

Diversion and Defensiveness: Parshat Vaeira

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

When Moshe and Aharon first approached Bnei Yisrael and told them that Hashem had seen their suffering and would redeem them from Egypt, Bnei Yisrael believed them. Just a short time later, Moshe transmitted a fuller message of the process of salvation. Yet now, Bnei Yisrael “did not heed Moshe because of shortness of breath and hard work.” What caused this change of heart?

Hashem tells Moshe to go back to Pharaoh and tell him to send Bnei Yisrael from his land. Moshe argues that if Bnei Yisrael didn't listen to him, *kal v'chomer* (a fortiori) Pharaoh won't listen to him. He concludes by saying that he has “sealed lips,” a comment that seems to have no bearing on the main argument.

Rabbi Weinberg contends that Moshe's objection that he is tongue-tied is exactly where it belongs, at the end of the argument. Moshe's inability to speak is a result of Bnei Yisrael's not believing in him rather than the cause. If I can't convince Bnei Yisrael, argued Moshe, what can I possibly say that would convince Pharaoh? Further, the Chatam Sofer adds, that if Bnei Yisrael don't believe in the promise to their forefathers and don't get up and leave Egypt on their own on the strength of that promise, Pharaoh will argue that he certainly doesn't have to send them out. If Bnei Yisrael don't believe in Hashem, writes Rabbi Rebo, how will Pharaoh believe in Him?

Rabbi Dunner explains that the heavier workload Pharaoh placed on the Jews was

also part of Hashem's plan. Had Moshe succeeded in his initial request, Bnei Yisrael could have ascribed the power either to Moshe as a powerful messenger or to Pharaoh himself, who now chose to free his slaves. Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to put their faith totally in Him. Only when they would have given up all hope in the human element would Hashem intercede.

Rabbi Egbi, citing the *Lev Eliyahu*, explains that it is relatively easy to believe intellectually that there is a God Who created and runs the world. But to continue in that faith, to feel it viscerally and make it part of your life is much more difficult. If an obstacle comes in the way, the faith may dissipate. When faith takes the easier way out, the result is akin to idol worship, because you sacrificed your faith in Hashem for physical or material convenience.

How can one bolster one's *emunah*? One needs quiet time and solitude to trace the patterns in one's life and in the world, and eventually reach the truth and belief in the Creator. When Pharaoh added to the workload of Bnei Yisrael, they had even less time to contemplate. So although they believed Moshe's initial report, they were now stuck in a rut. This is the hint of the idolatry that the *medrash* alludes to as preventing the Jews from believing Moshe's message. This is also the source of all *avodah zarah*. Scientists can trace the universe back and show multiple causes to how the world came about in its present state. But at some point, they stop because it interferes with the theories they desire to keep. If Bnei Yisrael were so overwhelmed by the stress of their work that

they couldn't internalize Hashem's message, how could Pharaoh who had to keep up the constant demanding charade of being a god absorb the message?

We can now understand Moshe's argument. If Bnei Yisrael don't believe, *kal v'chomer* Pharaoh won't. To understand Moshe's insistence, we must first understand his love for the Jewish people, writes *Mikdash Halevi*. Even hitting the rock instead of speaking to it, a digression that cost him entrance into Eretz Yisrael, was for the sake of the people. Had the rock complied, it would reflect badly on Bnei Yisrael to whom Hashem speaks and who often fail to comply with His will. But by hitting the rock, Moshe could argue that Bnei Yisrael would also comply if they were hit.

So too, if Pharaoh should listen to Hashem, how would it look for Bnei Yisrael? Hashem responds by ensuring that He will harden Pharaoh's heart. This was not unfair, since Pharaoh had already indicated that he didn't want to listen. If he were to repent, it would be an lacking *teshuvah*, based on fear. Moshe teaches us that just as the people need to believe in their leader, the leader must also believe in the people he is representing, love them, fight for them and protect them.

We are a nation of believers. When life gets so difficult that it seems we cannot breathe, that is when we need to pause, take that deep breath, look Heavenward, and live by the faith that Hashem is always in control.

The Book of Shemot- Part 2

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Zohar in the beginning of *Shemot* quotes a verse in Tehilim, “*Lechu chazu mifalot Hashem asher sam shamot ba'aretz*. Go and look what Hashem accomplishes in this world. He creates desolation in this world.” The Zohar continues, “*Al tikri shamot eleh shemot*.” Do not read it as *shamot* (desolation) but as *shemot* (names). The *Shelah* explains the connection. Every person has a name that defines his spiritual potential.

