuva" (repentance) is mentioned, the Torah's statement "v'lo shammu el Moshe" indicates this message was implicit.

How does Moshe convey this message to Bnei Yisrael? The above psukim in Sefer Shmot leave us only with a clue as to what the precise demand was; Sefer Yechezkel, however, 'spills the beans'!

[Before continuing, it is imperative that you first read Yechezkel 20:1-9, preferably in Hebrew. Then read Shmot 6:2-13 and note the parallels! Note that Yechezkel 20:5-6 is referring to Shmot 3:6-8, and therefore Yechezkel 20:7-8 provides the missing information necessary to understand Shmot 3:9!]

Yechezkel (see 20:1-10) compares the behavior of the elders of Yehuda, exiled to Bavel seven years earlier, to that of their forefathers. While doing so, he reminds them of what took place prior to Yetziat Mitzraim:

"On the day that I chose Israel... when I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt [compare Shmot 6:3]... when I said "Ani Hashem Elokeichem" [compare 6:6]... that same day I swore to take them out of Egypt into a land flowing with milk and honey [compare 6:8, 3:8] ..."
"And I said to them [at that time]: Each man must rid himself of his detestable ways, and not DEFILE himself with the fetishes of Egypt - [for] ANI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM"
"But, they REBELLED against Me, and they did not OBEY me ("v'lo avu l'SHMOAH ay'li"), no one rid himself from his detestable ways, no one gave up the fetishes of Egypt, and I resolved to pour out My fury upon them..." (20:5-8)

Yechezkel states explicitly what Sefer Shmot only alludes to: God had called upon Bnei Yisrael to repent prior to the Exodus to be worthy of their redemption. He had instructed them to cleanse themselves of the "tumah" of their Egyptian culture in preparation for God's revelation "b'shem Havaya". However, they did not 'listen'. [These psukim in Yechezkel are the obvious source for the popular Midrash quoted in the introduction.]

Thus, Moshe's "shlichut" to Bnei Yisrael is also a 'mission' in the fullest sense of the word. He must not only INFORM them of the forthcoming redemption, he must also COMMAND them and teach them to do "teshuva" (repentance) [see Shmot 6:13!]. This mission is at least as difficult as his mission to Pharaoh. Bnei Yisrael, as Sefer Yechezkel explains, were just as 'stubborn' as Pharaoh himself.

Although Bnei Yisrael were deserving of being destroyed, Yechezkel explains that God saves them for 'the sake of His Name': "va'a'as l'maan shmi, l'vilti ha'chel l'einei hagoyim" (20:9).

[This fact will enable us to appreciate the significance of the Korban Pesach which Bnei Yisrael were required to bring before their actual redemption /iy"h the topic of next week's shiur].

This background provides a beautiful explanation for the difficult psukim describing the events that later take place at 'Marah' (15:22-26). Recall that according to Yechezkel, Bnei Yisrael deserved the same punishment as the Egyptians. God saved them only for the sake of His Name.

Had Bnei Yisrael truly listened to Moshe and done teshuva prior to the Exodus, they would have arrived at Har Sinai to

receive the Torah after their 'three day journey' into the desert as originally planned. After the splitting of the Red Sea, Bnei Yisrael indeed do travel 'three days' into the desert, but they can not find water [they do not deserve it] (15:22). Instead, they arrive at "Marah", a location where the 'water was BITTER' (15:23). In order to drink the water, Moshe must teach them and instruct them (15:25). [The 'tree' which God shows him may relate to the "etz ha'chayim" of Gan Eden - see Further Iyun]. The purpose of this incident is stated specifically. God must 'heal' them, otherwise He will afflict them with the very same punishment that Mitzraim received. This time, they must truly listen and accept:

And He said: -im SHMO'AH TISH'MAU b'KOL HAVAYA ELOKECHA -

Should you OBEY and accept the word of the Lord your God and listen to His commandments, and keep His laws, all of the affliction which I put on Egypt I will not put on you, for I am God, your healer" (15:26)

Prior to receiving the Torah at Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael undergo many tests (e.g. the manna, Amalek etc.) in which they must prove their faith). Only then is the entire nation worthy of receiving "hitgalut" - the Ten Commandments - which begin with "Anochi HAVAYA ELOKECHA asher hotzeiticha me'Eretz Mitzraim...".

shabbat shalom
mena chem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. The first "ot" for Bnei Yisrael was Moshe's "mateh" turning into a "nachash". This was to show Bnei Yisrael that indeed Hashem (shem Havaya) has come to redeem them (4:1-4). Based on the shiur, the symbolism of the "nachash" is significant. The first mention of "nachash" is in Gan Eden, the environment which exhibits "olam ha'hitgalut" (shem Havaya/ see shiur Parshat Breishit). In Gan Eden, the "nachash" questioned the very possibility of "schar v'onesh" (Divine retribution). From the perspective of Bnei Yisrael, God's "hitaglut" and Divine retribution is the essence of Yetziat Mitzraim!

On the other hand, when Moshe goes to Pharaoh, Hashem tells him to perform a "mofet" with his "mateh". Unlike the "ot" for Bnei Yisrael, now the "mateh" turns into a "tanin". We first find "tanin" in the Creation story of perek Aleph in Breishit, b'shem Elokim. Pharaoh questioned the very existence of God, therefore, he needed a "mofet" to show that God indeed does exist and is the Creator of all nature - the message of perek aleph of Breishit!

Bnei Yisrael do not need a sign that God exists, rather they need to know that He is about to reveal Himself, they need a sign from Perek Bet in Breishit- Gan Eden!

B. An obvious question arises: Why are the explicit details of God's charge that Bnei Yisrael do teshuva, which are found in Yechezkel, missing from Sefer Shmot? One could suggest that even though Bnei Yisrael's behavior is inexcusable, it may be understandable, due to their "avodah kasha" (see 6:9).

Nevertheless, there may be additional allusions to this in Parshat Va'eyra itself.

Let's examine how Parshat Va'eyra continues, noting some obvious questions:

6:13 - "Vay'tza'veym el BNEI YISRAEL v'el Pharaoh melech

Mitzraim - l'Hotzi et Bnei Yisrael m'Mitzraim"

Why did Bnei Yisroel need to be COMMANDED to leave Egypt?

Could this be that command to Bnei Yisrael?

6:14 -28 - What is the 'yichus' of Moshe & Aaron doing here?

This parsha is obviously out of place, as the lineage of Moshe and Aaron should have been introduced before the story of the burning bush! Is this Parsha replacing what should have been written here?

6:28 "va'yhi byom diber Hashem el Moshe b'erezt Mitzraim." seems to be only half a pasuk- what is it referring to?

Possibly what is recorded in Yechezkel?

6:29 is a repeat of 6:13, with the exception that now there is no commandment to Bnei Yisroel, only to Pharaoh! Likewise:

7:1 - 11:1 The ensuing story of the Makot is exclusively between Moshe and Pharaoh - or Hashem and Mitzraim. There is no dibur at all to Bnei Yisroel! At times they are mentioned in contrast to the Mitzrim; however, they are never warned nor instructed to do anything! Why has the focus changed?

