



Parshas Vaera

For the week ending 28 Teves 5759
15 - 16 January 1999

Overview

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the 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 Aharon 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 to refuse Moshe's request. After the plague of lice, even Pharaoh's magicians concede that only 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.

Insights

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME, LATELY?

“Say to Aharon, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the land..’ ” (8:12)

Two men are walking toward each other in the street. As they draw alongside, a smile spreads across the face of one of them. Excitedly, he says to the other: “Izzy, Izzy, it’s me, Moishe. Don’t you recognize me?” Izzy furrows his brow, trying to bring to the surface some deep forgotten memory. “Moishe?” Unfazed, the other continues, “Don’t you remember me, Izzy! I’m Moishe. I once loaned you \$25,000 interest-free for five years.” “Oh yeah,” replies Izzy, “but Moishe, what have you done for me lately?”

G-d commanded only Aharon and not Moshe to initiate the plague of lice. When Moshe killed the Egyptian who was beating a Jew, Moshe hid the body of the Egyptian in the earth. Thus, he had a debt of gratitude to the earth and could not strike it. However, the Torah tells us that the killing became known, and Pharaoh tried to kill Moshe, forcing Moshe to flee the country. So what was Moshe’s debt to the earth? He had to flee for his life anyway. The earth hadn’t really done anything for him after all.

The Torah here is teaching us a powerful lesson: Gratitude is not to be quantified by results. When someone does something for us, even if it turns out to be unsuccessful or unnecessary, we owe them as much gratitude as if they had just loaned us \$25,000 interest-free for five years.

SPINNING YOUR WHEELS

“Therefore say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am Hashem, and I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt...and you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt.’ ” (6:6-7)

In Russia, during the Stalinist era, there were people who were locked up in prison for decades. One such prisoner was kept in a tiny cell, most of the time in darkness. Protruding from one wall of his cell was a handle. For 16 hours a day the prisoner had to turn the handle. 16 hours every day for more than 10 years. The guards had told him that the handle was connected to a mill, and that the mill crushed wheat for the prison bread. When Stalin finally died, the man was released from his cell. He walked a few paces into the

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light. His legs were like rubber from years of under-use. He rubbed his eyes and turned to look at the machine he had been powering for all those long years. Protruding from the wall on the outside of his cell was a shaft that was connected to a heavy flywheel which was connected to absolutely nothing. The flywheel was only there to give the necessary impression of the resistance of a large machine, but in reality this man had spent the last ten years doing nothing. He was totally crushed. How vindictive that the punishment should be felt only *after* the prisoner had already served his time!

Anomalies in the Torah's spelling of words speak volumes. In the above excerpt, the word *burdens* appears twice. In the first verse, the plural is lacking the letter *vav*. In the second, it is written complete. Why?

There are two aspects to slavery. One aspect is the constriction of physical freedom; the other is the enslavement of the mind. When someone is a slave, he is aware only of the physical enslavement he endures. He is so entombed in the day-to-day business of survival, his life is sunk in so relentless a treadmill, that he doesn't perceive his spiritual bondage.

G-d told the Jewish People that after "*I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt,*" after I take you out from the physical captivity of Egypt, only then "*you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt.*" Only then will you realize the depth of your mental and spiritual slavery.

It is only once a prisoner is physically free that he realizes he has been spinning his spiritual wheels like a rat on a treadmill.

NAMES

"G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am Hashem. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as El Shaddai, but with My Name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them.' " (6:2-3)

When Jews talk about G-d, they call Him "Hashem." Hashem means The Name. Which name? The name which in Greek is called the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter ineffable name of G-d which represents His Essence.

Another name for G-d is *El Shaddai*. The name *Shaddai* is an acronym for the sentence: "I, Who spoke and told the Universe 'Enough!' " When G-d created the world, he "set in motion" a process which seemed to be infinitely expanding. The name *Shaddai* connotes G-d's power to stop that process, to say "Enough!"

