

Lamplighter

24 Tevet

Va'eira

963

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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

The Torah portion of Va'eira recounts the plagues that G-d inflicted on the Egyptians. Most lasted one week, with the exceptions of the plague of darkness and the slaying of the firstborn.

Rashi, the foremost Torah commentator, provides the timetable: In general, each plague occupied a period of one month. The first week was the plague itself, followed by three weeks during which Moses repeatedly warned Pharaoh about the plague to come.

At first glance, this categorization seems odd. Wouldn't the three weeks of warning belong to the next plague, rather than the one which preceded it? No, Rashi insists, the three weeks in which Moses admonished Pharaoh and forewarned him about the coming plague relate to the plague that was already visited upon the Egyptians.

Here we see the deeper significance of Moses' actions: In warning Pharaoh, Moses' intention was not merely to prepare him for the next round of punishment, but to "break" him. The whole purpose of the Ten Plagues was to shatter Pharaoh's arrogance, to intimidate him. In fact, the warning phase that followed each plague was an integral part of this process.

By reprimanding Pharaoh immediately upon the completion of each plague, the fear and damage inflicted by that plague was intensified manifold. With each warning, Pharaoh came that much closer to being "broken."

The Torah relates that even before the plagues began, Moses was sent before Pharaoh and his magicians to perform the miracle in which his staff turned into a serpent. The very next day, with the impression still fresh in Pharaoh's mind, Moses warned him about the plague of blood.

Concerning this mission, G-d commanded Moses, "The staff that turned into a snake, you shall take in your hand" - thereby emphasizing the connection between the miracle and Moses' words of admonition. With Pharaoh still under the influence of what he had witnessed, Moses' warning made the miracle seem that much more wondrous.

Pharaoh is symbolic of the obstacles a Jew encounters in his service of G-d; the plagues represent his efforts to wage war against them. Applying the above principle to our lives we see that it's not enough to "attack" these impediments; we must "break" them completely until total victory is attained.

Chasidut explains that this desire to prevail is deeply rooted in the soul. And just as a king will spend vast amounts of money to be victorious in war, G-d opens His "treasury" and grants the Jewish people storehouses of strengths.

We, the generation of the "footsteps of Moshiach," are particularly equipped with the strength to overcome difficulties. And by standing strong we will attain the ultimate victory of all: the Final Redemption with Moshiach.

(Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe)

The Greatest Miracle of All

By Naftali Silberberg

Miracles, miracles, and more miracles. That is the story of this week's Torah portion. Sticks transforming into serpents; water turning into blood; hail pellets with a core of fire; dreadful plagues of frogs, lice, wild beasts, pestilence and boils.

"Fairy tales," declares the sceptic. "Isn't it *so* convenient that all these miracles happened more than three thousand years ago? I'll believe it when I see it with my own eyes! Why didn't G-d send Ten Plagues upon the Nazis? What's with all the terrorists who blow up men, women and children? Did G-d perhaps forget how to make miracles?!"

The believing Jew, too, asks the same questions – albeit in a more respectful tone. Yes, he understands that G-d controls nature as well as the super-natural, but why did G-d choose to flip the switch, deciding to abandon the course of miracles, and run the world entirely through the laws of nature?

The Book of Exodus introduces us to the era of openly nature-defying miracles, an era which lasted roughly a millennium. The Scriptures are filled with stories of prophets and miracles; in fact, it seems that the laws of nature were temporarily defunct. This era ended with the destruction of the first Holy Temple. Afterward, there were a few brief glimpses of the supernatural – such as the miracle of Chanukah – but after a few centuries, these, too, vanished. For the past 2000 years we live in a double exile: physically, we were banished from our homeland, and spiritually, we cannot perceive the G-dly hand which creates and directs all of creation.

The reason for the emergence and subsequent disappearance of miracles is linked to the purpose of our very existence. Life in the Garden of Eden was idyllic, because evil was not yet part of the human character. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge imbued Adam and Eve with an intimate knowledge of physical and material desire. The moment they were expelled from the Garden is the moment when the story of the perpetual human struggle began: the struggle of choosing between the G-dly (good) or the opposite (egotism, hedonism, etc.). And actually, this is what G-d really wanted from the moment he considered the idea of creation — a free-choosing human being who would struggle with the evil and self-centeredness which are natural parts of his personality, and triumph.

