

Parshat HaShavuah

וארא

VA'EIRA

כ"ח טבת תשע"ו

JANUARY 9,
2016

A PUBLICATION OF



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חלקינו מה טוב

Ashreinu

Candle Lighting

5:26

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:48

Sunset

5:45

Motzei
Shabbat

6:23

Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

BE A HERO

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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It's all about placement! Your position on the team, your job in the group assignment, or your part in the play—in each of these, you play a significant role in making sure the job gets done. The Torah works the same way. Every pasuk and perek in the Torah is in its place for a significant reason: to shed light on our ancestors' lives and convey a specific message to its readers. If that is the case, then this week's parsha has a major placement dilemma!

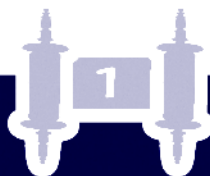
As we are reaching the major confrontation between Moshe, Aharon, and Pharaoh, all of a sudden, the Torah (Shmot 6:14) digresses to discuss the lineage of Moshe and Aharon. Why does the Torah give us a discourse about the lineage of Moshe and Aharon at this dramatic moment in the story? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to have placed these pesukim at the beginning of Sefer Shmot, when Moshe is first introduced? Why now?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch offers a beautiful and enlightening solution to this conundrum. He explains that up until this point of the story, Moshe and Aharon's efforts have been met with frustration and failure. From this point on, they will begin to triumph. Hashem will begin to perform the miracles and supernatural events to help them lead the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim. Therefore, says Rav Hirsch, right before that moment the Torah wants to make something very clear to each and everyone of us.

Moshe and Aharon are of "absolutely human origin and the absolutely ordinary human nature of their beings should be firmly established." (Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Shemot 6:14)

What is a hero? In Judaism we recognize our heroes as ordinary human beings. Pagans deified their heroes and therefore were able to worship them, but they could not emulate them. We view our heroes as people that we can aspire to model ourselves after.

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Rabbi Hochman continued

The Torah goes out of its way at this point in time to let us know that Moshe and Aharon were as human as can be, and yet they were able to take action and become heroes to the entire Jewish people. We often look around and see great Torah giants or tremendous ba'alei chesed, and think to ourselves, "they were made for that, but I can never be like that, that is not who I am." The Torah is teaching us that every single Jewish hero starts the same way. We all have flaws and experience difficult situations that could prevent us from achieving greatness, but we should never tell ourselves that we can't be a hero for someone or something. It is only a question of to how we choose to direct our efforts and how hard we want to push ourselves.

These heroes were "average Joes," but took it upon themselves to do something great. We should never doubt our ability to become heroes and change the world around us.

THE MAGIC OF QUESTIONS

TAMARA KAHN ('17)

Everyone views the magicians as Pharaoh's evil assistants who ploy to counteract Hashem's miracles; but do we consider their motives and the intentions behind their actions? Pharaoh prompts them to reenact Hashem's miracles, and they succeed with the first two plagues, they are stumped by the third, and they do not attempt the rest.

The magicians were raised in Egypt, surrounded by Egyptian culture and subject to Pharaoh and their belief in Egyptian deities. When faced with a new foreign power, they were courageous and noble by defending their beliefs and culture against Hashem and trying to disprove their opposition. The first lesson we can learn from the magicians is to embrace challenges and utilize the abilities we possess to overcome those challenges.

However, upon failing to reproduce the plague of lice, the magicians respond that the miracle resulted from the "finger of God," and they humbly accept that there exists power greater than their own. Pharaoh refuses to listen and his stubbornness wills him to relentlessly attack Hashem, even though his magicians concede. The difference between Pharaoh and his magicians at this instance is expressed through the concept of a *kashia* and a *shaila*. Both of these terms refer to questions, but a *kashia* describes an attack, whereas a *shaila* pertains to an understanding.

The magicians could have either been attacking Hashem or trying to understand their power relative to Hashem's power. They stopped trying to replicate Hashem's miracles once they realized that Hashem was, in fact, better than them, and they humbly accepted this truth as an answer to their question. After putting forth their effort and asking their questions, they received their answer and did not attempt to discredit it, thereby abandoning their egos.

The stories in this parsha are discussed at the Pesach Seder, where both the *chacham* and the *rasha* are known for asking questions. The *chacham's* questions are in the form of *shailas* and the *rasha's* questions are in the form of *kashias*. The *chacham* includes himself and his peers in his questions, making them relevant to himself and demonstrating how he cares about the answers and is genuinely seeking the truth. The *rasha*, on the other hand, distances himself from the questions by not including himself and he expresses his lack of interest in the answer and his desire to attack the traditions and religion.

When we approach the subject of believing in Hashem, do we ask questions that attack or do we ask questions that are geared towards understanding? We must ask firm questions, and when we are seeking the truth and a valid answer, we continuously question and fight for the truth until we humbly accept the final answer. Questions should not be asked for the sake of asking questions and not caring about or disregarding the answers. Questions such as these are attacks that stem from personal egos and do not lead to truth or meaning. Being intellectually and spiritually honest and asking questions for the quest of knowledge and truth leads to humility, which is a central and valued attribute in Judaism.





