

The Hand That Smites - Caresses

Weekly Torah Video Series: Parshas Vaeira

Featured Video: The Hand That Smites Caresses

Hypersensitivity Elicits A Response Of Insensitivity

1. Moshe said to G-d, "Why have you brought difficulty upon this People?"
 2. Midrash: Dasan and Aviram accused Moshe of souring their relationship with Pharoah.
 3. They blasphemed and cursed him.
 4. Moshe was so deeply effected by their onslaught: their claim was a desecration if G-d's name.
 5. Because of his pain he expressed himself to G-d in this manner.
 6. This is similar to Avraham- when told by G-d that he was going to destroy Sodom.
 7. Avraham's concern: there may be a misperception regarding the standing of the members of the Sodom community.
 8. The population may believe G-d destroys the righteous together with the evil.
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Heightened Intensity Yields Outstanding Results

1. Moshe comes to Egypt as G-d's Agent to redeem the Jews.
2. He performs 3 miracles to prove that he is the Redeemer.
3. The Jews believe and want to leave Egypt to go in the desert for 3 days to worship G-d.
4. Pharoah withdraws the straw subsidy and demands the same quota of bricks.
5. The Jewish Overseers are beaten by Egyptians for not producing numbers.
6. They complain to Pharoah it is impossible.
7. Pharoah's response is they are lazy have too much time to think.
8. The overseers meet Moshe as they're leaving Pharoah and fault him for all.
9. Moshe pleads to G-d: "Why are you making it so difficult for the people? Why did you send me?"
10. If the redemption was to begin with Moshe coming to Egypt why did the bondage intensify?
11. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: As G-d created the world, whenever there is transition from one state to another there is always resistance.
12. The darkest part of night is right before dawn; the end of winter is the coldest part of winter.
13. As transition is to take place from bondage to redemption, resistance causes an intensification of bondage before the redemption.

Weekly Torah Commentaries Series: Parshas Vaeira

The Hand That Smites - Caressees

Spiritualization Through Torah

The Torah tells us that G-d commanded Moshe to go before the Jewish people and present them with the four expressions of redemption through which they would be redeemed and extricated from bondage. The verse states, **“Say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall be a G-d to you...”**

The Torah continues, **“So Moshe spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to Moshe because of shortness of wind (kotzeir ruach) and hard work.”**

Although Moshe had proven to the Jewish people through revealed miracles that he was G-d’s agent and the true Redeemer to take them out of Egypt, they did not have the capacity to internalize his words because they were short winded and overwhelmed with the quotas that were demanded of them by their taskmasters.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains the term “kotzeir ruach” to mean “of limited capacity.” He writes, “Since the Jewish people in Egypt did not engage in Torah study (except for the Tribe of Levy) they were limited in spirit. It is the Torah that broadens the heart of man.”

Although the Jewish people fully comprehended what Moshe had told them regarding their redemption and believed that he was in fact the Redeemer, nevertheless, because they did not engage in Torah study, they did not have the broadness and depth of heart to fully appreciate and internalize the value of what was at hand.

The Torah tells us that Yaakov our Patriarch worked for Lavan for seven years for the hand of Rachel our Matriarch. During those seven years, Yaakov’s level of dedication and toil did not waiver despite the ongoing victimization and deception of Lavan regarding what was rightfully his.

Despite these seemingly intolerable conditions, the Torah states, **“Yaakov worked seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him a few days ...”** How is it possible that after enduring such difficulties over an extended period of time, he considered it to be the equivalent of a few days?

Firstly, if Yaakov truly understood and appreciated that Rachel was his true soul mate, he should have experienced it as an endless period of waiting. In addition, coupled with all of the difficulties over this extended period of time, it should have been considered overwhelming to Yaakov. Nevertheless, he considered it to be the equivalent of a “few days.”

Because Yaakov appreciated and internalized the eternal and unlimited value of Rachel as being the primary Matriarch of the Jewish people, whatever he endured was considered to be inconsequential. The reason that Yaakov was not deterred, distracted, or discouraged despite the unending deceit and hard labor to which he was subjected, was because he internalized the value of Rachel as the future Matriarch.

This was because he was the Patriarch who embodied Torah. The Torah quantifies him as, **“The perfect man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah).”** Because of the broadness of heart that he achieved through his study of Torah and dedication to G-d, even after being deceived by Lavan by being given Leah instead of Rachel, he was no less dedicated to another seven years to work on behalf of the hand of Rachel.