Miracles are comparable to training wheels. In the early years of our nationhood, G-d assisted us in our struggle by frequently and very openly interfering in the happenings of this world. A miracle opens the eyes to a higher truth and motivates a person to want to connect to this higher reality through Torah and mitzvot. Ultimately, however, we need to mature. We need to be able to ride the bike with our own two wheels; we need to face life's struggle with our own strengths. The Messianic Era is the consummation of our relationship with G-d, and to earn this privilege we have to prove that the relationship is real to us, so real that we maintain this relationship even in the absence of any revealed reciprocation from G-d.

We are the greatest miracle of all: our ability to steadfastly remain loyal to G-d throughout two thousand years of temptation despite the spiritual blackness which surrounds us.



Staying Jewish in Russia

It was Stalinist Russia. The sudden banging on the door made the occupants' blood run cold. The knocking was getting louder. They were about to sneak out the back exit when the older of the two suggested that the younger one stay behind. It was better to wait a few minutes before opening the door.

The banging continued even more vigorously. "Who's there?" the youngster called out, but the stranger refused to identify himself. The youth flung open the door. Standing there was a high-ranking officer of the KGB. "Is this where the *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) lives?" the officer demanded.

"*Shochet*?" he replied. "There's no one here by the name of Shochet."

The officer gave him a penetrating look and said, "Then perhaps there's someone here who cuts children?"

"No," he said in the most confident tone he could muster.

For a moment the stranger said nothing. Then he whispered in the boy's ear: "Don't deny it. I know that the man who cuts children lives here!" The youth was shocked, for the man had uttered these words in Yiddish!

"I am a Jew. Seven days ago my wife gave birth to a baby boy, and I want very much for him to be entered into the covenant of Abraham. My wife is very much opposed to the idea. Tomorrow at exactly nine in the morning she will be leaving the house. I am begging you to come to my house tomorrow and bring the *mohel*. The baby will be in one of the front rooms."

The officer told the astounded youngster his address and hurried away. "Remember," he said pleadingly, "Tomorrow is the eighth day of my son's life. I implore you to do me this favour."

Reb Eizik was the only *shochet* and *mohel* in the entire city, and Yaakov, a boy with no living relatives in the world, had been taken in to live with the *shochet* and accompanied him on his holy and very dangerous rounds.

The officer left. Was it a trap? Yaakov was convinced that it was a clever ruse cooked up to catch Reb Eizik red-handed. When Reb Eizik came home, Yaakov filled him in on everything. The Chasid thought for several minutes, the deep wrinkles that lined his forehead testifying to his inner conflict and turmoil. He had reached a decision:

"Tomorrow morning we will go to the officer's house to enter his son into the covenant of Abraham."

The following day, Reb Eizik and his ward arose at dawn and recited their prayers. Then they set out in the direction of the river. On the way, the Chasid explained that he was almost certain that this was, indeed, a trap. He therefore wished to immerse himself in a *mikva* (Ritual bath) before they continued. "If this is to be our last day on earth, at least we will die in a state of ritual purity," he declared.

The officer's house was located on one of the finest streets in the city, which only served to confirm their suspicions. The neighbourhood was inhabited by the highest ranking members of the KGB and their families. But the two Jews stuck to their decision. Reb Eizik and Yaakov secreted themselves in a hiding place across from the officer's house. Seconds later they saw a woman dressed in the latest fashion exit the building and proceed down the block. Together they strode across the street.

Reb Eizik knocked on the massive door. An older woman opened the door and motioned for them to enter. In the corner of the room was a beautiful crib, inside which a tiny baby was sleeping peacefully. They ran over and picked up the child, whereupon a small white envelope fell out.

Inside the envelope was a letter from the baby's father, apologizing for his not being able to be present at his son's *bris*

(*Circumcision*) and asking that they give the baby a Jewish name. The rest of the letter was an emotional statement of his thanks and appreciation for the great mitzva they were doing, without their even knowing who he was.

Reb Eizik quickly and deftly performed the *bris*, while Yaakov acted as *sandek* (*The one who holds the boy while the circumcision is performed*). They were about to leave when the woman who had opened the door suddenly appeared and motioned for them to stay put.

Yaakov was terrified. Seconds later, however, the woman brought out a brand new frying pan, and handed them a dozen eggs! A veritable fortune! She invited them to make themselves omelettes. The young boy was so malnourished, so starved, that the eggs went down with no effort at all.

After they finished eating and were about to leave, the woman presented them with a huge sack of bread, another gift from the Russian officer. Such a quantity of bread was something the average citizen could only dream of, but how could they walk down the street carrying the bag. Surely they would attract the attention of the ever watchful police.

The woman suddenly understood why the two Jews hesitated to accept the priceless gift. She opened a drawer, ripped off a wad of coupons from a booklet and handed them over.

