

VAEIRA



INSPIRATION

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FROM THE PAGES OF OU PRESS

CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV

ויאמר אליו אני ה' (שמות ו:ב)

and He said to him, "I am the Lord."
(Shemos 6:2)

Chazal point out that God was very critical of Moses' argument with Him, and that a similar criticism was leveled against Solomon (Shemos Rabbah 6:1). The Midrash explains that the Torah enjoined Israelite kings from having too many wives so they would not sway the king from wholeheartedly serving God (Deut. 17:17). Solomon, however, maintained that this rationale did not apply to him; his belief in God was ironclad and could never be weakened no matter how many women he wed. Chazal indicate that at the moment Solomon decided to violate this command of the Torah, the letter yud from the word יָרָבָה in the phrase וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ נָשִׁים, and he should not take many wives for himself, complained to God that Solomon ignored this mitzvah. In the Hebrew language the yud is the letter prefix for a verb that indicates the future tense. The yud argued that while initially Solomon's heart would indeed be unaffected, Solomon did not recognize that in the future this situation could change. When he became older and weaker and his mental abilities were no

longer as sharp, we learn that his wives indeed swayed Solomon's heart (I Kings 11:3) and that altars to false gods were built in his palace by these wives. The yud demonstrated that even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, could fall prey to what he was certain he could avoid.

This same yud criticized Moses because in the course of his argument with God, Moses made a mistake that involved this same letter. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh for the first time, He did not reveal Himself with the י-ה-ו-ה, the Shem Havayah representing all three tenses: past, present and future. God told Moses only of the past: the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (3:6) and the future, I will be (3:14). By omitting the part of His name which represents the present, God in effect said that while Jews were still being persecuted, the present cannot be understood.

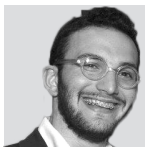
At the burning bush, God had already warned Moses that Pharaoh would not let the people go immediately (3:19) and that there would be much tribulation until the redemption. Moses should accustom himself to relating to God only via the yud, the promise of the future redemption, and the heh representing

the past. Despite being warned, Moses did not accept this idea. When Pharaoh rejected Moses' message, the Torah says Moses returned to complain to God (6:22) using the name י-ה-ו-ה. The Torah used this Name here because Moses was not satisfied with the Name אהיה; he wanted immediate redemption, arguing, Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? Since I have come to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has harmed this people, and You have not saved Your people (5:23).

Both Moses and Solomon emphasized the present over the future. God, through His attribute of justice, would have killed Moses for his apparent impudence. However, since Moses was merely reflecting the anxiety of the Israelites, the divine attribute of mercy had pity on Moses, and God forgave him. He would now reveal Himself in the present through open miracles, with the name י-ה-ו-ה.

While God told Moses that He would begin the redemption immediately, He at the same time contrasted Moses' behavior unfavorably with the forefathers (see Rashi on 6:3). God reproved

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FULFILLING YOUR MISSION



Reading this week's parsha, I found something very interesting. Throughout this parsha, we see the names of Moshe and Aaron a lot, but the Torah keeps on switching the order of their names.

The famous question on this is: How can we say Aaron's name before Moshe's, if the Torah tells us that there will never be anyone as great as Moshe Rabbeinu?

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l gives an answer to this question. He says that it is clear to us that Moshe Rabbeinu was on a higher level. However, both Moshe and Aaron were equal in the sense that each of them had fulfilled their potential in this world.

Hashem does not compare us to Moshe, rather He wants us to be the best person we can possibly be. Hashem wants us to

push ourselves and do our hishtadlus, to put in our work in order to live a successful life. That is why we are allowed to put Aaron's name before Moshe's name. Because he fulfilled his mission in this world, he was equal to his brother, the Anav Mikol Adam, Moshe Rabbeinu.

Akiva Garfinkel is the teen president of Midwest NCSY.