The second seven years were with no less dedication. He regarded them as being the equivalent of only “a few days.” Yaakov considered his degree of suffering and victimization as a pittance, and therefore it did not interfere with his dedication to his father in law Lavan. Since Yaakov’s essence was Torah, he had the ultimate broadness of heart to be able to appreciate and value spiritual opportunity regardless of the physical conditions.

The ultimate level of fear of G-d is revering G-d due to one’s semblance of appreciation of His Omnipotence and Majesty (Yiras haRomemus). One is only overwhelmed with awe when he is negated to G-d. The quality of service to G-d in this context is a selfless dedication where one feels privileged to serve his Maker.

By dedicating one’s life to Torah study, a spiritual metamorphosis takes place within the individual, thus giving him an appreciation and ability to internalize G-d’s greatness to the degree of one’s self negation. Without a minimal advanced dimension of Torah, one’s knowledge is limited to the abstract and intellectual. It thus does not affect the individual on an emotional level.

Identically, despite the fact that the Jewish people had witnessed revealed miracles in Egypt, which established Moshe as the true Redeemer, because they did not engage in Torah study, they did not have the capacity to fully appreciate or internalize the opportunity of what Moshe presented to them.

The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin states, “Great is the study of Torah because it brings to actualization (of mitzvos).” According to this understanding, when one studies Torah at a special level without distraction and is fully dedicated, it creates a spiritualization of the individual to give him the capacity to appreciate the mitzvah at hand. This results in the actualization of the mitzvah that is appreciated.

The Ramifications of an Inappropriate Question

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Va’eira, **“V’yedaber Elokim – G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, “I am Hashem...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that Moshe was addressed by G-d in a formal and reprimanding context. The appellation of “Elokim” connotes the Attribute of Justice, indicating that Moshe was being faulted for a failing. Additionally the usage of the term “v’yedaber (spoke)” is a formal manner of speech rather than “vayomer (said).”

Moshe was addressed by G-d within the context of Judgment because of an inappropriate question that he had asked. The Torah tells us at the end of the previous Portion (Shemos) that after Pharaoh had withdrawn the straw subsidy from the Jewish people and demanded the same quota of bricks to be produced, Moshe approached G-d with the question, **“My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have you sent me?”**

In the Portion of Shemos after Moshe had asked G-d this inappropriate question, G-d responded to Moshe, **“Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh...”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain the verse, **“Now you will see...”** to mean, “Because you questioned My ways... you will now see the redemption from Egypt, but you will not witness (later) what I will do to the seven nations of Canaan when I will bring the Jewish people into the Land.”

Because the question that Moshe had asked was considered to be a breach of faith, G-d punished him by not allowing him to enter into the Land of Israel along with the Jewish people. He would only witness the redemption from Egypt, but he would not be allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

Seemingly, if G-d immediately punished Moshe by decreeing that he would not be able to enter into the Land, why does G-d continue to address Moshe within the context of Justice in the next Portion as it states, **“V’yedaber Elokim?”** One would think that since Moshe was already diminished by the decree, not to be allowed to enter into the Land, he would have been reinstated within the context of the Attribute of Mercy after the reprimand. Why does G-d continue to address Moshe within the context of Judgment even after meting out the punishment?

In addition, Rashi cites Chazal in a number of locations that whenever the wrath of G-d is mentioned, there are always immediate consequences. For example, the Torah tells us that at the burning bush there was a seven-day dialogue between Moshe and G-d during which Moshe argued that he was not qualified to be the Redeemer as G-d had asked him to be.

Even after G-d had addressed and responded to all of Moshe’s issues, he said to G-d, **“Please, my Lord! Send through whomever You would send!”** Moshe wanted G-d to send his brother Aaron in his stead since Aaron had acted in the capacity of G-d’s agent regarding the Jewish people until that moment. The Torah then states, **“The wrath of G-d burned against Moshe...”**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the consequence of G-d’s wrath was that Moshe was no longer qualified to be the Priest (Kohen) because of his obstinacy; Moshe would remain the Levy. His brother Aaron and his offspring would be elevated to become the Priests (Kohanim).

After Moshe was diminished through this punishment, he was reinstated to his previous relationship with G-d and was not addressed by the Creator within the context of Justice. Why is this punishment different from the punishment of **“Now you will see...?”** in which G-d continued to address Moshe within the context of Judgment even after being punished?