Although the above questions do not constitute an absolute proof, they may indicate that something was expected of Bnei Yisrael at this time.

One can only conjecture as to why Hashem chose not to include that detail in Sefer Shmot. Possibly, its replacement by the lineage of shevet Levi, beginning from the households of Reuven and Shimon, may hint to one zchut that Bnei Yisroel DID have; "sh'lo shinu et shmam" etc. - that they didn't change their names, dress and language. Although they were immersed in Egyptian culture, they kept their Jewish identity, the key to Jewish survival!

Another possibility may be that Shevet Levi, unlike the other tribes, kept the masoret and prepared themselves properly for 'geulah'. This may be the reason that they were ultimately chosen to work in the Mishkan, as it is an environment where Hashem's name is present.

C. When Moshe returned to Egypt, God (b'shem Havaya) instructs him to use these miracles to warn Pharaoh, lest his first born be killed (makkat b'chort). This message is followed by a bizarre incident where Moshe is almost killed, but is saved by Ziporah performing Brit Milah on his son.

1. Attempt to relate this to the need to fulfill Brit Milah, before Brit Bein Ha'tarim can be fulfilled.
2. Relate this to the mitzvah that one who has not performed Brit Milah, can not offer Korban Pesach.

D. Note the structure of the Makot in groups of three - dzach adash b'achav - rav yehuda's simanim

1,4,& 7 begin with meeting Pharaoh at the river and warning him
2,5,& 8 begin with "Bo el Pharaoh" - meet him at his palace
ans warn him there

3,6,& 9 have no warning nor meeting of Pharaoh at all.

That makes groups of 1-2-3, 4-5-6, 7-8-9

See if you can find a common theme to each group of three.

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From: "listserv@lubavitch.chabad.org (W-2 LIST Chabad-Lubavitch)"

To: CShulman

Date: 1/15/96 1:34am

Subject: TorahStudies - Voeira

B"H
Torah Studies
Adaptation of Likutei Sichos
by
Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

Va'eira

After G-d had sent Moses to Pharaoh to ask for the release of the Jewish people from Egypt, not only was the request not granted, but the enslavement of the people became more oppressive. Moses therefore asks G-d: "Why have You dealt badly with this people?" The reply he receives, in effect, commends him to follow the example of the Fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who did not ask questions of G-d. The Rebbe examines the nature of the virtue of the Fathers, the reason why Moses asked the question, and the contemporary implications of G-d's answer.

MOSES' QUESTION

At the end of the previous Sidra, Shemot, we read of Moses' question to G-d: "Why have You dealt badly with this people?" The force of his question was this: How could a mission which had been ordered by G-d, which had been carried out by Moses, and which concerned the redemption from Egypt, have resulted in harm to the Jewish people? The redemption itself was wholly good; Moses, the emissary, was he of whom it was said, "And she saw that he was good"; and the initiator of the mission, and the redeemer was G-d Himself (G-d as He transcends nature, for the redemption of a people already sunk to the "49th gate of impurity" could only be a supernatural event), who is certainly wholly good and compassionate. So what could have been the source of the harm?

The answer with which Moses' question was met (in the opening of this week's Sidra) was, "And He said to him: I am the L-rd. And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as G-d Al-mighty (Kel Sha-dai), but by My name 'the L-rd' (the Tetragrammaton) I did not make Myself known to them."

In other words, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob underwent many trials and deprivations, and yet they asked no questions of Me.

Yet there are several points of difficulty in this story:

- (1) Moses had attained to greater spiritual heights than the Fathers. He was the seventh generation in descent from Abraham, and the Rabbis say: "The seventh is always (especially) precious." How then, if they had not raised questions about G-d, could Moses have done so?
- (2) G-d, in His answer to Moses, was underlining the virtue of the Fathers. Why did He not then say, "I appeared . . . to Israel" instead of ". . . to Jacob?" For "Israel" connotes a higher spiritual state than "Jacob."
- (3) Every narrative in the Torah has a moral implication for every Jew. And the Torah goes out of its way not to use an impolite expression even of an animal, let alone of a Jew, more still of Moses, the finest of them all. So we must assume that when it gives voice to a criticism of Moses, it must have a pressing

reason for doing so, namely to emphasize to every Jew the necessity for emulating the Fathers who raised no questions about G-d's conduct.

But this is hard to understand. For it presupposes that every Jew in every generation has the choice of behaving like Moses or like the Fathers.

It is true that, as the Rabbis say, "there is no generation that does not have a man like Abraham, like Isaac, like Jacob . . . and like Moses."

But this refers only to isolated individuals. And the Torah was given to all; it "speaks of the majority." So how can we say that to every Jew it is open to act like Moses or like the Fathers, and that in this respect they should follow the Fathers?

MOSES AND THE FATHERS

The difference between Moses and the Fathers is that Moses embodies the attribute of Knowledge (chochmah) - and thus it was through him that the Torah, which is the Divine Knowledge, was given.

Relative to him, the Fathers were the embodiments of the Emotions (middot).

Abraham served G-d primarily through love and compassion. He is called, "Abraham, My loved one"; and to men as well as to G-d his relation was one of kindness, both material and spiritual.

Isaac exemplified the service of fear and austere judgment: The Torah speaks of G-d as the "Fear of Isaac." And as a result he could tolerate no evil in the world. His "eyes became dim" when he knew of the idolatry of Esau's wives.

And lastly Jacob represents mercy - the perfect synthesis of love and fear, kindness and judgment. "The G-d of my father, the G-d of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac have been with me" - that is, he embraced both their modes of service. Therefore all his acts were perfect, whether in withstanding the trial of wealth (kindness) while he was with Laban and "the man (Jacob) increased exceedingly," or in the trial of anxiety (judgment) when Esau came to confront him accompanied by four hundred men. In all this, "Jacob came whole" - that is, in a state of perfection.

This is not to say that we do not find the attribute of Knowledge amongst the Fathers, nor of Emotion in Moses.

The Fathers learned Torah, as the Rabbis say: "G-d made Abraham's two kidneys like two wise men who instructed and advised him and taught him knowledge," and "From the days of our Fathers the Yeshiva (the academy for learning Torah) never departed from them (the Jewish people)."

And Moses displayed both compassion and austere judgment: Compassion when "he saw their (the Israelites') burdens" and his eyes and heart went out to them; judgment when he admonished the Jew who was fighting with his fellow, "Why did you smite your neighbor?" Nonetheless Moses' primary attribute was Knowledge, namely that he gave the Torah to the Jewish people and that it is called by his name: "Remember the Torah of Moses My servant".

And the primary mode of service of the Fathers was through the Emotions - a path which through them has become the inheritance of every Jew.

The Reason Behind the Question

We can now understand why Moses, despite his higher spiritual achievements than the Fathers, brought a question against G-d. For Knowledge, or intellect, seeks to comprehend everything. And when it encounters something that it cannot understand, this acts as a barrier to going further in the service of G-d.

Moses sought an answer - an explanation of what was incomprehensible to him so - that he could continue along his path to G-d through knowledge.

THE FAITH WHICH HAS NO QUESTIONS

The answer which he received was, "I am the L-rd. And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as G-d Al-mighty (Kel Sha-dai) but by My name 'the L-rd' (the Tetragrammaton) I did not make Myself known to them."

