



Parashat Va'era

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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Reconsidering Long Held Beliefs Made Moshe Appropriate for Leadership

Parshas [Vaera](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

I am well aware that this week is Parshas Vaera, and therefore I really should speak about Parshas Vaera. I am also very aware that last week for Parshas Shemos, I said a pshat in the very same *pasuk* that I will now focus on again, but on Friday morning I listened to a shiur from the Tolner Rebbe that he had given the previous Thursday night. The Tolner Rebbe has a whole different approach to the same *pasuk*. I think it is a brilliant *mehalech*, and I think the message that he takes out of this is a very important message.

In addition, the *parshios* of Shemos, Vaera, Bo and Beshalach are the *parshios* of Yetzias Mitzraim. I always consider them one entity, so therefore it is legitimate for me to speak about Parshas Shemos again this week.

The *pasuk* says, "And the Angel of Hashem appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush. He saw and behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed. Moshe thought, 'Let me turn aside now and see this great sight - why will the bush not be burned?' Hashem saw that he turned aside to see, and G-d called out to him from amid the bush and said, 'Moshe, Moshe,' and he replied, 'Here I am!'" (Shemos 3:2-4) This is a seminal moment in Jewish history - the beginning of Moshe Rabbeinu's career. Moshe Rabbeinu was the greatest of all *nevi'im* (prophets) and this is the first time

that Hashem speaks to him. Why does Hashem speak to him? It is because "He saw that Moshe turned aside to see."

The Tolner Rebbe of Yerushalayim asks four questions:

1. Rashi, on the words "*asura nah*" (Let me turn aside now) writes: "*asura m'kan l'hiskarev sham*" (I will turn from here to approach there.) Is this a kind of elaboration we need Rashi to provide? Why does Rashi need to provide this obvious inference, which really adds nothing to our understanding of these words?
2. The whole expression in the *pasuk* "And Moshe said, 'Let me turn aside now' to investigate" – only indicates that Moshe was talking to himself. Why is it important for us to know that Moshe had this conversation with himself before approaching to check it out?
3. The word *nah* in the expression *asura nah* indicates a *bakasha* (request). It is as if Moshe is saying (to himself), "Please, let me check this out." Moshe is not asking anyone else to do him a favor here, so why does Moshe use the word please (*nah*) in this sentence?
4. Finally, the *pasuk* says "And Hashem saw that Moshe turned to investigate." What is the import of this statement? Obviously, this strange incident merited investigation. People watch fire scenes even when they do consume because watching a burning fire is an interesting spectacle. Certainly, a miraculous fire that did not consume is worth checking out. The *pasuk* appears to say that the fact that Moshe went to check out the Burning Bush was the factor that motivated the *Ribono shel Olam* to speak to him. What is that all about?

In order to understand the answer given to these questions by the Tolner Rebbe, we need to know a little bit about the history of Moshe Rabbeinu: Going back a bit in time, Moshe went out and saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, one of Moshe's brethren. Moshe looked around, saw that no one was watching and he killed the Egyptian. The next day, Moshe encountered two Jews fighting with each other. He said to the attacker, "Why are you beating a fellow Jew?" The man answered, "Who made you the boss around here? Do you intend to kill me like you killed the Egyptian (yesterday)?" Moshe became afraid and said, "Behold, the matter is now known!" (Shemos 2:14) Rashi interprets: Moshe feared that if there could be such wicked people in *Klal Yisroel* that they threaten me that I will be reported to the authorities for saving a fellow Jew from violence, then they are not worthy of being redeemed. They speak *Lashon HaRah* (slander) and they beat each other up so they are unworthy of G-d's redemption. Rashi explains the expression "*achein, noda ha'davar*" (behold, the matter is now known): I now understand the matter that I had long been wondering about: Why are Jews suffering in exile all these years? Now I get it! I see that they deserve it!

Rabbeinu Ephraim al haTorah, who was an early commentary, makes this point in an even stronger fashion: Moshe Rabbeinu could not understand why *Klal Yisroel* should not be destroyed for being so contentious and slanderous vis-a-vis one another. According to Rabbeinu Ephraim, after witnessing these incidents, Moshe came to the conclusion that not only would *Bnei Yisroel* remain in Mitzraim and not come out, but that they would ultimately disappear.

Now, unlike the impression we get from a simple reading of the opening chapters of Sefer Shemos, Moshe did not flee to Midyan directly after killing this Egyptian. The Ramban writes that this incident of Moshe going out and killing the Egyptian took place when he was just twelve years old, or slightly older. When Moshe Rabbeinu came before Pharaoh, he was already eighty years old. What happened to those sixty-plus years in between, from the time he was twelve until the time he was eighty?