Many months later Yaakov was walking down the street when the same Russian officer stopped him. "I must thank you again, from the bottom of my heart. I have one more request to make of you. Whenever you make a *bris*, you should tell my story. Let everyone know that even in Soviet Russia, there are still Jews who have a warm spot in their hearts for Yiddishkeit."

This request led to a tradition in Yaakov's family. He is honoured with being the *sandek*, in commemoration of the role he played in that *bris* so very long ago, and he relates the story of the Russian officer, from beginning to end, with great enthusiasm and fervour.

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ISSUE 963

MOSHIACH MATTERS

We must increase in light, and not just any light, but specifically the light of *Simcha* (joyousness). Since *Simcha* "breaks all boundaries and limitations," it breaks through the person's limitations, the limitations of this world, and the limitations imposed by this dreadful darkness of exile...
(The Lubavitcher Rebbe, 15 Shevat, 5739 - 1979)

INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE



Aleph d'Rosh Chodesh Tammuz, 5710
June 15, 1950

This is in reply to your question regarding the significance of the custom during the marriage ceremony that the bride makes seven circuits around the groom under the Chuppah [wedding canopy].

The answer to this question, it seems to me, has to cover the following sub-questions: 1) The significance of the circuit, 2) its repetition seven times, 3) the bride circling around the groom and not vice versa, 4) the bride then joining the groom, standing by his side within the circle.

I trust that the following may give you a satisfactory answer.

It is stated in the Zohar (Part III, 7:2) that marriage, which is a union of two distinct persons, is in reality a union of two halves of the same soul. Each one, when born, possesses but half of that soul which becomes one and complete only in wedlock, through Chuppah and Kiddushin [sanctification].

This is why marriage is one of the greatest soul-stirring experiences of the bride and groom, for their respective souls have found at last the other half. Something of this joy is experienced, by way of illustration, at the re-union of two close relatives or beloved friends who had been separated for decades.

To a certain extent, therefore, the marriage marks the beginning of a complete and full life, while the pre-marital life of either the bride or groom may be considered in the nature of a preparatory period.

The union of the two parts of the same soul is not a union of two identical halves which make one whole; but they complement each other, each of them enriching the other with powers and qualities which hitherto were not possessed by him or her. For the "masculine" and "feminine" parts of the souls have basic differences, reflecting, broadly speaking, the character differences of the genders. One such difference is what our Sages called "the nature of the male to conquer," i.e., the propensity of the male to conquer new provinces (in business, profession, science, etc.) outside his home. This quality is generally not found in the female. On the other hand, the woman is called in our sacred literature the "Foundation of the House," for within the house her personality and innermost qualities are best expressed and asserted (Psalms 45:14).

It has been mentioned earlier that marriage, in a sense, marks the beginning of a full life. The wedding ceremony reflects this by an allusion to the beginning of all life. The Blessings of Betrothal (Birchoth Hanesuin) also begin with a reference to the creation of the first man, the first woman, and their wedding.

Ever since the Creation of the world, human life has been based on the seven-day cycle. G-d created the world in six days and hallowed the seventh as a day of rest. Man was then commanded to work for six days of the week, but to dedicate the seventh as a Sabbath unto G-d. When a Jew is about to set up a home and begin a full life, it is fitting that this basic principle of a happy life should be symbolized during the wedding ceremony.

Hence the "Seven Days of Feasting," and the "Seven Blessings" (Sheva Berachoth). This brings us also to the seven circuits of the bride around the groom.

Bearing the above in mind, as well as the earlier introductory remarks concerning the basic character differences between the male and female, the ceremony of the seven circuits which the bride makes around the groom suggest the following explanation:

The groom, who takes the initiative in bringing the union to fruition, is initially the centre of the new Jewish home. He is the first to take his place under the Chuppah. When the bride is led to the Chuppah, she proceeds to make a circle around the groom. This symbolizes the delineation (in space) of their own world within the outer world, with her husband-to-be as its centre. She continues to make circuits one after the other seven times, symbolizing that she, the "Foundation of the House," founds an edifice that would be complete on the first day of each and every week to come as on the second, third, etc., to the end of all times and seasons, a lasting and "eternal edifice" (with the infinity of the "cycle"). Her own contribution to this sacred union is also implied in the fact that she makes the circuits around the groom.

Having completed the seven circuits, she stands besides her husband-to-be in the centre of the circle, for after the preparations for the building of their home, both of them, the husband and the wife, form its centre. From here on, throughout the entire ceremony both the bride and groom form the centre of the holy ceremony, like king and queen surrounded by a suite of honour. Their lives become united into One full and happy life, based on the One Torah given by the One G-d.