Before the Giving of the Torah, G-d was revealed only as Elokim - a finite disclosure, revealing G-d as He is imminent in the world, the world of plurality: Hence the name Elokim which is in the plural. But after Sinai, He was revealed in His four-letter name - as infinite, transcending all divisions, a Unity. At that moment, divisions were dissolved, the division between higher and lower powers, between Knowledge and Emotion.

What G-d therefore said to Moses was:

When you stand at the threshold of a redemption which will culminate in the Giving of the Torah, you must surpass the division between Knowledge and Emotion. And even though you are primarily a man of Knowledge, this must be conjoined with the emotional power to have a faith which does not raise questions.

This is why He used the name "Jacob" instead of "Israel" in speaking of the Fathers.

"Jacob" refers to a lower level than "Israel" ("Jacob" is related in Hebrew to the word "ekev" - the heel; while "Israel" is composed of the letters "li-rosh" - the head is mine).

And the implication to Moses was that his Knowledge should embrace and be embraced by his Emotions in kabbalat ol - the acceptance of the weight of faith. The higher (knowledge) and the lower (the "heel") should inter-penetrate one another.

KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION

Not only do the emotions carry the strength to have a faith which goes beyond questions, but they also lead to action. Love brings a man to "do good"; fear leads him to "turn from evil." But knowledge, in itself, leads to detachment. The mind becomes engrossed in learning and loses its concern with action. Even though it may thereby gain the knowledge of what to do, it loses the inclination to do it.

This is why the Rabbis warned: "He who says, I have nothing but (my learning of) Torah, does not even have Torah." That is, the learning of Torah in itself could lead naturally to detachment, whereas the Jew must accompany it with actual service towards G-d and acts of compassion towards man. Learning, alone, without acting, is not true learning.

"FATHER" AND OFFSPRING

And this is why Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whose main path of service was through the Emotions, are called the "Fathers."

A father is someone who begets children. And the "generations of righteous men are their good deeds."

Being men of Emotion, and since Emotion leads to action, their (principal) achievement was "good deeds." And in another sense, too, their achievement lay in their offspring. They were not detached; they were concerned with the welfare of others; and therefore they transmitted their values to their children as an everlasting heritage. This explains the puzzling comment of Rashi on the word (at the beginning of our Sidra) "I appeared."

Rashi comments, "to the Fathers." But this seems self-evident and not worthy of mention, since the Torah itself continues, "to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

The point that Rashi is making, however, is that it is as "Fathers"

that their primary virtue lies earning them G-d's revelation. This was not for their individual spiritual achievements, but for their being men with offspring (whether understood as "good deeds" or as "children" who inherit their righteousness).

G-d loved Abraham because: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the L-rd."

The Meaning of G-d's Answer

The answer which G-d gave to Moses' question was therefore that without foregoing his character as a man of Knowledge, nonetheless he should be animated by the Emotions, as the Fathers were, so that firstly his faith would become unconditional, asking no questions, and secondly he would become a man who translated his knowledge into action.

Indeed, we find that Moses eventually went beyond the Fathers in this respect.

While they were shepherds, removed from the world, Moses translated the Torah and transmitted it to the world and bore the burden of the Jewish people to the extent that he could say: "You say to me, 'Carry them in your lap. . . ?' "

The two-way process of revelation at Mt. Sinai - when the "high came down low" and the "low became high" thus had its counterpart in the inner life.

The high, that is the intellect, descended into the field of action, and the low, that is the "heel" of Jacob (the symbol of kabbalat ol, or absolute acceptance of G-d's will) ascended until it shaped the intellect into its own unconditional faith.

And this is the moral for every Jew of G-d's reproof to Moses: That the highest and lowest amongst Jews should work together mutually. The "heads of your tribes" must "descend" to involve themselves with "the hewers of your wood and the drawers of your water," who must in turn "ascend" by learning Torah (both in its "revealed" and "inward" aspects) and by performing the Mitzvot and "beautifying" them. And each Jew, even the "heads of your tribes," must not be so detached in his studies as to neglect his involvement with the world, and his unconditional acceptance of the will of G-d.

This power - to unite "higher" and "lower" - is our inheritance from Moses. And this conduct, which in Moses brought the redemption from Egypt, will, in us, bring that final redemption which transcends all boundaries - the imminent realization of the Messianic Age.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. III pp. 854-62)

From: "Rafael Salasnik <rafi@brijnet.org>"
To: CSulman, " daf-hashavua@shamash.nysernet.org"
Date: 1/18/96 10:18am
Subject: daf-hashavua Vaera 5756/1996
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VA'ERA- Moses: Could he speak?

by Rabbi Emanuel Levy, Palmers Green & Southgate Synagogue

Twice in our Sidra Moses expresses his inability to affect the Israelites' redemption from the Egyptian bondage on account of his speech impediment. "Behold I am of uncircumcised lips and how will Pharaoh listen to me?" (Shemot 6:12, 30).

In great measure, the strength of a leader lies in his ability to sway the masses with powerful words. It therefore appears rather strange that the greatest leader our people have ever known should have had a speech defect. The Derashot Ha-ran (Rabbenu Nissim, c1310-75) however, turns this argument on its head. It had to be known to posterity that Moses succeeded in his task solely because of the divine truths which he espoused and not because

of any speech "gimmicks" or trick effects on his part.

Nevertheless, in the Book of Devarim we find Moses expounding the Torah, before an assembly of the entire Jewish people without any apparent difficulty whatsoever. All of a sudden he seems to have lost his defect altogether. Purely and simply, could Moses speak clearly or not?

The Yalkut Shimoni explains that when Moses tarried on Mount Sinai for forty

days studying the Torah, his defect was then healed. This explains why he could later expound the Torah.

Rabbi Eliezer Ben David in his work "Out of the Iron Furnace" quotes the writings of the Rogachover Gaon, Rabbi Moses Rosen (1858-1936) who provides

us with a fascinating insight into this question.

True, Moses had an impediment but as soon as he became identified as the "Lawgiver" as the chosen leader to convey the vibrant, living message of Torah to his people, his very being became bound up with Torah and nothing material in life was of any consequence to him any more. Whenever he received a prophesy the Divine Presence actually spoke through Moses' throat. To put Rabbi Rosen's words into modern parlance, Moses acted as a 'transmitter' for the Divine prophecy and his own physical defect was of no consequence. He was therefore capable of speaking words of Torah to the masses. But if so, why could Moses not convey the prophecies he heard directly to Pharaoh, without the need for Aaron as spokesman? The Rogachover provides an ingenious answer. Although Moses could speak the Egyptian language when growing up in Pharaoh's palace, from the moment he accepted Torah as his life blood he could speak no other language than Hebrew, the language in which the Torah is written. According to the laws of prophecy, a prophet cannot speak through an interpreter. Aaron therefore had to serve as an "extension" of Moses and in fact served as Moses' "mouth".

Perhaps this explains why the verse says: "Aaron your brother shall be your (Moses) prophet" (Shemot 7:11), since Aaron was needed to convey the actual

prophecy which Moses received to Pharaoh.

