



Parsha Journeys: Parshat Va'eira: Promised Redemption

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

When Hashem commanded Moshe to go to Pharaoh, he wondered if the king would listen to him since even his own people hadn't listened to him. Hashem assured him that Aharon would be his spokesman and assist him in his mission. Aharon was 83 years old and Moshe was 80 when they set out to confront Pharaoh. Aharon cast down his rod and it turned into a serpent. The Egyptian sorcerers immediately duplicated the miracle. But then Aharon's rod swallowed the Egyptian's rods. Still Pharaoh wasn't impressed. He said, "So your magic was a tad better than ours, but this is not any reason to let the Jews out." After each plague, Pharaoh acknowledged his errors and asked Moshe to pray. But once the plague ceased, his heart turned to stone again.

When Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh, he said, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to him?" Therefore the very first plagues were designed to prove to him Hashem's omnipotence and divine providence. Aharon, not Moshe, hit the river to bring the first plague of blood. Moshe wanted to avoid being ungrateful to the river, which had protected him as a baby. If Moshe displayed gratitude to an inanimate object, how much more so should we be grateful to people for their kindness. Similarly, Rav Gustman, a brilliant *rosh*

yeshiva, would water the plants and bushes outside his *yeshiva* in Rechavya every day as an act of gratitude to the plants and roots that sustained him in the forest during WWII.

The first and second plagues began at the Nile river, which the Egyptians worshiped. Now their idol would do the will of Hashem. The second plague produced thousands of frogs that overran the land of Egypt. But when they got to the border of Goshen, an open miracle happened and they stopped. The Ohr Hachaim points out that Pharaoh's responses to Moshe after the plagues didn't depend on whether he believed in Hashem but on whether or not he considered his life in danger. Whenever he feared for his life he offered to relent. Otherwise he remained adamant. The first time Pharaoh capitulates was during the plague of arov when he feared for his life. Finally during the plague of the firstborns, Pharaoh's resistance broke down completely.

After the third plague of lice, Pharaoh's sorcerers had to concede that these were not magic acts but an act of Hashem. The demons that they had used to replicate the first two plagues had no ability to rule over something smaller than lice. They had no choice but to acknowledge that it was the finger of Hashem. During the fourth plague, hordes of wild beasts

and crawling creatures roamed the land. The Egyptians couldn't even feel safe behind their locked doors because they had dirt floors and the snakes and scorpions swarmed around them. Not only did the plague not touch Goshen, even if a Jew ventured out of its borders, no beast harmed him. The land was devastated. The animals destroyed the crops, stripped the trees, and even took infants out of the cradle. After the plague ended, Moshe prayed that the animals should leave Egypt, unlike the frogs who died in the land, so that the Egyptians shouldn't benefit from the hides and leather of the dead beasts.

During the fifth plague of hail, Moshe informed Pharaoh that he deserved to die but Hashem would allow him to survive so that he would recognize Hashem's greatness and proclaim it to the world. This was ultimately the purpose of all the plagues, universal recognition of Hashem's sovereignty. There was no hail in Goshen and that too was a great miracle because the atmosphere and conditions of the city weren't different than the rest of Egypt. What was miraculous about the plague of hail was that the ice pellets contained fire and it rained down although fire usually rises up. The second miracle was that fire and water made peace to fulfill the will of Hashem.

The Centrality of Torah Study Fire and Light #13 Part 1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Thought, speech, and action are the garments of the soul. These garments are individually fitted. Hashem gives each person a unique package of characteristics and abilities that he will need to accomplish his purpose in life. But there are two garments that are universal, *yirah* (fear) and *anavah* (humility). They parallel the forces of Leah and Rachel. Leah had a strong sense of destiny. She could see beyond herself. Rachel was practical. She could uplift the world. Leah relates to *yirah* while Rachel relates to *anavah*. Both forces were actualized through Yaakov and Yisrael.

The two daughters of Lot, and the nations they gave birth to, Amon and Moav, parallel anger and desire. About them it says, "The

woman who causes him to stray, impoverishes him." In what sense do anger and desire make a person poor? A person who is overcome with desire seeks to fill the empty space within him with physical things. The more he has, the more he feels he's lacking. Rising above desire means being satisfied with what one has. The Gemara says stepping on bread crumbs causes poverty. The Gra explains this rationally. If you don't appreciate what you have, if you don't look at the food you have as being a gift from Hashem, then you're truly poor.