Sforno in his commentary in the Book of Bamidbar explains that although G-d had decreed that Moshe would not enter into the Land

of Israel after he had asked Him an inappropriate question, there was still an opportunity for Moshe to nullify the decree. As the Torah in the Portion of Va'eschanan tells us, Moshe supplicated G-d to overturn and nullify the decree to allow him to enter into the Land along with the Jewish people. However, G-d responded to his supplications by saying, **"Do not continue to speak to Me further about this matter..."**

Until that moment, the Attribute of Mercy could have nullified the decree and allowed Moshe to enter into the Land. However, after G-d told Moshe to cease his supplications, the decree was finalized. This is unlike the punishment that Moshe received at the burning bush. Once G-d decreed that he had forfeited the Priesthood to his brother Aaron, he did not have the ability to supplicate G-d to be reinstated because the decree was final. Aaron had already been designated to be the Kohen. Since the punishment of **"Now you will see..."** was not permanent, Moshe continued to be addressed by G-d within the context of Judgment.

There is another way to understand why Moshe continued to be addressed within the context of the Attribute of Justice although it was decreed that he would not enter into the Land. If he would have not failed, and had he been qualified to enter into the Land of Israel, Moshe would have functioned as the Redeemer at the time of the exodus from Egypt at the ultimate level. However, since he was disqualified from taking the Jewish people into the Land due to the question he posed to G-d, his capacity as Redeemer was no longer the same.

We find that the Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra contrasts the leadership of Moshe to the leadership of Yehoshuah, his student and successor. The Gemara tells us that the countenance of Moshe is likened to the "sun" whereas the countenance of Yehoshuah is likened to the "moon" which only reflects the light of the sun. Thus, the leadership of the Jewish people in the future, at the time of entering into the Land, was diminished due to Moshe's failing when he had asked the question.

By asking the inappropriate question to G-d of **"My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have you sent me?"** at that moment Moshe diminished the ultimate objective of bringing the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. The consequence of his failing was thus experienced by the Jewish people into the future. Therefore, although the decree was meted out immediately, since the effect of Moshe's failing continued, he was addressed by G-d within the context of Judgment even after being punished.

Revealing Truth for the Sake of G-d

The Torah states, **"Hashem said to Moshe, '...I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh so that I may multiply My signs and My wonders upon Egypt..."** Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "G-d said, 'Because Pharaoh had acted obstinate towards Me, it has become revealed that the nations of the world are not interested in repenting with a whole heart. It is therefore better that I harden his heart so that I should have the opportunity to increase My signs (miracles) so that you (the Jewish people) should recognize My power..."

Sifsei Chachamim explain the Midrash cited by Rashi to mean, "G-d said, 'If I do not harden the heart of Pharaoh, then he and the Egyptians will definitely repent. However, it is revealed before Me that it will not be a complete repentance (teshuvah) with a full heart. If so, I must bring upon them further plagues and tragedies because their repentance was not valid.

When mankind will see this, they will say, 'This is the way of G-d, that He brings destruction upon those who repent.' The nations of the world will not realize that it was only because Pharaoh did not do a proper teshuvah. I will therefore harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he should not repent to any degree, thus avoiding a desecration of My Name. I will thus be able to bring the plagues upon Egypt."

Chofetz Chaim writes that at one time in history, it was rare that Jews as a whole should abandon their observance of Judaism and not live their lives in accordance with Jewish tradition. It was unheard of that Jews would openly desecrate the Shabbos and not observe dietary laws. Although Jews in the past may not have truly believed in the principles of Torah and the importance of living within the dictates of the Torah, they outwardly remained observant because of the fear of being ostracized by their families and communities. However, today, Jews in large numbers are openly abandoning all Jewish tradition without any sense of shame or retribution. Chofetz Chaim asks, "Why does G-d allow this to happen?"

He explains this in a manner that is similar to the words of the Sifsei Chachamim. It is an indication that we are nearing the end of time, when G-d will judge all humanity. If Jews would remain observant in practice; however, in their hearts they have heretical beliefs, the only one who would be aware of this is G-d Himself.

At the time of judgment, those individuals who only displayed Judaism as a façade will be severely punished and condemned forever. If this were to happen, it would be a desecration of His name. It would appear that observant Jews are being punished as those who abandoned their Judaism.

Thus, G-d changed the dynamic of existence and allows Jews in great numbers to disassociate themselves and cast off the yoke of Judaism to openly pursue their rebellious ways. Thus, it will be obvious to all at the end of time why these individuals deserve to be punished. This revelation would thus not be a desecration of His name.