FIVELIGHTS

5 INSPIRATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS ON THE PARSHA

1

We are told 15 times in chapters 7 through 14 that God “hardened” Pharaoh’s heart. People often ask: How could remove Pharaoh’s free will like that, basically compelling the king to continue his acts of evil? One explanation is that “hardened his heart” means that God strengthened Pharaoh’s resolve. That is, God restored Pharaoh’s ability to do what he wanted without feeling coerced by the plagues. However, it is also possible that God really **did** remove Pharaoh’s free will.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 6:3) tells us that **it’s possible for a person to willfully commit so many sins that he will no longer be given the opportunity to repent.** Several verses support this idea, including II Chronicles 36:16, *“They mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets until the wrath of God mounted up against His people until there was no remedy.”* We see that it is possible to accrue so many sins that one’s situation is irreparable.

The Ramchal tell us similarly. In Derech Hashem (II, 3.6), he says that there is a limit to the amount of evil that God permits a human to perform. When a person reaches that limit, he receives no more chances and God simply destroys him as per Job 20:22, *“When the measure is full, he will be constrained.”*

The Talmud says, *“If a person desires to sin, the door is open for him”* (Yoma 38b). Evil people are often permitted to succeed in their misdeeds because it leads to their own destruction. Whether God strengthened his free will or impeded it, this is what ultimately happened to Pharaoh.

2

Moshe told Pharaoh that he would “entreat” God to remove the frogs (Shemos 8:5), after which he “cried out” to God (8:8). The Sifre teaches that there are ten expressions used throughout Tanach to denote prayer, of which these are two.

The Chiddushei HaRim cites this Sifre with the following explanation: The oppression of Egyptian servitude had crushed and demoralized the Jews to such an extent that they were no longer able to turn to God. With each plague, God weakened the Egyptians’ impact and drew the Jews closer to Him. At this point in the narrative, there had been two plagues – blood and frogs. **These reduced the Egyptians’ hold on the Jews, restoring the first two of the ten types of prayer.** (The implication is that all ten plagues would fully restore the Jews’ rapport with God.)

In our current long exile, we have no idea what we’re truly missing. As God rolls out our final redemption, He will not only remove the sources of our oppression, He’ll restore our ability to draw ourselves closer to Him.

3

With the plague of lice, Pharaoh’s sorcerers gave up trying to compete with Moshe. *“This is the finger of God,”* they said (Shemos 8:15), realizing that what Moshe and Aharon brought to Egypt were no mere magic tricks.

The Me’am Loez points out the gradual downfall of Pharaoh’s magicians. In chapter 7 (verses 11 and 22), they are referred to as the “sorcerers of Egypt” – the best of the best in all the world! By chapter 8 (verses 3 and 14), they are merely “sorcerers” – they have lost their international prestige. But that’s not all. Until now, the word “chartumim” (sorcerers) was written *malei*, with a yud between the two letters mem. In 8:15, the word is written *chaseir* – the yud is gone. The Me’am Loez cites the Gemara (Kiddushin 49b) that there were ten measures of sorcery, of which Egypt received nine. **The removal of the yud (whose numerical value is 10) indicates the loss of these ten measures of sorcery.**

We see from this how the rise of truth chips away at the power of falsehood. When falsehood has been sufficiently undermined, it loses its power completely. May such always be the case!

4

God tells Moshe that He has made him the “*elohim*” for Pharaoh, and Aharon his “*navi*” (Shemos 7:1). This verse calls out for explanation.

The word “*elohim*,” referring to might, can mean many things. It can mean mighty people, judges, angels, or even God Himself. “*Navi*,” of course, is the word we normally use for a prophet. Surely the verse can’t be saying that God has appointed Moshe as some sort of deity for Pharaoh with Aharon as his prophet! Nevertheless, it is open to this misinterpretation.

Onkelos, in his Aramaic translation, clarifies things for us. He renders “*elohim*” as “*rav*” – a teacher. Moshe’s job is to educate Pharaoh, one way or another. Onkelos defines “*navi*” as “*meturgaman*” – an interpreter. Rashi on this verse cites Onkelos and goes on to explain that, really, *navi* always means an interpreter, since that is the job a prophet fills between God and us.

Even seemingly simple verses can be tricky. We rely on Rashi to explain things for us, but Rashi relied on Onkelos!

5

The Jewish people were ready to leave... they were just worried about where they were going! In a fascinating explanation, Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in his commentary *Meshesh Cochmah* (6:13), writes that the Jewish people were ready to believe Moshe about his promises to leave Egypt. Their concern was about setting up a new society in Eretz Yisroel.

