

LAMPLIGHTER

24 Teves
Parshas Va'eira

119

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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

In this week's Torah portion, Va'eira, we read about the plagues G-d brought upon the Egyptians. On the simplest level, the plagues were intended to punish the Egyptians for enslaving the Jews and refusing to set them free. But the Torah tells us there was an even deeper purpose behind them: "And the Egyptians shall know that I am the L-rd."

The Egyptian people did not believe in G-d; the plagues were meant to educate them about the Creator and His power. As Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel explained, Pharaoh denied three things: the existence of G-d, the concept of Divine Providence (that G-d oversees and is intimately involved in everything that goes on in the world), and G-d's ability to perform miracles that transcend the laws of nature.

When G-d brought the plagues upon the Egyptians, all three of these erroneous beliefs were publicly disproven: The first three plagues demonstrated that G-d exists; the second three plagues established His Divine Providence; and the next three plagues taught Pharaoh that G-d can indeed act in a supernatural manner.

Significantly, however, the Torah mentions an additional reason for G-d's having brought the plagues: to teach the Jewish people about His greatness: "That you may tell in the ears of your child, and of your grandchildren, what things I have done in Egypt...that you may know that I am the L-rd." In other words, in addition to the effect they were supposed to have on the Egyptians, the plagues were meant as a lesson for the Jews, that they should "know that I am the L-rd." As Rashi notes, "The Holy One, blessed be He, brings punishment upon the nations in order that Israel should hearken and fear."

But why wasn't punishing the Egyptians and refuting their religious misconceptions, enough of a reason to bring the plagues? Why was it necessary for the Jews to be brought to a greater awareness of G-d?

The answer has to do with the reason G-d created the world in the first place. Our Sages teach that G-d created the world "for Israel and for the Torah." Accordingly, everything that happens in the world - every event and every little detail - has a direct connection to the Jewish people and the Torah, and is intended for their benefit.

For this reason, there had to be more "justification" than simply punishing the Egyptians and refuting their beliefs; the plagues would somehow have to be advantageous to the Jews. In fact, it was only when they caused the Jews to have a greater awareness of G-d that the Egyptian plagues completely fulfilled their objective.

Adapted from Vol. 36 of Likutei Sichot

Fire and Ice

By Michael Gourarie

In this week's Torah reading we read the story of the ten plagues that punished the Egyptians.

The seventh plague that G-d sent upon the Egyptians - the plagues that made way for the final exodus from Egypt - was hail. Enormous hailstones rained down, destroying Egyptian crops and damaging their fields. But then the Torah adds a miraculous detail that is somewhat puzzling. It tells us that each hail stone contained a flame of fire that burned inside the ice. What purpose did that fire serve?

The Zohar explains that the ten plagues were not sent just to dismantle Egypt's infrastructure. They were powerful forces that provided the Jews with strategies for spiritual rehabilitation. Each plague carried with it an important lesson in the journey of growth and true freedom.

Hail is cold and icy and symbolizes insensitivity and indifference to other people and their needs. The "hail" personality is someone that appears to lack the capacity to care, to be compassionate or to love. This is someone that seems totally cold and couldn't care about anyone or anything. Is this person beyond hope? Can a spark of love be ignited?

With this plague the Torah declares that even the stone hearted can be aroused. Every person has a flame of love and compassion within them. But with some that flame is a love of self, driven by ego and channelled inwards rather than towards others. The result is selfishness and care for one self, with insensitivity to others. The fire burns, but it is hidden inside the ice.

All that needs to happen is for the ice to melt, and the fire of love and compassion will be visible to all. To achieve this, the "hail" individual needs to do two things:

- a) Chip away at his/her ego by developing a sense of humility.
- b) Begin to do acts of kindness and love even in the absence of motivation. The deeds themselves will stoke the fire.

The flame always burns. It is up to the individual whether it will be hidden by hail or burn openly.

