

## Blood's Blight: Parshat Va'eirah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Why did the ten plagues begin with striking the Nile and why did the water specifically turn to blood? Further, we know Hashem wanted *Bnei Yisroel* to recognize that Hashem was the One True God, but why did the Egyptians also need to know this? In addition, why did Pharaoh not call on Moshe to remove this plague as he did with the other? The *Midrash* tells us that if a Jew and an Egyptian were drinking water from the same cup, the Jew got water while the Egyptian got blood. Only by paying the Jew did he get water. What is the significance of this?

It was important to start by destroying the belief in the primary god of Egypt, the Nile, notes the *Ben Melech*. The Nile, writes Rabbi Kluger, was the backbone of the Egyptian culture as it irrigated their land making the Egyptians feel self-sufficient. Hashem wants a connection with mankind. When Moshe was leading *Bnei Yisroel* to the Land, he told them, in *Eretz Yisroel*, you will need to rely on Hashem and pray to Him for sustenance. In this respect, the Nile represented the antithesis of *tefillah*. *Bnei Yisroel* were so steeped in the culture of Egypt that the message that Hashem was in control had to be taught to them. Each of the plagues was meant to drive this point home.

The plagues were meant to act both as a plague for the Egyptians/*venogaf* Hashem *beMitzrayim nagof* while still being a means of healing for *Bnei Yisroel/verafo* (Isaiah 19:22), writes the *Mima'amakim*. According to mystical sources, the ten plagues represented a recreation of the world, each plague representing one of the utterances of creation meant to bring the Egyptians to a recognition of the Creator. Since they refused to accept

Hashem, the original utterances became plagues for them. In contrast, for *Bnei Yisroel* who were destined to accept those utterances, the plagues were a blessing.

It was necessary to strike first at the god of Egypt, the Nile, and at the super god, Pharaoh, writes Rabbi M. Druck. Hashem proved to Pharaoh that he controlled nothing, although, because his palace was unaffected by the plague, he felt he was still in charge of his home. Therefore, when Pharaoh turned and entered his house, he felt no compassion for his suffering countrymen and refused to pray for them.

Pharaoh witnesses the evidence of Hashem's existence and immanence in the world, but he refused to recognize Him. Do we see God's hand directing events both big and small? Do we turn to Him in prayer, or do we turn to the false security of our homes and jobs? If we do not turn to Hashem, are we any better than Pharaoh?

The Egyptian saw blood; the Jew saw water. Hashem created not only the one unified world, but an individual, unique world for each of us. If we both see the sun, it is because it's shining in both our worlds. The same sea can drown the Egyptians while transporting *Bnei Yisroel* across. While in man's reality, two opposites cannot exist simultaneously, in God's world, they can and do. Therefore, God can give His personal oversight to each of us in individual worlds that overlap, for Hashem is *Elokhecha/your* (singular) personal God, adds Rabbi Wolbe.

A Jew and an Egyptian could obtain different liquids from the same bowl, for Hashem created the world for each individual. When we

recognize Hashem's personal involvement in each of our needs, we begin to feel tremendous gratitude to our Creator. Everything that happens to us has been orchestrated specifically for our personal benefit. Since no two people are alike, each of us must work with what Hashem has given us to perfect our world. As Rav N. Horowitz writes, by making us each different, Hashem created a world where we learn to live with others, to be patient and compassionate, and perfect a world Hashem has purposely left incomplete, so that we can experience the joy of accomplishment.

Now we understand Hashem's afflicting the Nile as the first plague, but why use the medium of blood? The *Hegyonah shel Torah*, explains, First, Hashem was repaying the Egyptians measure for measure for treating Jewish blood lightly. Secondly, in order to avenge the spilled Jewish dam/blood, the Egyptians had to pay *damim/money* to atone for the blood. Since there is a relationship between money and blood, and since Hashem is extremely exacting, Pharaoh was not punished with blood in his own house, writes Rabbi Druck citing the *Meshech Chochmah*. Since he incurred some expenses while raising Moshe in the palace, he was now repaid for those expenditures.

This first plague, while bringing knowledge of and faith in Hashem to the forefront, also teaches us that each of us has a personal relationship with Hashem that attests to the value of every individual while still infusing us with care and love for each other.



## Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 16

### Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The Ohr Hachaim says, *Lo yiyhe lecha...* means refraining from placing obstacles in front of *kabalot ha'or ha'elyon* - the acceptance of the heavenly light in this world and in the World to Come. This is the greatest pleasure and joy that a person can experience. If you do create hindrances, it's as if you separate yourself from the greatest gift of joy, meaning, and fulfillment that one can experience in this world. This really defines for us the second commandment. It's about choosing to do the right thing. We're supposed to do good because it will benefit us

for eternity. Running after physicality blocks us from being able to live life to its fullest. We can feel it at moments in time even in this world. But in the World to Come it will be an unending reality, intensifying again and again.