In actual fact, Aaron had served as a prophet in Egypt in his own right. The words in the Book of Ezekiel, "Every man, cast away the idols of his eyes!" (20:7) are actually ascribed by Rashi to Aaron who was already exhorting the people to remain true to their holy destiny, eighty years before Moses had his vision at the Burning Bush.

We may well wonder why, according to this, Aaron could not have assumed Moses' role as deliverer?

The Rogachover replies as follows: To Aaron the wisdom and understanding of the Torah were given as a gift. Only Moses had to toil and persevere over the Torah until finally understanding was granted to him. It was therefore doubly precious to him.

Whilst Moses was perfecting his knowledge and understanding of Torah, Aaron

was perfecting his human qualities of kindness, mercy and love of his fellow man. In the words of Pirkei Avot, he "loved mankind and drew them near to Torah" (1:12).

Thus Aaron, who personified unity amongst Jews, moulded the people into one

nation, but it was Moses, and Moses alone, who was the embodiment of Torah

who had to serve as the ultimate lawgiver.

With this insight, we can understand the rather strange anomaly of Moses turning his staff into a snake (Shemot 7:10). What possible wonderment would this cause if Pharaoh's sorcerers were able to duplicate this sign? The Zohar asks this question and answers "because all of mankind's troubles began with the serpent, and the source of Pharaoh's power was with the serpent."

The meaning is as follows. It was the serpent which enticed Adam to eat from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, and which brought death to mankind. It therefore symbolises evil. Pharaoh is also referred to in our Haftorah as the great serpent that lies in the midst of his rivers (Ezekiel 23:3). The analogy is clear. Moses, by converting his staff into a snake, implied his foreknowledge of the fact that Pharaoh, like the serpent, was the embodiment of all evil and impurity in the world. It took Moses, whose weapon was the Torah, to counteract all the subtlety and guile of which Pharaoh was capable of wielding. Although Pharaoh's magicians duplicated the sign, Moses showed that he knew the source of Pharaoh's power and would

be able to act with the correct strategy, wrenching the Israelites from the clutches of impurity.

When we say the words of Yigdal on Friday night: "There never arose another prophet in Israel like Moses' we can therefore say them with heightened understanding and greater awareness.

The Golden Age of Spain

by Mr. Clive Fierstone, Academic Registrar, Jews' College, Hendon
In the southern State of Granada, Samuel HaNagid, The Prince (993-1056)

Was the Vizier for twenty five years and served three kings. In an era of early medieval tolerance, he was able to combine success at court with patronage and involvement with the arts. He was an author of a Biblical Hebrew dictionary and penned Hebrew poetry, some of which is dedicated to his success as chief of the army on the battlefield!

His major work, Hilhot HaNagid, (Legal Directions of the Prince) shows wide

appreciation of both the Jerusalem and the Babylonian Talmud in addition to the scholarly work to date. Scholars have seen Samuel HaNagid as the founder of the new School of learning. Unfortunately, his son Joseph, who succeeded his position, lacked his father's tact and acted in an arrogant manner which incited hatred. Power coupled with arrogance can only lead to a disaster. He was killed when his palace was attacked and this had a disastrous effect on the Jews of Granada, who were expelled.

Other independent Kingdoms had their Jewish leaders but on the horizon, Christian Kingdoms were gaining power, and towards the end of the eleventh century, the Moslems of the South Peninsula invited the Berber Tribes of North Africa to come to their aid. Initially, Jews were not welcome under this new strict Moslem regime and, except for a short period in the first

half of the century, the glory of the Golden era had ceased in Southern Moslem Spain.

The late Cecil Roth opined that it would be incorrect to restrict the glories of Spanish Jewry to the age of Arab supremacy.

It was in the Christian northern Spain that the famous Spanish Biblical exegete, Abraham Ibn Ezra (1092-1167) lived at least some of his scholarly life and it was there that the poet-philosopher Judah Halevi developed his literary ideas. In contradistinction it was from the Moslem sector of Spain that Rabbi Maimonides fled in 1165. As the twelfth century progressed, there were signs of Papal-directed anti-Jewish measures and the Golden Age had certainly ended in Spain.

../To be continued next week

From: "Zev Itzkowitz <zev@shamash.org>"
To: CShulman, " A Byte of Torah
<bytetorah@shamash.ny...
Date: 1/17/96 11:52am
Subject: A Byte Of Torah V,XIV VaEira

"The magicians said to Pharaoh,

It is the finger of Hashem (E-lo-him)..." (Exodus 8:15)

What did the magicians mean when they ascribed the plague of lice to be "from the finger of Hashem"? When the magicians saw that they could not duplicate what Moses and Aaron did, they correctly realized that the plagues could not possibly be magic, but could come only from Hashem (Rashi).

Still,

they did not want to admit that the plague was such a big deal. Therefore, in order to minimize the issue to Pharaoh, they said that Hashem had merely struck them with a finger and not with His full hand (Ramban).

Another possibility is that the Hebrew word for finger may also denote retribution in ancient Egyptian. Therefore, the magicians could have been advising Pharaoh that this plague is part of Hashem's retribution (R. Aryeh Kaplan).

Alternatively, "E-lo-him" may not be referring to Hashem, but to Elohim, other gods. When Moses and Aaron had originally appeared before the court and performed their "parlor tricks", they, the court magicians, had been able to reproduce them, albeit on a smaller scale. The plague of lice, however, pointed to a higher power than any magician. First, Moses and Aaron

had not come to warn them of this forthcoming plague. Furthermore, the magicians could not reproduce its effect. They, therefore, advised Pharaoh of their conclusion: Not only this plague, but all the previous plagues were actually brought upon them by the gods and have no connection to Moses' and

Aaron's threats (cf. Rabbeinu Bechaye). While the magicians correctly identified a divine source to the plagues, they erroneously concluded that it was their Egyptians gods and not Hashem.

From: "Bircas Hatorah <bircas@jer1.co.il>"
To: " " Weekly Words of Torah from Bircas H...
Date: 1/18/96 1:10pm

Parshas Va'era

Selected, translated and arranged by Rabbi Dov Rabinowitz

"And HaShem spoke to Moshe saying: I am HaShem. Speak to Paroh the king of Mitsraim everything which I tell you." (6,29)

The Meshech Chochma explains this in the light of Moshe's previous protest to HaShem "Behold, the Children of Yisroel did not listen to me, and how will Paroh listen to me?" (6,12) This is one of the ten instances of Kal VeChomer (a fortiori) in the Torah. (Those whose benefit I am seeking did not listen to me, how much more so Paroh, for whom my goal is detrimental).

However there is a refutation: The Children of Yisroel have absolute free choice in their actions; but Paroh is the king of Mitsraim, and "The heart of kings and rulers is in the hand of HaShem" (Mishlei 25). HaShem deprives them of their free will (in order to use them as His instruments in directing the affairs of their kingdom, and of the world in general).

HaShem now told Moshe that (despite his protest that Paroh would certainly not listen to him) He could turn Paroh's heart in any way which He may desire. Moshe countered that his second previous protest "I have sealed lips, and how will Paroh listen to me?" (6,30) still remained valid. To this HaShem replied "Aharon your brother will be your prophet (spokesman)".