Anger also impoverishes. When your inner voices says, "This isn't the way it should be," it's expressing a lack of appreciation for the

way things are. This is the opposite of Torah, which engenders movement and continuity and actualizes our potential both in this world and the next. The *yetzer hara* comes from the side of impurity. In order to vitalize itself, it needs to latch on to something holy. There's no way you would listen to the evil inclination if it told you outright to do something bad. So it dresses itself up in a veneer of *kedusha*. The greater the *kedusha* the more the *sitra achra* (satan) will try to draw its energy. But it won't work with Torah. The Torah's holiness is so great that it can't be redefined, or redirected. The only way to silence the *yetzer hara* is by bringing Torah into the picture. It will keep you from falling. Not only because it's so specific, but because the passion, warmth, and energy

Continued on Page 2



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Continued from Page 1

it evokes will overpower any negativity.

The verse in Tehilim says, "Salvation is far from the wicked." One would think this is because they don't deserve it, but the verse continues, "Because they haven't investigated your *chukim*." These are the laws that don't have easily interpreted reasons. When you play by the rules of the game, by the limitations that Hashem imposed, then everything falls into place and you see and feel that all of your strengths are being

focused in the direction that makes you a better person and the world a better place.

The soul is compared to a flame as the verse says, "*Ner Hashem nishmat adam*." Its nature is to rise upward. The Torah touches that deep place within us. The Gemara says when the great sages were studying Torah they were surrounded by fire. It says about Rav Yochanan that the birds in heaven would be burnt by the air that came forth from his mouth. In the Beis Hamikdash, the fire from heaven

consumed and elevated not only the offering from the altar but everything the person brought with it: the repentance, the confession, the identification of the animal side of self, and the resolution not to repeat the sin. Just as the fire of the sacrifices purified the person, the Torah purifies our animal soul. There are different ways that this can happen. *Ol malchut shamayim* refers to the function of the yoke which is to grab the animal's neck and lead it where it has to go. Similarly, Torah directs our animal side to the side of *kedusha*.

Accepting Criticism

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hanoch Teller

The human inclination to deny responsibility for wrongs committed is deeply rooted. The first example of this is in *Bereishit*. Hashem confronted Adam after he sinned with the Tree of Knowledge. Immediately, Adam shifted the blame to Chava, "The woman you gave me made me do it." When Hashem confronted Chava she said, "The snake duped me." People instinctively deflect criticism.

Instead of defending yourself or pointing out the critic's failings, reflect upon what the person has said. Even if you think it was overstated, there may be a kernel of truth there. Take what you've heard and use it for self-growth. A person should train himself to feel gratitude, not animosity, towards his critics. Ultimately their words may be your catalyst to greater spiritual achievement.

The Alter of Kelm once said, people are ready to pay huge sums of money to top doctors to heal their physical ailments. Should we be any less grateful to someone who seeks to

heal our spiritual failings? Rav Noach Weinberg noted, if someone would point out to you that you dropped your wallet filled with money you'd be so appreciative. You should feel the same towards someone who gives you constructive criticism. Rabbi Pliskin explains that as a rookie businessman will eagerly welcome any tips or helpful suggestion that come his way, a person should be grateful for any pointers that will help him on his spiritual quest. Refusing to listen to criticism cuts off any possibility of improvement. The Rambam writes in *Hilchot Teshuva* that denial is a very serious obstacle to repentance. If people stop criticizing you, it's a strong warning sign that they've given up hope that you can change.

The Gemara in *Sotah* expounds the verse, "The speaker of falsehood shall not stand before my eyes." He will not have a place in the World to Come. People usually lie to cover up and impress others. A liar lacks fear of heaven. His lying implies that Hashem's impression of him is less important to him than

his impression on people. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* says that the punishment of a liar is that even when he finally speaks the truth no one will listen to him. He destroys his reputation, which is very hard to repair. A liar thinks everyone else lies too and will never trust other people.

A little charity is still charity, a little kindness is still kindness, but a little truth is an out and out lie. We have to be careful to be precise and accurate and avoid all exaggeration. Any minor alterations to the truth is no longer truth. Rav Kamenetzky objected to people writing on wedding invitations, the *chuppah* will be at six o'clock sharp, when it usually began much later. He himself was very particular that any *simcha* he made would begin precisely at the time stated. The Torah says, "*Midbar sheker tirchak*," Stay far from falsehood. Truth is the seal of Hashem. May we merit to follow in His ways.