With all good wishes and kindest personal regards.

A WORD from the Director

This weekend (Friday), 24 Tevet, is the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chasidism.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman, known by generations of Chasidim as "the Alter Rebbe" (the "Elder Rebbe") was a rationalist and a mystic, a Kabbalist and a Talmudist, a person utterly not of this world and at the very same time very much a man of the world. All of these qualities and more were harmoniously blended together in the Alter Rebbe.

At the age of five, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was accepted into the "Chevra Kadisha," (the Holy Society, i.e. the Burial Society) of his community. When he was only nine years old he was considered accomplished in geometry and astronomy. He was so proficient in the complicated laws of the Jewish calendar that he was able to compose a 15-year calendar when he was only ten years old. At the age of 12, he lectured publicly on Maimonides' intricate Laws of the Sanctification of the New Moon and the pre-eminent Torah-scholars of that time were utterly overwhelmed.

And yet, together with all of this great scholarship, erudition and wisdom was the ability to relate to every Jew, young or old, unlettered or scholarly, pious or in need of spiritual guidance.

The Alter Rebbe explains in Tanya, his magnum opus, that the ultimate purpose of the creation of the world is the Era of Moshiach. "It is known that the Messianic era, especially the period after the resurrection of the dead, is indeed the ultimate purpose and the fulfillment of this world. It is for this purpose that this world was originally created." (Ch. 36) But lest we think that we can just sit back and expect it to happen on its own, the Alter Rebbe delineates our responsibility to make it happen. "Now this ultimate perfection of the Messianic era and the time of the resurrection of the dead... is dependent on our actions and divine service throughout the period of exile." (Ch. 37)

May the Alter Rebbe's life and teachings inspire us to rise to the occasion and cause the world to realize its purpose with Moshiach NOW!

J.I. Gutnick

The proper time to recite the Shema.

The Biblical command is to recite the Shema "when you lie down and when you rise up."

Morning Shema

The sages concluded that the time of rising - i.e. the time when one may recite the morning Shema - commences when there is enough sunlight to recognize a casual acquaintance from a distance of four cubits (approximately seven feet), and continues until the end of the third hour after sunrise.

This is the time when the most "spoiled" citizens, the princes, would awaken. Although it seems that many of today's teenagers are even more "princely"... but that doesn't change the established Halachah!

"Halachic time" works differently than the clocks we are used to. In Halachah, time is based on "proportional hours" that depend on the season. Halachic hours are not necessarily sixty minutes; instead we take the day, from sunrise until sunset, and divide it into twelve equal parts.

Each part constitutes one Halachic hour. In the summer this can be up to 75 minutes and in the winter it can be as little as 45 minutes. Thus in the winter, the time for reciting the Shema ends earlier than in the summer.

Ideally, one should recite the Shema at the earliest opportunity possible.

After this end time, the Shema can - and should - still be recited, however the Biblical Mitzvah of reciting the Shema in its proper time has not been fulfilled.

Evening Shema

The Shema at night may be said after the stars appear.

As with the morning Shema, the evening Shema, too, should ideally be recited as early as possible.

Technically, the evening Shema can be recited until dawn, but it is preferable that a person not delay it past midnight lest he fall asleep and not say the Shema. If unavoidable circumstances prevented one from reciting the Shema before dawn, it may be recited until sunrise.

(for exact times go to Chabad.org)

It is also customary to recite the Shema again before going to sleep at night.

CUSTOMS CORNER

It Happened Once...



The Alter Rebbe, author of the Tanya and (Rav's) Shulchan Aruch, had many thousands of followers. When any one of them had a serious problem, they would come to Liozna, the small town in White Russia where the Rebbe lived, to ask his advice and blessing.

So it was that one of his followers, who lived in a nearby village, came to the Alter Rebbe one day with tears in his eyes, and poured out his troubled heart to him. He told the Rebbe that he had a teenage boy, whom he tried to bring up in the Way of the Torah and mitzvos. He was a fine boy, devoted to his studies, and observant of the mitzvos. But suddenly, something got into him, and he began to turn away from Torah and mitzvos. The heartbroken father feared that his son might go completely astray, and he begged the Rebbe to tell him what to do to bring him back to the right path.

"Do you think you could persuade your son to come and see me?" the Alter Rebbe asked.

"I'm afraid that in his present state of mind he may not be willing to come to the Rebbe the villager answered sadly.