"And there will be hail in the whole land of Mitsraim, on the people, on the animals and on all the plants of the field in the land of Mitsraim." (9,22)

The Gri"z of Brisk explains that since the Torah delineates the people, the animals, and the plants of the field individually, we can infer that the hail did not fall everywhere, for in that case it would not have been necessary to go into such detail. In fact, the hail fell specifically where there were people or animals or plants.

This enables us to understand that when HaShem commands: "Now send out and gather all your cattle ... that which will be in the field and not be gathered into the house ..." (9,19), this was not because the houses would afford protection, which was not available in the fields, from the miraculous hail, but rather that this was the way that this affliction was decreed, that the hail would fall only on these species when they were in the field, but it would not fall on them when they were in the houses.

From: "Jeffrey Gross <75310.3454@compuserve.com>"
To: CShulman, " "Halachic Topics Related to the Weekl...
Date: 1/17/96 11:56am
Subject: Parshas Va'eira

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

He said to Pharaoh, "When I leave the city, I shall spread out my hands to Hashem... (9:29) But in the city Moshe would not pray, since it was filled with idols (Rashi).

Cutting Through A Church Parking Lot
QUESTION: Is it permitted to cut through the parking lot of a church?

DISCUSSION: Several issues must be addressed in order to clarify

and resolve this matter:

1) May one enter a house of Avoda Zara?

It is clearly prohibited to enter a house of Avoda Zara. The Mishna in Avoda Zara (11b) prohibits one to even enter a city in which an Avoda Zara is present. Unfortunately, it is impossible for us, while we are in exile, to adhere to this prohibition. We are considered Anusim (under duress) in regard to this matter. Entering an actual house of Avoda Zara, however, is clearly prohibited(1).

2) Is a church a house of Avoda Zara?

The Poskim are not uniform in their classification of Christians as ovdey avodah zara. Although the Rambam clearly rules that Christians are ovdey avodah zara(2), other Rishonim(3) are more hesitant. Their view is based on the assumption that non-Jews are only considered ovdey avodah zarah if they totally reject the existence of G-d. Christianity, however, combines the belief in G-d with other beliefs. This theology is called Avoda Zara B'shituf (combination). Some Poskim rule that this is not considered real Avoda Zara(4), while many other Poskim disagree and consider it Avoda Zara(5).

Additionally, there is a view(6) that holds that gentiles nowadays cannot be considered ovdey avodah zara since they are merely following in the tradition of their parents (without actually worshipping avodah zara).

Practically speaking, however, the Poskim agree that a church is considered a house of Avoda Zara and one is forbidden to enter it(7). The following reasons are offered:

The majority of the Poskim consider Christianity to be an Avoda Zara(8);

Even if Avoda Zara B'shituf is permitted, it is only permitted for a non-Jew. For a Jew, however, there is no difference between Avoda Zara and Avoda Zara B'shituf.(9); The view of the Ran (Sanhedrin 61b) is that the belief in any religion except Judaism constitutes Avoda Zara. He says the following: "... even the Christian saints, and even the Meshugah leader of the Ishmaelite (Mohammed), even though their followers do not consider them gods, nevertheless since they bow to them in recognition of the human incarnation of their divinities, they all have the Halacha of Avoda Zara ..."(10). Even if present day gentiles do not worship avodah zara, nevertheless their churches are considered houses of avodah zara, since all the services conducted there are performed in the name of the Avoda Zara(11).

3) Can one cut through the parking lot of a church?

When the church is being used, it is clearly forbidden to enter the church's parking lot.

When the church is not being used, it is permitted to cut through the church's parking lot. Although there is a Middas Chassidus not to enter a courtyard of a church, nevertheless, if the shortest route available is through the church's parking lot, it is permitted and the Middas Chassidus does not apply(12).

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FOOTNOTES:

1 Rambam in Pirush Ha'mishnayos Avoda Zara 1:3. Shach YD 149:1. See also YD 150:1.

2 Hilchos Maacholos Asuros 11:7. The line in the Rambam referring to Christians was censored. It was, however, fully retrieved by the Frankel Edition of the Rambam which is currently being published.

3 Tosfos Sanhedrin 63b in the name of R' Tam.

4 Rama OC 156 according to Pischei Teshuvah YD 147:2; Mor U'ketziah 224; Shoel U'maishiv Tanina 1:5

5 Noda B'Yeudah Tanina Yd 148; Shu"t Shaar Efraim 24; Pri Megadim YD Sifsei Daas 65:45;

6 Shulchan Aruch YD 148:12.

7 Pri Hasadeh 2:4; Igros Moshe YD 3:129.

8 Shu"t Minchas Elazer 1:53-3; Yechave Daas 4:45

9 Shu"t Binyan Tzion 1:63

10 Quoted by Tzitz Eliezer. 14:91 According to this, a mosque would also be forbidden to enter. See also Sefer Hazikaron R' C. Shmulevitz, Igeres Hashmad of the Rambam and the footnotes there.

11 Darchei Teshuva 150:2

12 Rama YD 159:2.

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Date: 1/18/96 10:32am
Subject: enayim l'torah -- vaera
vaera

Enayim LaTorah - Parshat Va'era
Publication of Student Organization of Yeshiva University

It's a Vision Thing
by Rabbi Etan Tokayer

Still reeling from the shocking turn of Bnei Yisrael's fortunes, we begin our parasha with a seemingly strange point: Hashem appeared to our forefathers, and never explained Himself to them -- "U'sh'mi Hashem Lo No'dati Lahem" - "By My name Hashem (the shem hamephorash) I was never known to them." (6:3) By implication, Hashem here points an accusatory finger at Moshe and says, "Your forefathers did not doubt me; why, Moshe, do you doubt me?"

Two questions stand out. First, would it not have been better for Hashem to simply assure Moshe that events would turn out well? After all, Moshe had just accepted G-d's mission with a feeling of insecurity about his ability to communicate. Why, then, does Hashem scold Moshe rather than support him? Second, the pasuk names each of the avot to whom Hashem appeared; "I appeared to the avot" would have certainly sufficed. Additionally, Rash"i notes that, just in case we missed all of sefer Breishit, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov are the avot.

Addressing the first question, we find that Hashem here does not castigate Moshe at all. Rather, he is simply responding to Moshe's question from the end of last week's parasha -- Why, Hashem, have you allowed this evil to occur? Why did you bother to send me to Pharaoh? Hashem immediately responds: I appeared to all the avot and they did not understand me. They could not fathom My plan as it unfolded just as you will not. Although Moshe may have

comprehended G-d's plan to a greater degree, Hashem later says to him, "Ve'Raita et Achorai Uphanai Lo Yeirau" -- You will only see me from the back, from hindsight, even as my plan for the future remains a murky vision. G-d's statement to Moshe, then, was perhaps the greatest assurance and support Moshe could want -- the knowledge that his uncertainty, uneasiness, and obfuscated vision were nothing short of the expected and natural. The key is not to know exactly where Hashem is leading us, but to always keep G-d at the head of the trail.