Rabbeinu Tam writes in his Sefer haYashar that Moshe ran to Eretz Cush (Ethiopia) in between, and stayed there for sixty years. Then, he went to Midyan, and that is where we pick up the story. For all that time, Moshe has nothing to do with *Klal Yisroel*. This matter of “He went out to his brethren and saw their suffering...” (Shemos 2:11) seemed to be merely a passing moment of concern. Then, for the next sixty-plus years, “It is not my problem!” Is this the Moshe Rabbeinu who is so concerned about the fate of his fellow man?

The explanation is that Moshe had concluded (as Rashi and Rabbeinu Ephraim mentioned) that *Bnei Yisroel* were doomed! His interaction with those two Jews that second day convinced him that the Jews were not worthy of redemption. That is why he could stay away for so much time with the firm belief that the Jews would never get out of *Mitzraim*.

Moshe came to Midyan and then saw the Burning Bush. He saw that it was not being consumed. This was a miraculous event. There was a message over here. *Klal Yisroel* are like this thorn bush. Anyone who starts up with them is going to suffer! Hashem was sending Moshe a message via this miraculous sight: Against all expectations to the contrary, a thorn bush, representing the Jewish people, was not being

consumed. Suddenly, Moshe Rabbeinu has an epiphany. Moshe says: Do you know what? Maybe, I was wrong! Maybe, my operating assumption for the past sixty-plus years that *Klal Yisroel* will never get out of *Mitzraim* was incorrect.

It is not easy for a person to change a deeply ingrained belief or assumption that has guided his life for the last twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years! Moshe Rabbeinu was confronted with a challenge here that is very difficult for human beings to face. Should I change my mind? It is possible that I was wrong all these years?

Moshe Rabbeinu said to himself "I will turn aside and investigate" (*Asura nah v'er'eh*). Moshe needs to talk to himself. He needs to convince himself. "Please, Moshe, check this out because maybe I have been mistaken. Maybe I am wrong!"

This is why Rashi provides the seemingly unnecessary elaboration "Turn aside from here and go to there." (Question #1) This is not just a matter of moving six feet. This is a very important life changing moment. (Question #2) This is a matter of changing an entire philosophy and world vision. This is why Moshe uses the word *nah* (please) (Question #3), because Moshe needed to convince himself. People find it very difficult to admit that they have been wrong.

Finally, that is also why the next *pasuk* says "And Hashem saw that he turned to investigate." The *Ribono shel Olam* saw that Moshe Rabbeinu was investigating. We asked, "What's the big deal about checking out a fire?" (Question #4) Sure. We would all check out such an incident. But if it meant having to reassess and possibly retract that which we have strongly believed for the last half century, that is not such a simple

matter. This made an impression on the *Ribono shel Olam* because this proved to Him that Moshe Rabbeinu had the quality to be a *manhig Yisroel* (Jewish leader). The quality to be a *manhig Yisroel* is the ability to admit "I may be wrong. Maybe there is another way of looking at things. Maybe I made a mistake."

At this moment in time, Moshe Rabbeinu becomes the leader of the Jewish people. We pointed out the same concept a couple of weeks ago (in Parshas Vayechi), when we discussed the *bracha* that Yaakov gave to Yehudah – the blessing of leadership. Onkelos explains that the reason why Yaakov picked Yehudah for the role of Jewish leadership was because he admitted (in the incident with his daughter-in-law Tamar) that he had made a mistake. "She is more righteous in the matter than I." (Bereshis 38:26) Yehudah also admitted "I may be wrong. Maybe there is another way of looking at things. Maybe I made a mistake." Since Yaakov saw that Yehudah had this quality, he proclaimed "The scepter will not depart from Yehudah." (Bereshis 49:10)

This happens to us as well. We have certain opinions, certain presumptions in life. There are certain things that we believe in throughout our lives. Maybe, just maybe, we are wrong. Everyone has opinions. They have opinions about Eretz Yisroel. They have opinions about secular education. They have opinions about women. People have deeply ingrained presumptions about all different matters. We are all opinionated. And of course, we are always right. "It is my way or the highway. There is no other way!"

If we are always right and the other guy is always wrong, we become intolerant of other people. Because they are wrong. Because they are silly. Because they are stupid. Because they

don't get it! This intolerance that is so prevalent today stems from this inability to ever reassess long held personal opinions, which just might be wrong!

The ability to say "Guess what? I was wrong!" is an attribute that everyone needs to have.