An important lesson emerges from this passage – **sometimes we are ready to leave our comfort zone, but we are not yet ready to embrace our personal goals and identity.**

SEE IT **INSIDE**

Parsha ideas that are so good, you have to see them inside!

RAMBAN 6:2	How was God's relationship with the Avos different from His relationship with Moshe?
OHR HACHAIM 6:8	Did Hashem really keep His promise of bringing the Jewish people to the Land of Israel?
OHR HACHAIM 6:9	Torah helps us listen.
SEFORNO 6:9	The repercussions of not listing to Moshe.
RABBEINI BACHAYE 7:22	If all the water was blood, where did Paroah's magicians get the water for their magic trick?
RAMBAN 6:13	Great things come from being humble.
RAMBAN 7:3	Wasn't hardening Pharaoh's heart a violation of his free will?
IBN EZRA 7:7	Age is more than just a number.

Rabbi Nosson Schapira of Krakow (1585-1633) once told of the following case that was presented to him:

A wealthy businessman from Warsaw would do business each month in the Krakow market. On each visit he noticed an extremely pious widow huddled near her basket of bagels reciting Psalms. She only lifted her eyes from her worn prayer book to sell a bagel or roll. After the sale she'd shower her customer with a myriad of blessings and immediately she'd return to the frayed pages of her prayer book that were varnished with teardrops and devotion.

Upon observing her each month, the Krakow businessman came to a conclusion. "This pious woman should not have to struggle to earn a living. She should be able to pursue her prayers and piety with no worries." He offered to double her monthly earnings on one condition: she would leave the bagel business and spend her time in the service of the L-rd. The woman, tears of joy streaming down her face, accepted the generous offer and thanked the kind man with praise, gratitude and blessing.

A month later, when the man returned to Krakow, he was shocked to find the woman at her usual place, mixing the sweet smell of bagels with the sweet words of Tehillim. As soon as he approached, the woman handed him an envelope. "Here is your money. I thought it over I can't accept your offer." "A deal is a deal," he exclaimed. "We must see Rabbi Schapira!"

After the businessman presented his case, the woman spoke. "The reason this generous man offered to support me was to help me grow in my spirituality and devotion. From the day I left my bagel business I've only fallen. Let me explain.

"Every day that it would rain, I would think of the farmers who planted the wheat for my bagels. I would sing praises for the glory of rain as I felt the personal guidance of Hashem with each raindrop. When the sun would shine I would once again thank Hashem from letting the farmers harvest in good weather. When I would grind the flour and then sift it again I'd find countless reasons to thank the Almighty. When the bread would bake golden brown I'd thank Hashem for the beauty of the product and its sweet sell. And when a customer would come I'd thank both Hashem for sending him and then bless my patron, too! Now this is all gone, I want no part of a simple, all-expense-paid life."

Stories Around the Campfire



CHUMASH MESORAS HARAV CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Moses, telling him that the forefathers had not demanded such instant gratification. They remained satisfied with a promise that would be fulfilled only in future generations. (Mipninei Harav, pp. 367-369)

The Mesoras HaRav Chumash, based on the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, was edited by Dr. Arnold Lustiger.

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CONVERSATIONS WITH RABBI STEVEN MIODOWNNIK



Rabbi Steven Miodownik is the Rabbi of Ahavas Achim in Highland Park, NJ.

WHAT IS THE MOST FREQUENT SHAILA YOU ARE ASKED?

I never heard of quinoa until 2005 (which is a shame because it makes a great Scrabble word), but if I had a dollar for every time someone asked me about quinoa and kitniyos for Pesach, I could go away to a Pesach hotel and eat foods that look and taste like chametz gamur. I have a nagging suspicion that the health benefits of quinoa are somewhat mitigated when the quinoa is drowned in melted cheese or served under a 24-ounce steak.

MOST INTERESTING SHAILA?