The Seforno tells us, one cannot worship idols if one remembers that they are just servants of the king. One could look at the sun and see its greatness and respect it as a creation of Hashem. But one can never forget that it is just an emissary, and our full allegiance belongs solely to the Creator of it all. Hashem is always present even when He seems concealed as it

says in *Shir Hashirim*, "He stands behind the wall and looks via the slits of the window." We may not see Him, but he cares about us and is looking out for us in ways we cannot fathom. *Poel tzedek* is about choosing good. When challenges confront us we must know we cannot understand but there is a reason. Our question shouldn't be why but rather how the painful test could connect us closer to Hashem. This includes davening that Hashem give us the strength to face our challenges and that He reveal Himself so that we can do his will without any obstacles.

## Mishlei: Wisdom and Children

### Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

"The way of the wicked is like a dark fog..." A person can go through life blindly, doing things without thinking, and tripping on stones along the way. There are people in jail for white collar crimes who never planned to be imprisoned. You don't know where bad choices will take you. Nobody plans to ruin their marriage. No husband intended to be absent emotionally nor did a wife plan on being critical or emasculating. If you're walking in the dark without goals, you could falter and end up in situations you never envisioned.

"My son listen to my words, incline your ear to my words." Hearing is passive, inclining your ear is active. This refers to active listening, being able to repeat what you heard in different words showing that you heard. Here Shlomo Hamelech talks about listening with heart. Do I really hear what this person is saying? Teach your children to actively listen, to try to ascertain the motivations and feelings of people.

"Don't let them move from your eyes, guard them within your heart." When you hear words of wisdom you have to keep them in your heart and question how to apply them. "For they are life for all who find them and healing for his flesh." Everyone seeks to be more alive. Nobody wants to spend their lives in shades of passive grey. The primary mental illness nowadays is anxiety which has to do with fear of making mistakes. The connection

between body and mind is very real. Halacha states that if a woman is about to give birth on Shabbat, she can take whoever she wants with her to allay her anxiety. Anxiety wears away at your body. People don't realize that being really alive is taking your choices moment by moment and choosing good. It doesn't have to do with external success. Do things that connect you, that achieve things that are real, and learn the words that will tell you how to do it.

"Guard your heart more than anything else, because that's where the result is, in terms of life." Remember what you learned. Let it move from your mind to your heart, because the heart is the captain of the ship. You can do this by using imagery. If someone tells you, "Care for the poor," that doesn't tell you anything. Telling the story of someone who is in real need and needs your help touches your heart. Rav Nachman said, at the end of time, the only thing that will touch people's heart will be a story, because we will be so deadened and calloused by the suffering of exile.

"Take yourself away from verbal distortion and put devious lips far away from you." People create their own narratives all the time. Let's say a child is doing badly in school. He's acting out, hitting other kids, has learning difficulties. The parents' narrative might be- "My son isn't understood. They treat him as a case, not as a human." The kids victim's mother's narrative might be- "My son came home today from school and he couldn't move

his shoulder. He told me a boy threw a chair at him and he doesn't know why he sees him as his enemy." The teacher's narrative might be- "I'm thinking of leaving education. There are kids in my class that I can't help and I don't know what to do." All three narratives are different, yet they are all partially true. Truth is the whole picture. Keep your lips from narratives that aren't the whole picture and aren't true. Rav Tzvi Meir says, to judge favorably you have to have depth. It's easy to see negativity. Be broad enough to recognize that there are multiple sides to any narrative. Distance yourself from the false narratives.

"Let your eyes look ahead, let your eyelids look straight ahead." A chacham is someone who sees the logical outcome of events. His eyes look straight. "*Chacham einav b'rosho*-The wise man's eyes are on his head." He lets his mind navigate. "Weigh the course of your feet and then your course will be established. Don't go to the right or left. Keep your feet from evil." Right is too extreme while left is too permissive. Don't be extreme in any direction. See the logical outcome. Too much justice is living with constant tension and too little is not caring enough. Too much chesed is being manipulative while too little is caring only about yourself. Neither one will give you depth and peace of mind. How do you know what is extreme? To quote the Rambam, you need to know *halacha* but you also need to strive for *mah hu rachum*- Just as Hashem is compassionate, so too seek to emulate Him.