HOW TO: DISCOVER GOD

Yael Attias ('16)

We are all familiar with the grandiose and impressive ten plagues that God performed in Egypt. The first plague, blood, was performed after Pharaoh said to Moshe, "Who is God that I should listen to Him? I don't know this God!" (5:2) Therefore it can be implied that the purpose of this plague was for Pharaoh to know that God is the One truly running the show. This is precisely why the plague was to turn the Nile River into blood. Pharaoh had been promoting himself as a god saying "I am the river and I created it." (Ezekiel 29:3). Knowing he wasn't actually a god, Pharaoh had to relieve himself, and so he would sneak down to the river early in the mornings when no one would see him. However, Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate his first plague, and so Pharaoh viewed God as a mere magician.

When it came to lice, Pharaoh's magicians were unable to replicate the plague and even admitted that it was the finger of God. (8:15) The Talmud (Sanhedrin 67) says that the reason they were unable to create lice is because a magician can manipulate existing substances and energy but cannot create life itself. When the magicians told Pharaoh that this was the finger of God, they used God's name "Elokim", which represents the power of God acting through nature. (Elokim has the numerical value of 86, which is the same as "HaTeva" - nature.) After this plague, Pharaoh and his magicians now recognized God as the force controlling nature but still refused to view Him as the ultimate power.

Finally in the seventh plague, hail, the pasuk says that every tree was smashed and every animal and man caught outdoors was killed. Pharaoh stood amidst his destroyed country and declared, "I have sinned this time and God is righteous..." (9:27) using God's name "YKVK", the ineffable part of God that we cannot understand. It took a long time, but although Pharaoh now recognized God as the ultimate power and being, he still refused to let the Jewish people go.

The process that Pharaoh went through in order to finally recognize God is very similar to the process we all go through in growing up. When we are kids we think that the whole world revolves around us, but as we grow up we become aware of things that are way beyond our control, such as natural disasters, disease, and death itself, which we can only ascribe to a higher power - God. Rabbi Shragga Simmons says, life is a series of such recognitions. But sometimes we get confused, we forget, and slip back in the continuum." The reason this happens is because we live in a day and age in which we have experienced the power of human intellect and abilities. It is important to always remember that all we accomplish is due to God.

SLAVERY AND SENSITIVITY

Koby Harary ('16)

IN MEMORY OF MENACHEM MENDEL BEN KAYLA YEHUDIT

I read a very powerful and interesting Dvar Torah this week by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig. We learn from this week's parsha, Parshat Va'eira, a very important lesson that applies to everyone, everyday. The Gemara Yerushalmi, in Masechet Rosh Hashana states that prior to the actual departure from Egypt and the final steps of our redemption, the Jewish people were taught about the mitzvah of *shiluach avadim*, emancipation of slaves.

Why would Hashem have Moshe teach the Jewish people a law that wouldn't be practiced until nearly 50 years later, when Jewish people would be living in the land of Israel during the *yovel* year?

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The answer can be found by looking at Masechet Brachot, daf 6b. The gemara says that giving charity on a fast day is the most effective way to harness the energies of that day. Rashi adds that not only is that true, but the best time to give the charity on the fast is prior to the break-fast. The gemara and Rashi are trying to teach us that a person who is generally well off is in control of his own life and comfortable. Only while fasting can we truly understand how the person in need of tzedaka feels. Only when we are hungry, when we truly feel and understand being dependent on someone else, can we fulfill the mitzvah of charity.

With this state of mind, we can achieve a true sensitivity and understanding of a person who is also in need. Our job is to help those in need and we must remember that always. From this we can understand that it makes sense to give the Jewish people the commandment of *shiluach avadim* right before their departure from slavery to freedom. They are given a commandment to which they are truly sensitive, as they were just slaves themselves.

When we look at our daily interactions, we can find moments when we were insensitive toward another's feelings, whether accidentally or purposely. We must strive to be more aware of what we do and more careful about what we say.

TRUE FREEDOM CASEY WINDERBAUM ('16)

IN MEMORY OF MENACHEM MENDEL BEN KAYLA YEHUDIT

"And I will take you to Me for a nation, and I will be for you a God, and you will know I am Hashem your God who took you out from the burdens of Egypt." (Shemot 6:7)

The Maharal asks: Why are we still mentioning leaving Egypt if we find ourselves back in exile? It would seem that the miracle of Yetziat Mitzrayim is belied by our return to exile in foreign lands.

Perhaps there is a difference between our essential identity, who we are, and our incidental status, where we are or what we are doing. In the pasuk, Hashem establishes our identity. He is our liberator from Egypt, our protector, our guardian, and He brings us to Eretz Yisrael. In contrast, galut is an incidental part of our history, and is not the ideal. We may think we're free in exile, but we are not.

We can also learn from this idea on a personal level. A poor person can pretend to be rich, paying for lavish gifts with his credit card, but must return to reality when his bill arrives. Others may try to belittle us, but true self-esteem is what we create in the inside, the real "us." We should be happy knowing the "real us," not how others define who we are. Similarly, as a nation, distance from Hashem and His land is incidental; our true relationship is based on our deep connection with Him, represented by Yetziat Mitzrayim.

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