A die-hard, resourceful Yankees fan was in a real quandary. Tickets to the playoff game went on sale on Shabbos afternoon, and would be sold out in minutes. But, his friend in Israel was willing to use the credit card information to purchase tickets from Israel when it was still Shabbos in New York. Could he ask his friend to buy the tickets on his behalf from the New York office while it was still Shabbos in New York? It's a complicated issue, but the question really demonstrated the commitment and passion my friend has... for the Yankees.

WHICH SHAIYLOS DO YOU WISH YOU WERE ASKED MORE?

A congregant recently scheduled a meeting with me before Rosh Hashanah for a "spiritual checkup." He said, "I go to my doctor for an annual "physical" to take care of my body. Shouldn't I also contemplate my neshama by going to my rabbi for a "spiritual"?"

Too often, the rabbi is seen as repository of halachic knowledge whose advice can refine one's ritual performance. But the broader scope of each individual – character traits, family and social life, hopes and dreams – must also be part of the committed Jew's self-analysis.

WHO IS YOUR FAVORITE PARSHAN ON CHUMASH?

I guess Rashi would be a hackneyed

answer, but my appreciation for Rashi's peirush on Chumash has intensified because I love commentaries (and speeches!) that are compact and to-the-point, with each word carefully chosen. The handful of times when Rashi writes "I do not know" why a pasuk is written a certain way demonstrates his intellectual honesty and humility. In my teaching, I always stress that Rashi was the greatest "plagiarizer" of all, as he rarely offers his own wisdom, but rather culls the Torah Sheba'al Peh for the best possible explanation for each pasuk.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE BOOK?

Every couple of years I cycle through a sefer on the parsha that elevates my week. My current obsession is with the *Imrei Baruch* by Rabbi Baruch Simon. His essays based on the parsha are spectacular, as he assembles source after source to deliver a thoughtful message, usually related to mussar and personal growth. A couple of years ago, I was on line at the YU Seferim Sale with my children, holding the newest *Imrei Baruch* in hand for purchase, when I realized that Rabbi Simon was right in front of us buying a sefer. So I got a kick out of pointing out the author of my new sefer to the kids so they could see there is a real person behind the words! (We didn't ask for an autograph.)

In terms of English books, the one I have read and reread most often in the past few years is *The Prime Ministers* by Yehuda Avner, which has taught me more about the history of the State of Israel than any other source. Ambassador Avner's brilliant prose and keen observations never fail to amaze me. I was fortunate enough to be able to interview him in a talk-show format at a Melave Malke in my shul before his passing. It was a fascinating conversation that drew us all into sixty years of Israel's history.

WHAT DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF STAYING INSPIRED?

My personal answer is Jewish music, which is an enormous component of my life. Just as movies have soundtracks

that amplify the emotions, I try to play background music in the home, in the car, in the office, to motivate me. When words from Tanach or the siddur are being sung, you are subconsciously uplifted. We don't sufficiently appreciate the influence of a song and how it can animate a neshama that has grown dormant. A powerful tune injects simcha into our lives and can make even the most mundane activity special. I still have a cassette player in my car for my hundreds of tapes. When that car goes, I don't know what I will do. And my kids are still baffled when I tell them about "rewinding" or "fast-forwarding" to get to a song.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT BEING A SHUL RAV?

We all have good days and bad days in our chosen professions, and being a shul rav comes with many challenges. But to me, there is nothing more mesmerizing than gazing out on Yom Kippur night at a sea of white, and taking in the sight of hundreds of people whom I love so much pouring their hearts out in prayer – grandparents, parents, and children. The purity of their souls is apparent. This is the moment when I reflect on the fantastic privilege and great responsibility of being a spiritual leader. And each year at this time as I look around the room with its electric atmosphere, I recognize how much I learn from the congregants I am supposedly leading.

WHAT IS ONE CHALLENGE YOU THINK AMERICAN ORTHODOXY NEEDS TO MEET IN THIS NEXT GENERATION?

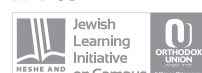
We need to radically alter our model for Jewish education. The current system of parents paying the vast majority of day school expenses in the form of tuition is unsustainable, and has caused some to seek greener pastures at great risk to their children. I'm afraid we only have a few short years left to create a culture in which Jews at every age and stage of life are supporting the day school system, along with much more government funding to which our children are entitled.



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