Slice of LIFE

The Dream Team

by Esther Kosofsky

Did you hear the one about the Chabad Rebbetzin, the Muslim cleric and the Buddhist monk? No, this is not a new joke; it is a true story that happened to me.

I was contacted by the Southwick, Massachusetts, middle school and asked to participate in a religious diversity day when the students would be exposed to a variety of religions.

Realizing that I had been handed an irresistible opportunity, I agreed to attend, rather relieved to find out that the students would be split up and rotate from room to room to hear each representative individually.

As the day approached, my apprehension grew and I wondered what I could say that would impact the students, not just give them the answers they needed to fill out the charts the teachers had prepared. These charts asked the typical questions about special foods, places of worship, holidays, significant books, and of course politically correct questions.

Southwick is a blue-collar town with very few Jews, so how could I reach out to them? The more I thought about it, the more concerned I became.

How could I leave the students with any meaningful information beyond terms such as synagogue, rabbi, gefilte fish and matza? How could I move them and inspire them to live more meaningful lives? I finally hit upon one of the great equalizers, sports and for this time of year, football.

The first group of students shuffled into the room clutching their important papers and pencils, eager to fill in the blanks under the "Jewish" column. While I certainly did not look like the religious leader they expected, they were not sure how to relate to a Jewish woman. They looked relieved that I did not have an

accent, but they truly were not prepared for what I was about to describe.

"Imagine that you are a football coach" I began. Southwick is New England Patriots football country and the Patriots won two Super Bowls in the past three years, so when I saw some eyes light up and kids seemed to be paying attention, I knew it was a good beginning.

"Imagine," I continued, "you are the Patriots coach, coming off two world championships in two years. You are looking for a new challenge and are being offered two new options for coaching. Option A is to coach a team of hand-picked all-stars, players with instant name recognition. I am sure this team would include some famous players from the past - like Terry Bradshaw, Lynn Swann, Johnny Unitas and Earl Campbell - and several current ones.

"With this team you could sit back and watch the players work together in harmony. All you would have to do is plan the Super Bowl victory party; the rest would be done for you. Just agree and you will go down in history as the coach of the best team of football players ever assembled. You will not only be the coach of the year, you might well be the considered the best coach ever.

"Option B would be to coach a team of, shall we say, misfits. This group of athletes is not quite in their prime, not quite as skilled and certainly not as talented as the first team. These players want to play but can't seem to get it together. These players have name recognition only with their mothers. They know the rules, but somehow come up short in execution. These are the players who might catch the ball and run towards the wrong goal and think they are actually scoring for their team.

"But do you know what qualities these players have? They have heart and they have the drive to win. With hard work and constant practice, with coaxing, convincing, and consistent leadership, there is a chance that these players might be able to be groomed into a winning team. If you can teach them the fundamentals, if you are committed to working with them and will give them a clear and attainable goal, it would be the

greatest challenge but you might just surprise the world.

"So you have a choice, Option A, the dream team or Option B, the not ready for prime time players. And now," I asked the students, "which team would you rather coach?"

The overwhelming response was Option B and the reasons given were obvious: this team presented a challenge for the coach. If you are going to invest time and effort into a project, you want to know that you helped make a difference. If you believe in your squad and are willing to put up with them as they follow their learning curve, there is a slim possibility that you will see amazing results.

As I scanned the room and saw that the students were with me to this point, I was ready to help them make the leap into the next part of our discussion.

"Imagine you are G-d, and you want to coach a team, or in G-d's terms, you want to create a world. You already have a dream team; they are called angels. Angels don't fight, they don't get sick and they don't die. Angels listen to the word of G-d and carry out His request without question; in other words, they are perfect. But G-d wanted more.