Now we can answer the second question. The pasuk details the names of the avot -- and Rash"i identifies for us that they were indeed the avot -- in order to emphasize that these tzaddikim represent both individually and collectively the challenge of constantly aspiring to keep Hashem at the center of our line of vision. As the Chatam Sofer notes, the word avot derives both from the word Av - father and from ahava - to love. The avot succeeded because even as they peered into a murky future, unable to see fully Hashem's master plan, they constantly and unflinchingly aspired to keep Hashem as the light that illuminated their way.

From: "Dovid Green <dmgreen@skynet.net>"
To: CShulman, " Dvar Torah <dvar Torah@torah.org>"
Date: 1/18/96 2:01pm
Subject: Parshas Va'Erah

There is a curious midrashic statement regarding Pharaoh and his stubbornness to release the Children of Israel. The midrash states as follows. A person looks at the work of the creation as if it must have been hard work for G-d to have done it all. But it isn't hard at all, as it states in Isaiah (40:28) "He does not tire, nor does He become weary." The midrash continues: "With what do I become weary?" asks G-d. "With those who anger me with idle (time wasting) preoccupations. This is the explanation of the verse in Proverbs (27:3) A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty,(a reference to the creation), but a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them.

This is beautifully explained by Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Altar, of blessed memory, known as the Sfas Emes. He explains that one who recognizes

the wisdom in the creation is necessarily filled with awe and wonder. However, even more wonderful is the fact that G-d gives free choice to mankind. This means that even though G-d is constantly giving life and maintaining the creation in its every detail, we have the choice to oppose His will even though at every moment we are being kept alive by Him.

The Sfas Emes remarks that these are two of the fundamentals of Jewish belief. 1. That G-d is the creator of the universe. 2. That G-d took us out of the land of Egypt. The latter teaches us that free choice is in G-d's hands to give or take as He sees fit, seen by the fact that Pharaoh's free choice was taken from him.

In Exodus(31:17) the verse states that when G-d completed the creation of the world, Shabbos (The Sabbath) was heralded in. It is written that G-d rested (Shovas), meaning that he ceased creating, and that He experienced pleasure (VaYeenofash). How G-d experiences pleasure needs to be understood. His pleasure, so to speak, is from seeing mankind accept His dominion over themselves. Adam and Chava were the only humans alive at that

time, and they ushered in the Shabbos with the words "come let us praise G-d" that we begin the Shabbos evening prayer service with. They recognized G-d and accepted to serve Him. Shabbos observance is the statement that the Jewish People has been making for the last 3300 some odd years that we

believe G-d created and runs the world, and rested on the seventh day. Shabbos observance is synonymous with belief in the creation. The rest and pleasure that G-d, so to speak, experiences is the opposite of the weariness which He feels with those who choose to oppose His will. Pharaoh is the paradigm of the person who makes G-d weary, so to speak.

The lesson we learn from the inspiring words of the Sfas Emes, is that the existence of evil in the world is a function of the preservation of free choice. G-d's existence and interaction in the world is one which we can choose to believe, or not to believe in. G-d remains behind the scenes to the extent that we can even deny His existence, and choose the path we so desire. We can even do others harm without the intervention of G-d. This is all to preserve a pure free choice. If G-d would reveal Himself to the world, all free choice would be eliminated. The choice to believe in G-d, and manifest our belief in Him through our actions brings Him pleasure. G-d shows His ultimate might in His tolerance of evil in the world. However, as the Sfas Emes so beautifully states, the more darkness there is, the greater the appreciation of the light when it shines. Just as the darkness of the slavery and pain in Egypt ended in a great light which continues to enlighten us, so too will the time come when a great light will shine, all questions will fall away, and the mysteries of our dark and painful history will be revealed.

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Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eyra

- "RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'eyra -

Parshas Va'eyra:

Added Vov Reflects Added Recognition of Slavery's Impact

In this weeks Parsha [Shmos 6:6-7] we read "Therefore say to the Children of Israel, I am Hashem and I will take you out from under the sufferings [sivlos] of Egypt and I will save you from your slavery, and I will redeem you with an Outstretched Arm and with great miracles. And I will take you to Me for a Nation, and I will be your G-d, and you will know that I am Hashem your G-d that took you out from beneath the sufferings [sivlos] of Egypt."

We know that in the Torah we have words that are sometimes written with an optional vov (mohlay = full) and sometimes written without an optional vov (chohser = missing). In the two verses above, however, we have an unusual occurrence. Two succeeding verses use the same word with different spellings. In Shmos 6:6, the pasuk writes the word "sivlos" without the vov (chohser) and Shmos 6:7, the pasuk writes "sivlos" with the vov (maleh). This is strange.

Rav Yosef Salant, in his sefer, Be'er Yosef, suggests a beautiful interpretation of this change of spelling: The Jewish people were enduring terrible physical suffering in Egypt and they were very much aware of that suffering. But there was something else going

on of which they were not as keenly aware.

The Jewish People went down to Egypt as great personalities -- the Twelve Tribes of the L-rd and their children who walked in their footsteps. They went down as the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, as great individuals with tremendous purity of intention and great spiritual character and integrity. However, what happens when you take a people and enslave them, take away their human dignity and treat them like animals? Over the course of years, this has a corrosive effect. People who started out with totally pure neshamos (souls), looking like the children of the Patriarchs, after the bondage and the ill-treatment of literally hundreds of years, will eventually change. Their personalities and actions become like those of slaves. From being lofty personalities, they sink to the level of slaves.

The Jewish People experienced two "sivlos" -- two enslavements in Egypt. There was the enslavement of their bodies (that they painfully realized) and then there was the enslavement of their souls and their spirits (which after years, they still failed to recognize). Perhaps the first generation remembered free people, but subsequent generations only knew parents and grandparents that were slaves but did not know how a Jew is supposed to look and act.

This is what the Torah says in last week's Parsha, [2:23-25] "And the Jews cried out to G-d... and G-d remembered the Covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov... and G-d Knew". The Be'er Yosef asks why the pasuk inserts the remembrance of the Covenant with the Patriarchs in the middle of this narrative? He answers, because G-d recognized he was not just dealing with ordinary people but with the descendants of great personalities such as Avrohom, Yitzchak, and Yaakov and yet "Look what happened to them!" He understood that this was part of the tragedy -- how far they had fallen! This, too, is the explanation of the double term [3:7] "I have surely seen (Ra-oh Raiti) the suffering of my people.." I saw (1) their physical enslavement and I saw (2) what happened to their souls.

Therefore, says the Be'er Yosef, we can understand the original pasukim. First it says "I will take you out from the 'sivlos' of Egypt" with the word 'sivlos' spelled incompletely because, unfortunately, they understood that they had one bondage -- the physical enslavement. But then in the next pasuk, where it says "I will take you (again) for Me as a Nation, and I will (again) be your G-d," there it spells 'sivlos' (fully, with a vov) because then they will understand retroactively the dual nature of their enslavement -- a physical one as well as a spiritual one. They will then realize what they once were and what they would once again become... by receiving the Torah.

Levi Named His Children With A Lesson of Brotherhood in Mind

Immediately following Sheni, the Torah seems to go off on a tangent by listing the genealogy of the Jewish people. "The sons of Reuvein are... The sons of Shimon are... And these are the sons of Levi -- Gershon, Kehas, and Merari."