The Tolner Rebbe mentioned that the Gerrer Rebbe in Poland had 100,000 *chassidim*. The Gerrer Rebbe in pre-War Poland held that Orthodox Jewry must support Agudas Yisroel. If the Gerrer Rebbe held that everyone must support Agudas Yisroel, then automatically 100,000 *chassidim* supported Agudas Yisroel. Then, the Gerrer Rebbe heard that there was a Jewish leader, named Rav Yissachar Dov Rokeach (the Belzer Rebbe), who disagreed.

Now imagine that you are the Gerrer Rebbe with 100,000 *chassidim* and there is another distinguished Chassidic leader, who does not have nearly as many followers, who disagrees with you. What should be your reaction? "I'm right. He's wrong!"

But what did the Gerer Rebbe do? He sent two people to the Belzer Rebbe to better understand what he held and why he held that opinion. The delegation went to the Belzer Rebbe and explained their mission. The Belzer Rebbe asked them "And what is your opinion about the matter?" They responded, "We have no opinion about the matter, we are just here on a mission from the Gerrer Rebbe." The Belzer Rebbe explained to this delegation the reason for his opposition.

They came back to the Gerrer Rebbe and reported on their conversation. The Gerrer Rebbe responded, "Yes. There is such an opinion and it is important that there should be such an opinion." The Gerrer Rebbe explained: We are

all *nogeah* (biased) in our decision-making processes. We need to consult with someone on the outside who can hear our side of an argument and tell us “Do you know what? You’re wrong!” A leader cannot be surrounded by “Yes-men.” We need people around us to tell us when we are wrong. Everyone needs such a person. Our wives often fill this role. This one act of reassessment and reevaluation – Why is the bush not burning? – vaulted Moshe into the position where he was deserving of becoming the *Manhig Yisroel*. He demonstrated that he had the quality of saying “I was wrong!”

Showing The Nile The Gratitude It Deserved

Parshas [Vaera](#)

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vaera contains the bulk of the Ten Plagues, beginning with the plague of Blood and continuing up to the plague of Locusts. The plagues begin with G-d’s command to Moshe: “Say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt; over their rivers, over their canals, over their ponds, and over all their gatherings of water, and they shall become blood; there shall be blood in all the land of Egypt, and in the wood and in the stones.’” [Shemos 7:19]

Rashi on this pasuk [verse] teaches that it was Aaron, rather than Moshe, was commanded to initiate this plague because the Nile protected Moshe when he was thrown into it as an infant. Therefore, Aaron initiated the plague of Blood and the plague of Frogs (in which the Nile was also smitten).

The Gemara comments on this: A person should not cast stones into the well from which he has drunk.

This is the principle of Hakaras HaTov [recognizing a favor]. We learn from here that Hakaras HaTov applies even when the doer of the favor is only doing what he is supposed to do anyway. The Nile merely floated the basket. That is the nature of water. It is a law of physics that something lighter than water floats on water. The Nile thus did not go out of its way to do anything special for Moshe. It just did what it has been doing since the beginning of time.

And yet, we still learn from here that there is an obligation of Hakaras HaTov. This dispels a common practice among people. It is the nature of people to say: “Why do I need to say ‘Thank you’? Why do I need to have HaKaras HaTov? — He had to do it anyway!”

Hakaras HaTov is not measured by the benefactor’s efforts. It is measured by the impact on the recipient. When someone benefits from someone else — whether the benefactor did or did not need to provide the benefit, he did or did not have to do it, whether it was or was not a bother for him, the beneficiary has a responsibility to recognize that he owes a debt of gratitude. The proof is the Nile River. It merely did what water does and yet Moshe Rabbeinu felt a sense of Hakaras HaTov.

The Egyptians Remained Stubborn Against Their Better Judgment

The plague of Dever [Pestilence] wiped out all the livestock of Egypt. However, none of the cows belonging to Jews died. Nevertheless, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened. The plague did not have the desired effect.

By the next plague, that of Boils (Shechin), the pasuk says, "It will become dust over the entire land of Egypt, and it shall become a boil blossoming forth blisters upon man and upon animal throughout the land of Egypt." [Shemos 9:9]. Indeed, this is exactly what happened: "They took soot of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh and Moses threw it heavenward, and it became a boil and blisters erupting upon man and upon animal." [Shemos 9:10]. The question is "What animals? What beasts?" Weren't all the animals killed during the previous plague of Dever?

Rashi addresses this question. Rashi says that the plague of Dever only affected the animals that were out in the field. Those people "who feared the word of G-d" brought their animals inside and they were spared from the plague of Dever. Therefore, at this point in time, only the people "who feared G-d" still had animals.