"There is no challenge in 'coaching' angels. So what did G-d do? G-d created humankind, He created you and me and gave us a game plan, a guidebook that teaches us how to live a champion life. We might not get all the plays right, sometimes we think we are doing the right thing but then realize that we were confused and end up in the wrong place at the wrong time. We often stumble. Yet when we manage to overcome all of the setbacks and touch the divine within us, when we commit ourselves to a life of love and light, this causes the greatest satisfaction to G-d, the Creator of the universe."

While I may not have covered all the facts in my 30 minutes with each class, hopefully I gave them something to think about the next Sunday during kick-off: that we can all do something not only for ourselves and the world, but also for G-d.

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Editor: Yisroel Leib Lester
P.O. Box 67, Balaclava Vic. 3183 AUSTRALIA

Email: lamplighter@rabbinicalcollege.edu.au

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ISSUE 1119

MOSHIACH MATTERS

It says in this week's Parsha: "And Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aaron and He commanded them to the children of Israel and to Pharaoh King of Egypt to take the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt." One explanation given in regards to the "command" is that Hashem wanted the exodus to be in the spirit of a command. A command is not taken into consideration and deliberation. It is by definition followed through. This was the approach that Moshe and Aaron took with Pharaoh - no negotiation. And this, also being the first of the times that the Jews would be redeemed set the tone for a non-negotiable approach to exile. We will be redeemed.



INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

24th of Teves, 5721 [1961]
Yahrtzeit of the Old Rebbe
Author of the Tanya and Shulchan Aruch

Greetings and Blessings:

On this day, the Yahrzeit [anniversary of the passing] of the saintly Old Rebbe (the founder of Chabad) [Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi], I recall a story related by my father-in-law of saintly memory, an episode in the life of the Old Rebbe which has a timely message for all of us.

When the "Tzemach Tzedek" [the third Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi Menachem Mendel] was a little boy learning Chumash [the Five Books of Moses - Torah], and he reached the first verse of the [Torah portion] sedra Vayechi - "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years" - his teacher explained to him (in accordance with the commentary of the Baal HaTurim) that the Torah indicated thereby that these were Jacob's best years of his life. Returning home, the boy asked his grandfather, the Old Rebbe: "How is it possible that the best years of our father Jacob, the chosen among the Patriarchs, should have been experienced in exile in Egypt?"

The Old Rebbe replied: "The Torah tells us that before going to Egypt, Jacob had sent his son Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to lead the way to Goshen. Here the Torah indicated - as explained in the Medrash, and quoted by Rashi - that Jacob had sent Judah to establish a place of learning, a Yeshiva where Jacob's children would study the Torah. By studying the Torah one becomes closer to G-d and he lives truly and fully, even in a place like Egypt."

The message for each and every one of us is: When Jews are about to settle in a new place, at any country at any time, the first and foremost step is to establish there a place for learning Torah, where the Torah would be studied and observed not only by the older generation (Jacob, the father) but also and especially by the children. When Jews realize that the very foundation of Jewish life, and of a Jewish Settlement, is the Torah, and acting on this conviction they maintain and cultivate a flourishing Torah centre, then they ensure that the new era would be the best years of their lives, irrespective what the external conditions may be.

Furthermore, by becoming closer to G-d, the Master of the Universe, one creates the channel through which G-d's blessing flows in a growing measure not only to those occupied with the study of Torah, the teachers and students, but to all those who support and expand the Torah institutions and thus actively participate in the spreading of the Torah and Mitzvoth [commandments] in a growing measure.

CUSTOMS CORNER

The Proper Environment for Prayer

During the Plague of Hail, when Pharaoh asked Moses to pray that the plague come to an end, Moses responded, "When I leave the city I will spread my palms to G d, and the thunder will cease." The Midrash explains that he would not pray in the city because it was full of idols.

We learn from this verse that it's forbidden to pray in a place that has idols. This prohibition includes icons that are worshipped, as well as crucifixes.

Additionally, one may not pray, recite any blessings, or study Torah if urine or feces are visible within a range of four cubits.