Why, concerning the Children of Levi, does it say "And these are the names of the Children of Levi" whereas concerning Reuvein and Shimon it only says "The sons of Reuvain/Shimon are ..."? The Shela"h HaKodesh asks this question and he answers it with a beautiful thought.

He says the Torah uses the expression "And these are the names of the Children of Levi..." because there was something significant

about the names of Levi's children. We all know that all the tribes were enslaved in Egypt with the exception of the tribe of Levi which was not enslaved.

Picture this. All the tribes are suffering greatly and one tribe is sitting untouched. The Shela"h says that perhaps they were untouched, but they were not unaffected. A Levi, even if he is not himself enslaved, nevertheless feels the pain of his fellow Jew. He shares the burden with his fellow man. In order to make this impression on his children and on his children's children, Levi gave them names that connote this terrible enslavement.

Even though he is not personally enslaved, a Levi wants to indicate, "I feel for you and I know what you are going through; I'm not going to forget it and I'm not going to let my children forget it". I call my first son Gershon because we were chased out (Gershu) from our land. I call my second son Kehas because their teeth became black (Kihu Shinehm) from the pain that they felt as a result of the severity of the enslavement. And I call my third son Merari because of the bitterness (merrirus) they felt from "they embittered their lives".

Therefore, says the Shela"h, the Torah stresses "And these are the names of the children of Levi," to teach us that the names symbolized Levi's message to his children that one can never rest comfortably while another Jew is in pain.

[The fact that that the children were born and named before the enslavement began is not a question because we find that children were named with Ruach HaKodesh (Divine inspiration) based on the future, as we find with Peleg (Bereshis 10:25) who was so named because "in his days the world became divided".]

Levi's Message Taken to Heart by Moshe Rabbeinu

In truth, we find that this message was not lost on the Tribe of Levi. We find that one of Levi's descendants felt this terrible enslavement. We read concerning the Burning Bush [Shmos 3:4] "And Hashem saw that Moshe came over to look and the L-rd called out to him from the midst of the bush..." The Medrash says that the language of the pasuk implies a cause and effect -- because Moshe came over to look, that's why G-d called out to him. Our Sages tell us that when Moshe looked at the Bush he said to himself, here is a situation of destruction, of fire, and yet the Bush is not being destroyed. -- If so, there is hope for the Jewish people. Even though they are surrounded by destruction, there is hope that they will not be destroyed.

Rav Elye Svei (Rosh Yeshiva of the Philadelphia Yeshiva) says that this is what impressed G-d about Moshe. It had been forty years since Moshe left Egypt and had lost contact with his suffering and enslaved brethren. Nevertheless, his first reaction upon seeing the Burning Bush was that there is hope for Klal Yisroel. This demonstrates that for those 40 years Moshe Rabbenu never forgot about Klal Yisroel. He was constantly thinking about his brethren who were suffering in Egypt. He constantly bore the burden of his fellow-man.

The lesson that Levi wanted to teach his children -- Gershon, Kehas, and Merrari -- that they must never forget about the enslavement, was not lost on Moshe Rabbenu. That's what Chaza"l mean when they say that when G-d saw that Moshe came over to look (and according to the Medrash, immediately thought about his suffering brethren), G-d was prompted to call out to Moshe and say

"This is the one who will be My leader!" Only a Jew who worries daily about the situation and the suffering of the Jewish people is worthy to be a leader of the Jewish people.

As long as there is a single Jew in trouble, we're all in trouble. Whenever another Jew anywhere is in pain, we can never reside in peace and in comfort.

Personalities & Sources:

Shela"h HaKodosh -- "The Holy Shelah" Rabbi Yeshaya ben Avraham HaLevi Horowitz named after acronym of his first book -- Shenei Luchos Habris. Lived 1565-1630; Prague - Poland - Eretz Yisroel; Rabbi, Kabbalist, communal leader.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@scn.org

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MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH
PARSHAS VOEIRA
Yechezkel 28:25

This week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in arrogance and self sufficiency. The prophet Yechezkel delivered a powerful message to the Egyptian empire predicting its downfall and total destruction. Yechezkel told the Egyptian Pharaoh, "So says Hashem, 'Behold I will bring the sword against you and I will destroy man and animal from you and the land of Egypt will be desolate and ruined...in response to your saying that the river is yours and you developed it.'" Hashem held the Egyptians severely responsible for their arrogant attitude regarding their prosperity. Egypt is a unique country which relies heavily upon the Nile River for its existence. Rainfall in Egypt is quite infrequent and an elaborate irrigation system is necessary to provide even the basic levels of growth. The Egyptians of those times became well acclimated to the system and began perceiving themselves as self sufficient. Unlike other countries that relied upon rain, Egypt possessed a self-contained system of success. They viewed the Nile River as their provider and even saw their Pharaoh as some type of deity. He was responsible for the efficiency of the system and, by definition, became credited as being the source of their goodness. Pharaoh accepted his title and claimed that the Nile was actually his creation and that he had developed it as the provider of Egypt. Hashem responded to this arrogance and informed Pharaoh that his days were numbered. The time had come for the Egyptian empire to fall and for Egypt to become a totally desolate land.

This ridiculous notion of Pharaoh as a deity has its parallel in this week's sidra. Hashem said to Moshe (Sh'mos 7:15) "Go to Pharaoh in the morning behold he is going out to the water." Moshe Rabbeinu was given explicit instructions to meet Pharaoh away from his palace at the Nile River. Rashi (ad loc) explains that this auspicious meeting place was designated in response to Pharaoh's arrogant claim to the masses. He maintained that he was a deity and was not subject to any physical needs and constraints. He therefore found it necessary to wake early each morning and

travel secretly to the Nile River in order to tend to his physical needs. Hashem chose this exact moment to send His messenger Moshe to Pharaoh to remind him that he was human and that his secret identity was discovered.

This familiar pattern of the Pharaohs extends further and, in truth, a direct corollary can be seen between the earlier Pharaoh and the Pharaoh of Yechezkel's era. In the haftorah Yechezkel describes Egypt's downfall and states, "Therefore behold I (Hashem) am turning against you and your river and I will make the land of Egypt ruined and desolate... Neither the foot of man nor the foot of animal shall pass through it for forty years." Our Chazal (Breishis Rabba 89:9) place special significance on these forty years of desolation. They explain that the phenomena of the famine is mentioned six times in the discussions between Yosef and Pharaoh. This indicates that a total of forty-two years of famine was actually decreed upon Egypt. Tosfos (Breishis 41, 27) explain that Yosef interpreted only seven years of famine because Yosef turned to Hashem and prayed that only seven of those years materialize during his lifetime. Out Chazal (see Rashi 47, 19) add that in actuality only two years of famine transpired because when Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt and blessed Pharaoh with prosperity the famine came to an immediate halt. Chazal explain that forty years of the famine were put on hold and it was now time for this earlier prophecy to be fulfilled.