The Uniqueness of Avraham and the Patriarchs

The Torah states, **"G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am Hashem. I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov..."** Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, "Each of the Patriarchs has a unique and exalted classification.

What was special about Avraham that he was unique in his own right? Despite the fact that G-d was not a known entity in existence, he came to recognize G-d as the Creator and benefactor of existence through his own initiative. If G-d's existence would have been known, then any intelligent person would choose to follow in His way because it is logical for one who has wisdom to choose the path of good over evil.

However, regarding Avraham, despite the fact that there was no known trace of G-d in existence, he pursued a path of truth and came upon truth, which is G-d Himself. This is the reason Avraham is considered to be unique and exalted. Avraham, in fact chose to cleave to G-d before any miracles were performed on his behalf. He recognized G-d's Attributes and His Ways. It is because of this that he became the 'beloved of G-d.' Although his life was replete with trials and tribulations, he chose and cleaved to G-d. He had no other reason to cleave to G-d other than his love of truth.

Yitzchak has an exalted status because he chose to offer himself as a sacrifice at the Akeidah, and thus he is classified as the unblemished offering. ...Yaakov has an exalted status because his seed was pure and was thus able to establish the twelve tribes of G-d..."

The Gemara in Tractate Chagigah tells us that G-d values the ascent of all the Jewish people when they visit the Temple Mount during the three festivals of the year. The Gemara cites a verse from Song of Songs which states, "How beautiful are your paces, the daughter of the benefactor (bas nadiv)."

Who is the "the daughter of the benefactor (bas nadiv)?" It is the Jewish people who are the descendants of Avraham who selflessly gave his heart to G-d (nadiv leibo). Because of Avraham's selfless love for G-d, he dedicated his totality to His service." Anything that was needed to further the espousal of G-d in existence, Avraham did so without any restraint. Avraham had no impediment to his service of G-d because of his extraordinary level of humility. As Chazal tell us, Avraham was one of the most humble people who ever lived as he had said to G-d, "I am dust and ash." He was able to assume the Attribute of Kindness (Chesed) which is indiscriminate and unlimited due to his level of selfless devotion to G-d which was rooted in his humility.

The Attribute of Kindness is different than the Attribute of Mercy, which only allows has application if one is truly deserving and has value. This is not so regarding the Attribute of Kindness. The kindness that Avraham demonstrated was without calculation and consideration. He gave selflessly for the sake of G-d.

Avraham was able to see clearly what he needed to do regarding his espousal of monotheism because of his humility. If one is not sufficiently humble, his perception of the truth becomes obscured because his focus is inward rather than outward. It is the lack of humility that interferes with one's ability to have clarity and commit oneself to G-d without limitation.

Pharaoh's Denial of the Obvious Truth

The Torah tells us that G-d told Moshe to go before Pharaoh and forewarn him that if he does not allow the Jewish people to leave Egypt, the Nile will be turned to blood. The Torah states regarding the first plague of blood, "**So says G-d, 'Through this you shall know that I am Hashem; behold with the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood. The fish-life that is in the water shall die and the River shall become foul (from the stench of the dead fish). Egypt will grow weary of trying to drink water from the River (no water will remain potable).'**"

The plague manifested itself exactly as Moshe had forewarned Pharaoh. The Torah tells us that the Nile turned to blood and the fish died. The Torah continues, "**The necromancers of Egypt did the same by means of their incantations; so Pharaoh's heart was strong...**" The sorcerers of Egypt transformed water into blood through their witchcraft, and thus Pharaoh was not moved or affected in any way by the plague of blood because he attributed it to witchcraft. His heart was thus hardened, and he did not heed the words of Moshe to send out the Jewish people from Egypt.

The Torah mentions two times that after the Nile would be turned to blood, the fish would die. This fact seems to be superfluous. If factually

the Nile would be turned to blood, it is obvious that the fish would die. Why then was it necessary for the Torah to mention this fact?

Sforno explains that witchcraft cannot change the essence of whatever it may be affecting. Therefore, if water is transformed into blood through witchcraft, although the water appears to be blood in all of its aspects (such as color, texture, and viscosity), the chemical makeup would remain the same. It would retain all the properties of water.

However, when G-d deems that water should be changed to blood, it is not only transformed in its appearance, its entire essence becomes blood. When Moshe communicated the coming plague to Pharaoh, he needed to interject the fact that the fish would die in the Nile in order to qualify it as an act of G-d the Creator.