One may not pray in the presence of an immodestly dressed person. One should also cleanse one's own body before prayer by relieving one's self and washing one's hands when touching something dirty.

It is forbidden for a man to pray or say any blessing while bareheaded. A married woman should also cover her head while praying.

Because when praying we stand before the King of kings, it is appropriate that we dress in a respectable manner.

A WORD

from the Director

In this week's Parsha we read about how Moshe and Aaron came to Pharaoh's court. As a sign that they were truly from Hashem, Aaron cast his staff to the floor and it miraculously turned into a snake. In response, and to mock this attempt at miracles, Pharaoh had his wizards do the same. The Torah then relates that "Aaron's rod swallowed up their (the Egyptian wizards') rods," meaning that Aarons snake first turned back into a stick and then swallowed the other snakes (according to several commentaries, the Egyptians' staffs were swallowed as snakes). The Midrash comments on this that if Aaron's serpent would have swallowed their serpents, there would be nothing remarkable in that, because it is usual for serpents to swallow each other. Therefore the Torah tells us that the serpent resumed its original form, and as a staff swallowed the wizard's serpents.

The Torah's ways are pleasant and peaceful, and its objective is to shine light and not to battle the darkness. Nevertheless, when there are those who seek to obliterate us, even Moshe, the shepherd of the Jewish people, and Aaron, the man of peace, must play the role of chastising Pharaoh and crushing the might of the enemy.

Herein lies the lesson we can derive from this story. The fact that Aaron's staff swallowed the serpents shows us that even as the Jew is protecting his people and warring with the enemy, he is not the warrior. Even when consuming the enemy - the serpent - his involvement and desire to act in this vein is as dry as a petrified staff. Through shining with the light of Torah and dealing with the negative that may exist in our lives only in a removed manner, Hashem will ultimately show us that the negative really never existed and the inner truth of His oneness will shine forth as darkness and light will be one.

J. I. Guterlich

IT HAPPENED *Once...*

THE JUDGMENT AND THE ADVICE

Reb Noah was a devoted disciple of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the "Alter Rebbe" of Chabad, who lived in 18th century Russia. Reb Noah's son eventually married the Alter Rebbe's daughter and from that union came the Rebbe who was known as the Tzemach Tzedek. To this day, the memory of Reb Noah is well honoured among Lubavitchers, who tell this story about him.

After Reb Noah died and came before the Heavenly Court, they looked into his case and found that he had been a very good Jew. All his life he had observed the commandments as best he could and never missed any opportunity to perform an additional *mitzvah*.

Now, as is well known (Avot 4:11), when a Jew fulfils a *mitzvah*, a holy angel is born from that very act. These angels, it is said, will come to testify on behalf of the soul after death. And the more properly and sincerely he does the *mitzvah*, the stronger the angels will be. So it happened when Reb Noah stood before the Heavenly Court that thousands upon thousands of luminous *mitzvah* angels came to his trial, saying "I was born from such-and-such a good deed performed by Reb Noah when he was alive on earth".

The Heavenly Court was very impressed by the testimony of all these *mitzvah* angels and was about to decide that Reb Noah should go immediately to *Gan Eden* ("Paradise"). But suddenly another angel appeared, a dark one. It stood before the Court and said "I was born from a sin that Reb Noah committed during his life on earth." Then the angel revealed to the Court exactly what the sin had been.

The three judges who sit on the Heavenly Court deliberated thoroughly. On the one hand, Reb Noah was a pious man who had led a basically righteous life, so he deserved to go to *Gan Eden*. But on the other hand, he had committed the sin. Just as no good deed every goes unrewarded, so does no sin ever go unpunished. Finally, the Court decided to give Reb Noah two choices: he could spend a half-hour in *Gehennom* ("Purgatory") now, to atone for the sin, and then go straight to *Gan Eden*. Or, he could avoid the pain of purgatory by reincarnating on earth once again and making up for the sin there.