Man's mission on this world is to develop his strengths in a way that will bring honor to Hashem's name. Man is meant to become a chariot for the Divine Presence, a place where the *Shechinah* can rest. When a person develops his potential fully we can say that his deeds and his name correspond to each other. This is why we find the Torah restates Moshe's name when he came to the burning bush, to tell us that who he is and who his name is are

one and the same.

Shamot and *shemot* are two sides of one coin. Man is free to choose not to develop his potential and even to descend even lower than he started. People have latent strengths and Hashem wants them to develop. If they don't, He will bring desolation to enable them to get there. This is the story of mankind's history and all of Jewish history. When we discuss the

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the development of the Jewish nation, the appropriate name of the book that tells their story is *Shemot*. The book of *Shemot* tells us, that we can bring out our potential. Each of us can be a chariot for the Divine Name. It will require a lot of hard work. It may take a lifetime to accomplish. But it's our ultimate mission.

We can look at Esav and see that although he made all the wrong choices, he got his inheritance. Yet we still don't have our inheritance. We are building our names and developing our potential. We are creating the vessel that will be able to receive the great light of Hashem. Rav Kitov draws an analogy between the 70 people going down to Egypt and Noach and his children entering the ark.

In both cases, a new stage in the history of mankind was beginning. When Hashem destroyed the generation of the flood, it was an indication that their way of life was bringing them to *shamot* (desolation). But there was Noach and his family and a select group of animals who stuck to morality. They would start a new era. The generation of the flood was destroyed because they lacked kindness and selflessness. To rebuild the world, Noach had to go to the other extreme and busy himself with chesed in the ark day and night in order to lay a proper foundation for a new beginning.

The same thing happened in Egypt. One would think that a country rife with immorality and decadence would be the least likely place for the holy Jewish nation to be born. But if

they could withstand such impurity and corruption and emerge ennobled, they would be able to withstand anything. They could go out into the world and bring it to its purpose. The Jewish people went through terrible physical suffering in exile because when the physical is not at the forefront the spiritual can develop. Egypt was the crucible that forged the Jewish people into the vessel that could accept the Torah.

When Yaakov and his children went down to Egypt, Hashem said, "I will go down with you and I will take you out." The Egyptian exile was not about *shamot*, punishment. It was about *shemot*, building potential. It may have appeared like destruction but in reality it was an evolving process.

Tree of Life: Protecting the Covenant – Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

People sometimes ask, "How can I know what my true mission is?" Try to find expression for the goodness inside you and look for ways to let your inherent sanctity come forth. Then you will find your destiny. Hashem will make it clear to you.

The Torah is compared to water. Everything depends on it to grow. Just as rain quenches the thirst of the earth, a thinking person's soul is satisfied through Torah. One can break the *yetzer hara* through Torah as Chazal say, "I made the *yetzer hara* and I made Torah as its spice." If you let the Torah season your view of life you can sweeten the evil within you.

All of the sin offerings were offered on the north side of the *Beit Hamikdash*. One of the names of the *yetzer hara* is *tzfoni* (northerner), as the verse says "I will distance the one from the north from you." The north side receives the least light and is a symbol of

concealment of Hashem. The *yetzer hara's* way is to conceal sin and transgression. When a person sins, he either sees the rationalization he's created or he sees nothing. He just acts on instinct. The *yetzer hara* will say, "There's nothing so sinful about this act." It can find a way to permit anything. Ignorance makes you an easy target. You can do battle by learning and sticking to what's right. The more you know the more you can become a master of response. Every child could know Hashem. It's our job to introduce them.

Most of our sins are peripherally related to speech. Therefore the key way to control the *yetzer hara* is to keep our mouths closed. Know what you're allowed and not allowed to say. And until you're sure what you're saying is constructive and coming from the *yetzer tov*, don't say it. In Tehilim the pasuk says, "*Netzor leshoncha me'ra*. Guard your tongue from evil." Why does so much evil come through the

tongue? The Satan draws its energy from holiness. The ability to justify what you're doing comes from a spark of sanctity concealed in the evil act. Speech is the most definitive and potentially holiest aspect of who we are. This is why the *yetzer hara* aims at this critical area.

If you see the *yetzer hara* standing before you, stand up too. Your weapons are truth and Torah. Passivity leads to failure. The *yetzer hara* will ask you to do something that's forbidden and because you're carrying around some shame from the previous day you may go for it. Then it's only a short way from there to any of the things that address themselves to people who claim they are limited. You could look at yourself and say, "I can do it." You have to be willing to fight, though it may not be easy.