But in the very next plague of Barad [Hail], Moshe again gave fair warning to the people: "Behold at this time tomorrow I shall rain a very heavy hail, such as there has never been in Egypt, from the day it was founded until now. And now send forth, gather in your livestock and everything you have in the field; all the people and animals that are found in the field and will not be gathered into the house – the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die." [Shemos 9:18-19]

The Torah continues: "Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem made his servants and his livestock flee to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants and livestock in the field." [Shemos 9:20-21]

The question cries out to us: Anyone who still had animals at this stage of the cycle of plagues was already proven to be one

who feared the word of G-d. How then, can the pasuk teach that there were people who DID NOT fear the word of G-d who kept their animals out in the field during the plague of Barad? I saw a very interesting insight on this question from Rav Elya Meir Bloch. The Torah is revealing to us a basic truth in human nature. It is true that during the fifth plague of Dever there were Egyptians who “feared the word of G-d” and brought their animals into the barns before the plague began. But by this seventh plague of Barad some of these same people stubbornly proclaimed “No! I refuse to take in my animals.” The difference is that in the warning before the plague of Dever, Moshe Rabbeinu did not challenge the Egyptians to bring the animals into their houses. He did not lay down the gauntlet and say (as he does by Barad) “You want your animals alive – bring them in; you want your animals dead, leave them out!”

During the earlier plague, people with brains in their head took appropriate precautionary action. They were not fighting the yetzer hara [evil inclination] of standing up to Moshe’s challenge. However, with barad, when they were threatened, as much as their logic and brains told them to take appropriate precautions, their emotions would not allow them to follow through. This is human nature. We resist orders and coercion even when deep down, we know that listening to these “orders” would be the wisest path to follow. People are willing to lose life, limb, and property, just so they can avoid admitting “Hashem is the L-rd.” (Hashem hu haElokim).

Don't let your anger fill the land!!!

Written by Benjamin A Rose

Vata'al ha'tz'fardaya vat'chas es Eretz Mitzraim (8:2)" – "And the frog arose and covered the land of Mitzraim." Why is tz'fardaya (frog) written in the singular? Rashi quotes from the Medrash that the plague began with one large frog. Whenever the Mitzrim hit it, streams of frogs came pouring out of it. Ultimately, so many frogs came out that the whole land of Mitzraim was covered.

The Holy Steipler Gaon asks the very obvious question. Once the Mitzrim saw that each hit brought forth more frogs, why didn't they stop hitting it?

The Steipler explains, they became furious when they saw the large frog spewing more frogs... They couldn't control their anger and frustration...

They hit it again... It spewed more frogs... They got even angrier... They hit it again... It spewed more... And again... "Va't'chas es Eretz Mitzraim" –

The whole land of Mitzraim was covered with frogs.

When we're angry, we act in a counterproductive and self-destructive manner. If someone acts aggressively toward us our automatic response is to respond with anger. Stop! Think. If we stay silent, the other person would gradually cool down. Our angry response will simply fuel the fire further. Counterproductive. Self-destructive.

Think. Plan out the proper response – if any. Act on impulse – va't'chas es Eretz Mitzraim and the whole land will be covered with frogs.

Recognising Miracles

Written by Jonny Caller

'...you shall stand opposite him at the river's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand' (Shemot 7:15).

Q: why did Hashem have to specify that Moshe should take the staff 'that was turned into a snake'? Obviously!, he only had 1 staff!

A I heard from Simon Taylor (who read it on www.torah.org) the following explanation: when Aharon turned it into a snake, Pharoah's necromancers

just did the same thing, belittling the miracle. By emphasizing that Moshe was to take that very same staff in bringing the plagues, the Torah is teaching us that the Source of the big miracles, Hashem, is also the Source of the ‘small’ miracles. There are big and small miracles happening all the time around us, but we don’t always recognize them. E.g waking up in morning, sun coming out etc.

Pharoh’s freewill and the different types of repentance

Written by Jonny Caller

Q: We see many times throughout the plagues that Hashem ‘hardened Pharo’s heart’, seemingly denying Pharoh the ability to repent and to let the people go! Did Pharoh not have freewill! A: The Chafetz Chayim explains that there are 2 types of repentance:

- a) Repentance that Hashem does for us. Siyata Dishmaya. Hashem brings us up without us doing much of the work
- b) Repentance that we do ourselves. When Hashem hardened Pharoh’s heart, Hashem removed option ‘a’ from Pharoh, but he still had the free choice nonetheless to repent if he sincerely desired to do so.

Humor

Q. Why couldn't the two [elephants](#) go swimming?

A. Because they only had one pair of trunks between them.

Q. Why shouldn't you play cards in the African savannah?

A. Because it's full of cheetahs.

Q. Why was the baby snake sad?

A. Someone took its rattle.

Q. How do you raise a baby elephant?

A. With a crane.