Reb Noah answered: "With all due respect to this Court, I would like to consult with my Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman, before I make a decision. All my life I never did anything concerning my spiritual life without first asking the Rebbe's advice. And so I would like permission to ask the Rebbe about this now."

The Court consulted the Heavenly Records and found that it was indeed true. Reb Noah never did anything important without first asking the Alter Rebbe's advice. "Very well" the Court replied, "you may return to earth in the spirit and consult with your Rebbe about your decision".

Back on earth, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was sitting at the table as usual, learning Torah with his chassidim. Then the soul of Reb Noah appeared to him in the spirit and posed the question: "Earth or *Gehennom*?" The Rebbe turned to his chassidim and said "Reb Noah is here right now, and he is asking what judgment he should choose: a half hour in Purgatory or to be reborn in this world another time."

The chassidim said nothing. What could they say? If the Rebbe wasn't prepared to decide, how could they presume to speak for him? So they sat there in silence, waiting to hear what the Rebbe's answer would be.

The Alter Rebbe put his hand on his forehead, then rested his elbow on the table and concentrated very deeply. For a long time he just sat there in silence, turning the question over in his mind, weighing all the consequences. Then came the answer: "*Gehennom* - to purgatory!"

As soon as the Rebbe had said the word "*Gehennom*", the chassidim all heard a voice cry out in anguish, "Oy, Rebbe!" At the same moment they saw, burned into the wall by the door, the outline of a human hand!

From this the chassidim understood what a spiritual danger it can be for a soul to be born into this world. Better to spend half an hour in the fires of Purgatory than a whole lifetime on earth once again!

Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles

Biographic note:

Rabbi Shnuer Zalman [18 Elul 1745-24 Tevet 1812], one of the main disciples of the Maggid of Mezritch, is the founder of the Chabad-Chasidic movement. He is the author of *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* and *Tanya* as well as many other major works in both Jewish law and the mystical teachings.

Thoughts THAT COUNT

And the magicians brought up frogs on the land of Egypt (8:3).

Only "on the land of Egypt" -- their frogs did not jump into the ovens. (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*)

Pharaoh said: "Sacrifice to G-d your G-d in the wilderness, but don't go too far; pray for me (8:24)

The animal soul of man, which embodies his selfish and material desires, knows that it is futile to try to dissuade a Jew from serving his Creator. So when a Jew wants to pray, it doesn't try to stop him; instead, it seeks to transform his service into just another selfish endeavour. Go ahead, says the "Pharaoh" within, serve your G-d. "But don't go off too far. Pray for me as well..." (*Chassidic Saying*)

CANDLE LIGHTING: 27 DECEMBER 2013

BEGINS	ENDS
8:26MELBOURNE	9:32
8:13ADELAIDE	9:16
6:27BRISBANE	7:25
6:55DARWIN	7:48
6:26GOLD COAST	7:25
7:06PERTH	8:07
7:50SYDNEY	8:52
8:02CANBERRA	9:05
8:29LAUNCESTON	9:39
8:24AUCKLAND	9:29
8:38WELLINGTON	9:47
8:33HOBART	9:45
7:27BYRON BAY	8:26
6:49SINGAPORE	7:41



CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

439 INKERMANN STREET, CAULFIELD
PARSHAS VA'EIRA
24 TEVES • 27 DECEMBER

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	8:26 PM
	MINCHA:	8:35 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	9:05 PM
SHABBOS:	TEHILIM:	8:00 AM
	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA	9:40 AM
	MINCHA:	8:20 PM
	SHABBOS ENDS:	9:32 PM
	Molad for the month of Shevat: January 1, 2014	1:42 (6 chalakim) PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHACHARIS: SUN-FRI:	9:15 AM
	MON-FRI:	8:00 AM
	MINCHA:	8:35 PM
	MAARIV: SUN-FRI:	9:25 PM