When the plague actually took place, the Torah tells us that the fish died. Pharaoh, being the greatest sorcerer in Egypt, understood that the plague of blood was not witchcraft. If so, why was he not impressed by the blatant difference between the water that was transformed by his sorcerers and the plague of blood that G-d brought about?

Chazal tell us that Pharaoh deified himself and thus made himself appear to the Egyptian people that he did not need to do bodily functions as an ordinary human being. Through his advanced and superior knowledge of sorcery, Pharaoh was able to conceal himself from everyone (including other sorcerers) when he needed to go to the Nile and do his bodily functions. Only Moshe was able to locate him at the Nile at that particular moment.

When Moshe located him, Pharaoh was amazed at Moshe's ability and thus understood that there was nothing beyond his reach. If this was Pharaoh's dimension of sorcery, how could he choose to ignore the plague of blood and not be moved by the fact that it was an act of G-d and not sorcery?

The Torah states at the time of the plague of lice, "**The sorcerers did the same with their incantations to draw forth the lice, but they could not....The sorcerers said to Pharaoh, 'It is the finger of G-d!' but Pharaoh's heart was strong and he did not heed them...**" Chazal tell us that witchcraft cannot affect something that is less than a size of a grain of barley. Thus, the plague of lice could not be replicated through sorcery. Despite this compelling reality, Pharaoh chose to ignore the blatant truth.

The Torah tells us that after the miracle of the splitting of the Sea and the Egyptian armies were destroyed after it closed upon them, Moshe sang the song by the sea for the Jewish people. He articulated in this song how the nations of the world stood in awe and trembled by the miracles that G-d had performed on behalf of the Jewish people.

The world had openly witnessed the Hand of G-d protecting the Jewish people as His own. Nevertheless, a wandering people who did not fear G-d, the Amalekites, attacked the Jewish people without any hesitation.

Chazal depict the Amalekites to be the equivalent of a "fool who jumped into a scalding bath. Although he is burnt by the hot water, he nevertheless cools down the bath for others."

As a consequence of the attack of Amalek (although they were defeated) the aura of the Jewish people in the eyes of the world was diminished. They were seen as an ordinary people.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "A deprecator (letz) you should smite..." The Midrash explains that "A deprecator you should smite" refers to the Amalekite people. One does not try to attempt to reason with a deprecator because he does not have the capacity to appreciate the position of the other. Thus, since he cannot be contended with, he must be destroyed. Therefore, the Jewish people have been commanded to obliterate Amalek from existence.

It is not that the Amalekites were not fully aware of what had occurred at the splitting of the Sea or did not understand what G-d had done on behalf of the Jewish people, but rather, because they possess the characteristic of being deprecators, they do not have the capacity to internalize the truth. Thus, they acted as if nothing had happened. Although they had seen the Hand of G-d as obviously as the rest of the world, they behaved as though G-d did not exist, and there is no Divine Retribution. This innate characteristic of the Amalekites caused them to be oblivious to the truth of G-d and His relationship with the Jewish people.

When one has a conflict of interest, the truth does not resonate within him because he either evades it or puts it in another context. For Pharaoh, understanding the consequences of acknowledging the Hand of G-d was something he could not accept. He had a conflict of interest. If he were to acknowledge G-d as the Omnipotent One, he could not longer believe that he was a deity, but rather an ordinary human being.

Pharaoh repeatedly witnessed revealed miracles that his own sorcerers could not replicate. These events could only be understood as the Hand of G-d. It was only by the tenth plague of the killing of the first-born that Pharaoh could no longer evade or ignore the truth.

Every person, due to his personal interests and needs, has an aspect of the characteristic of a deprecator. Because of one's conflicts of interests, one becomes desensitized to the evil that he seeks to pursue. Although he may intellectually understand that his interest is inappropriate, the reality of that fact does not resonate within him to the degree that it affects his actions.

King Solomon writes in Proverbs, "One should not rebuke a deprecator (letz) because he will hate you. However, when one rebukes a wise man (chacham) he will love you."

The Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers states, "Who is a wise man? One who learns from everyone." The wise man, because of his perspective and focus in life, which is to advance himself through knowledge, will appreciate rebuke if it has constructive value to correct himself where he has failed. Very often, the failing is attributed to a degree of insensitivity because of one's personal conflict of interest, which is the characteristic of a deprecator.

Thus, when one attempts to rebuke this individual, one must speak in a context that he is not addressing the deprecating aspect of the person, but rather the aspect of the wise man who is interested in making the correction.



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