

Parshas Vaera

For the week ending 28 Teves 5756
19 & 20 January 1996

Mazel Tovs to:

Contributing Editor Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair and family on the birth of his son
and

Production Designer Lev Seltzer and his wife Ella on the birth of their "Bachor" (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 Sfas Emes)

THE COMPANY WE KEEP

"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*)

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Production Design: Lev Seltzer

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*.

Haftorah: Yechezkel 28:25 - 29:21

THE BUTLER DID IT!

“Behold I am over you, Pharaoh!” (29:3)

There once was a butler of a large mansion who decided one day to impersonate his master. A guest was due to arrive who had never met the real master. The butler, bedecked himself in his master's finest clothes, and greeted the guest in a fake aristocratic manner, ostentatiously showing-off the enormous mansion, its priceless art collection, and the acres of sumptuous gardens. The butler was having a grand time 'lording it up' until the real master appeared

on the scene, and roundly put the butler in his place. Similarly, Pharaoh did not stint from self-aggrandizement, conducting himself as supreme overlord, answerable to none. He even made himself into a god and proclaimed “I did not know Hashem.” Therefore Hashem reminds Pharaoh “Behold I am over you, Pharaoh!” - “Know that I rule over you, and you are in My hands to do with as I see fit - you are no more than a usurping butler!” (Based on Kochav M'Yaakov)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Mah Yedius-`ushlyn
“How Beloved...”

“להתענג בתענוגים, ברורים ושלו ודגים” - ...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.

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