This powerful insight of Chazal suggests that Egypt was presently suffering for the fault she committed nearly one thousand years earlier. This decree of desolation and destruction had been heavenly ordained to befall Egypt many centuries ago. It follows logically that the earlier Pharaoh must have possessed a similar approach to prosperity as did the latter. Indeed this was the case and we discover a similar scenario in the earlier Egyptian empire. The commentators take note of an intentional inaccuracy in Pharaoh's wording when relating his dream to Yosef. In Pharaoh's true dream he is seen standing above the Nile River, yet in relating this dream Pharaoh alters this point and tells of himself standing next to the river. Chazal comment (see Tanchuma Vaera 8) that Pharaoh truly considered himself a deity who created and developed the Nile River. He was seen standing above it because he maintained, "The river is mine and I have developed it." Pharaoh, however, was embarrassed to reveal this arrogance to Yosef and therefore omitted this nuance.

We now realize the direct corollary between the two Pharaohs, both claiming to be the source of their prosperity. In response to this arrogant attitude of total self dependency Hashem decreed forty two years of destruction and desolation. Through this, Hashem was displaying that it was He who controls prosperity and that everyone, Pharaoh and Egypt included, depend upon Hashem. Pharaoh finally accepted this message when Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt. Mysteriously, when Yaakov came and blessed Pharaoh with prosperity the famine came to a sudden halt. Pharaoh was thereby that convinced that it was Hashem who actually controlled the world and the forty remaining years were suspended until this arrogant attitude would reappear. Now, nearly one thousand years later Egypt returned to her ancient practices. After all the devastating blows Egypt had suffered she finally rebuilt her empire. Pharaoh, following his predecessors now turned to his Nile River and claimed to be the sole source of prosperity. Hashem refused to tolerate such arrogance and decreed upon Egypt her long awaited curse of forty years of desolation. Hashem reminded the Egyptians and the entire world that it

is He who controls the world and that everyone ultimately depends upon Him.

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Date: 1/19/96 10:18am
Subject: * PG LifeLine - Vaera

Project Genesis LifeLine

"It is a tree of life to all who cling to it."

D'var Torah and News from Project Genesis - learn@torah.org
Volume III, Number 16 Vaera

Please pray for the speedy healing of Messodit bat Rivka
and Menachem Azriel Zelig ben Yaffa Miriam

This week's LifeLine is dedicated in memory of Morty (Menashe) Cohen.

"G-d said to Moshe... I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will increase my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." [7:1, 3]

At first glance, it seems that Pharaoh was denied free choice - and if so, many ask, how could Pharaoh be held liable for his actions? What was his sin?

The Ramban (Nachmanides) and the Seforno both offer the following explanation (the Ramban actually provides two answers, saying that both are true). It is clear, they say, that Pharaoh did not want to repent. When the Torah recounts the first five plagues, it does not say that G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart - only that it was hardened, meaning that he did it himself. If at any time Pharaoh had desired repentance, then he certainly would have been given the opportunity to do so.

Why, then, did G-d harden Pharaoh's heart? Because after being struck with the first five plagues, Pharaoh would have been forced to release the Israelites not because it was G-d's will, but because he was unable to withstand further punishment. He would have been unable to resist, as his servants said to him, "do you not yet realize that Egypt is lost?" [10:7] And this, concludes the Seforno, is not repentance at all.

If last week's Dvar Torah discussed free will as the distinction between human beings and other creatures, the Seforno this week helps to point out what - in Jewish philosophy - "free will" really entails. For as one subscriber quite correctly pointed out, animals do many things only "because they feel like it," such as playing games. "And there are indications that cats," continued the writer, "will hunt or not because they feel like it - as long as they have sufficient food." All of this is true.

The Jewish understanding of free will, on the other hand, is not our ability to choose between any two random actions. Rather it is the opportunity to decide for ourselves whether to do good, or bad. My family once owned a cat that preferred hunting over playing with yarn. I will save you the details; suffice it to say that it brought an unusual assortment of small trophies home through the cat door. Now did my father punish the cat? Of course not - it's "the predatory instinct" that "comes naturally" to all cats in some

degree. But were we to see a child harming an animal, we would say that he is "being cruel", and must be taught to be kind.

"The heavens and the earth give testimony for Me upon you this day, that life and death I have placed before you, the blessing and the curse, and you will choose life..." [Dev. 30:19] Even if he had tried to do so, Dr. Dolittle could not have made this verse meaningful to the many animals he spoke with in the series of children's books. And the verse, according to Jewish sources, explains why it is that humans alone must have free choice: in order that G-d be able to reward us, for choosing life.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT II: In case you missed the recent notice, the subscribers file for the Ramchal list mysteriously disappeared from our host system. We'll be maintaining a local backup for the future, but we need you to subscribe again if you'd like to be part of the class. Just send mail, as follows: To: majordomo@torah.org (The automatic mail software)
Subject: none or anything, because majordomo will ignore it
subscribe ramchal. That's all you need to do, and we appreciate your patience and understanding.

The Drasha file was also corrupted, but we were able to recover the vast majority. If you did not receive Rabbi Kamenetzky's message this week, then you were quite possibly dropped - please subscribe again by replacing "ramchal" with "drasha" in the procedure described above. Thanks again! All classes are free of charge - but Project Genesis needs your support. If you are gainfully employed and enjoy subscribing to several of our lists, please consider a tax-deductible donation to support our programs. Please send email with the keyword "DONATIONS" for further information, including tax-deductions for Canadian readers.

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Date: 1/22/96 7:02am
Subject: SICHOT VA'ERA

PARASHAT VA'ERA
SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT" A

Knowledge of God
Summarized by Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon

"And God spoke to Moshe, and said to him, I am the Lord. And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov by the name of God Almighty, but by my name, the Lord, I was not familiar (lo noda'ti) to them." (Shemot 6:2-3)

Rashi's comment on these verses is well-known: "The Torah does not say 'I did not make myself known to them' but rather 'I was not familiar to them.' I was not known by My attribute of truth, for which I am called 'Lord' - true to my word, for I made promises to them which I have not yet fulfilled."

There is a difference between knowledge of God and

familiarity with God. God appeared to the Avot, but they had primarily an intellectual grasp of Him. Bnei Yisrael are granted not only intellectual knowledge of God, but also familiarity with Him.

The Rambam opens his Mishneh Torah with the words: "The most basic foundation and the pillar of all wisdom is to know that there is a First Cause" - from the Exodus and Har Sinai onwards for all generations.

Today it is difficult for us to reach the level of "familiarity" with God. There are a few who manage to reach the level of "knowledge" of God - knowing Him in an intellectual sense, but not the level of "familiarity." Their level of knowing God does not involve true communion, genuine closeness.

Yet we are commanded to know God, and must strive to reach the level of "noda'ti" - familiarity. How are we to fulfill this mitzva? One important method is explained by the Ba'al Ha-Tanya and others, who teach that we achieve this through learning Torah. Even though we cannot grasp God's actual thought, the Torah is identified with His thought. When a person studies Torah, he is studying God's thought, and God's will becomes entrenched in him. Obviously, in order for this to happen, we have to invest our hearts completely in our learning, such that it is not merely an intellectual pursuit and somehow 'external' to ourselves. We have to feel God's voice and thought and will emanating from our study, and through this - with God's help - we can reach the level of "noda'ti."

(Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat, Parashat Va'era 5750.
Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

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