When we look at nature, what strikes us is that it is a system of limitations. "What goes up must come down." The sun rules only by day. The moon only by night. Water flows down. Steam rises. Nature is limited and defined by "laws." These laws are, in essence, G-d saying "Enough!"

The above verse tells us that when G-d spoke to Moshe, He spoke to Him as Hashem, but when He communicated with Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, He made Himself known only through the name *El Shaddai*. On the surface, this seems to be in praise of Moshe, that G-d related to Moshe through His essential name "Hashem" rather than through the name *Shaddai*.

However, Rashi tells us that this verse is actually criticizing Moshe for saying: "Why have You done evil to this people?" But where is the implied criticism?

The Talmud relates the story of a man whose wife passed away, leaving him with a baby son to feed. He had no money to pay for a wet-nurse. A miracle was performed for him: He began to produce mother's milk, and he nursed his baby. Rabbi Yosef praised the greatness of this man, since a miracle had been performed on his account. Abaye responded: "On the contrary. How lacking is this man, since the entire natural order had to be overturned on his account!"

The greatness of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov was that they related to G-d through the natural world. They were able to "see" G-d in every blade of grass, every cloud, every pebble. The "laws" of nature — the name *El Shaddai* — was sufficient for them to be able to relate to G-d. Moshe, however, needed something beyond the natural world. G-d spoke to him through his Essential Name, a revelation above and beyond the natural world.

Sources:

What Have You Done For Me, Lately? - Rabbi Reuven Subar
Spinning Your Wheels - Shlah Hakadosh as heard from Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz
Names - Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Haftorah: Yechezkel 28:25 - 29:21

ROTTEN TO THE CORE

“On that day, I will cause the strength of Israel to flourish. (29:21)”

When you look around, it's easy to despair. The situation of the Jewish People becomes more and more precarious, beset from without and within. The ears of the world are beguiled by our enemies, while the People of the Book sound shrill and uncompromising. Jews are disappearing faster than an endangered species.

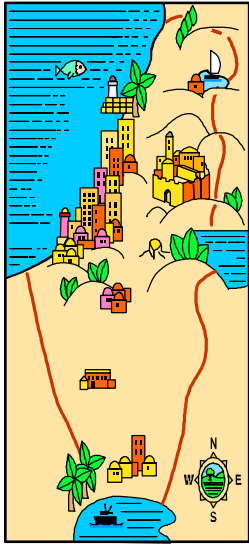
The Prophet Yishayahu may have been speaking some 2500 years ago, but he was speaking to us.

The rescue of the Jewish People is like the sprouting of a flower. Just as a plant starts to sprout only when the seed begins to rot, just when there seems to be no hope, when everything seems rotten to the core, so will the redemption of the Jewish People come when they are at their lowest ebb and all seems lost. It is at that moment that G-d will make Israel's strength flourish.

Avnei Ezel

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



ANTIPATRIS

Antipatris (or Antiparis as it appears in the Talmud) is linked to a holiday of Second Temple days known as “Mount Gerizim Day” held on the 25th of the month of Teves.

The Jew-hating Kuttites (Samaritans) in *Eretz Yisrael* incited Alexander the Great to destroy the *Beis Hamikdash*, and he began marching at the head of his army towards Jerusalem to do their bidding. When the *kohen gadol*, Shimon Hatzadik, learned of this, he donned his high priestly garments and, together with Jerusalem notables, walked all night to meet this force. The two finally met at Antipatris where Alexander descended from his royal chariot and prostrated himself before Shimon Hatzadik, explaining that it was this vision which led him to victory in all his battles. The tables were then turned on the Kuttites as the destruction which they planned for the *Beis Hamikdash* was visited instead upon their shrine on Mount Gerizim.

Built on the ruins of the Biblical city Aphek, site of a great battle between Israel and the Philistines recorded in the Book of Samuel, Antiparis is mentioned in the Talmudic description of the proliferation of Torah study during the reign of King Chizkiyahu: “They checked from Dan to Beersheba (north to south) and found not one unlearned Jew; from Geves to Antiparis (east to west) and found not a single child or adult unlearned in the laws of purity.”

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