"Then try to find some excuse to get him to come here. Perhaps you can send him into town on some errand? the Rebbe suggested. Once he is in town a way will be found to get him to see me."

Somewhat encouraged by the Alter Rebbe's optimism the Chassid returned home with a lighter heart.

Thinking about a way of carrying out the Rebbe's suggestion he suddenly had an idea. His son was very fond of horseback riding. Now it was not considered nice for observant young Jews to ride into town on horseback, but his son did not worry about what people might say, and whenever the opportunity presented itself he would ride right into town on horseback like any non-Jewish country yokel.

So the Chassid thought up an errand and asked his son to go into town.

"If I can ride into town ..." the son said. His father nodded.

The young man went galloping into town. Little did he know that the errand was really a pretext for his father's friends to get him to the Rebbe's house.

Shortly he found himself facing the Rebbe who greeted him warmly.

"But why did you choose to ride into town on horse back, instead of in a buggy?" the Rebbe asked.

"Well, I just love horseback riding. My horse is a fine animal; why not take advantage of such a fine horse?" the boy replied.

"And what are the advantages of such an animal?" asked the Alter Rebbe.

"A good horse runs fast. You gallop away and you reach your destination so much quicker," said the young man enthusiastically.

"That is all very well – if you are on the right road," countered the Rebbe, "but if you are on the wrong road, you can only travel quickly in the wrong direction!"

"Even so," insisted the young man, "the horse could help you quickly get back to the right road, if you catch yourself and see that you are on the wrong road. . . ."

"If you catch yourself and see that you are on the wrong road," the Alter Rebbe repeated slowly and emphatically. "Yes, my son, if you catch yourself before it is too late, and realize that you have strayed from the right path; then you can quickly return. . . ."

The words of the Alter Rebbe, uttered deliberately and pointedly, struck the young man like a bombshell, and the Rebbe's penetrating eyes seemed to pierce right through him. The boy fell down in a faint.

He was quickly revived, and in a subdued voice he asked the Rebbe's permission to remain in Liozna, so that he could renew his Torah studies and come back to his family as a good Torah-abiding Jew.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob... I have also heard the groaning of the Children of Israel. (Ex. 6:3-5)

Moses was concerned that after 210 years of slavery in Egypt the Jewish people would have grown too accustomed to the exile to fully absorb the message that their redemption was imminent. G-d's answer about our Patriarchs thus reassured him that his worries were unwarranted; the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can never accustom themselves to exile, for to them it is an unnatural state. Every day that passes is as bitter as the very first. The same is true for us today. Despite the fact that this present exile has lasted more than 1900 years, the Jewish people is more than ready to accept the message that the Final Redemption is indeed imminent. (*The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbat Parshat Shemot, 5751*)

But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. (Ex. 7:12)

From Aaron's staff we learn about the resurrection of the dead that will take place in Messianic times: If a lifeless staff, a dry piece of wood, can be transformed into a living entity, how much more so can a human being, consisting of a physical body and soul, be restored to life! (*Zohar*)

But when Pharaoh saw that there was a relief, he hardened his heart. (Ex. 8:11)

Such is the behavior of the wicked: In the midst of their punishment they cry out that they are vanquished, yet as soon as the agony has passed they return to their evil ways. (*Shemot Rabba*)

CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

PARSHAS VA'EIRA • 25 TEVET • 1 JANUARY 2011

| | | |
|------------------|---|-------------------------|
| FRIDAY NIGHT: | CANDLE LIGHTING: | 8:27 PM |
| | MINCHA: | 8:40 PM |
| | KABBOLAS SHABBOS: | 9:10 PM |
| SHABBOS MORNING: | SHACHARIS: | 10:00 AM |
| | LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA: | 9:42 AM |
| | THE MOLAD OF THE MONTH OF SHEVAT IS TUESDAY JANUARY 4: | |
| | | 10:32 AND 5 CHALAKIM PM |
| WEEKDAYS: | MINCHA: | 8:20 PM |
| | SHABBOS ENDS: | 9:32 PM |
| | SHACHARIS SUN-FRI: | 9:15 AM |
| | MINCHA: | 8:35 PM |
| | MAARIV: | 9:25 PM |

CANDLE LIGHTING: 31 DECEMBER 2010



| Begins | Ends |
|--------|-----------------|
| 8:27 | MELBOURNE 9:32 |
| 8:14 | ADELAIDE 9:17 |
| 6:28 | BRISBANE 7:26 |
| 6:57 | DARWIN 7:50 |
| 6:28 | GOLD COAST 7:26 |
| 7:08 | PERTH 8:08 |
| 7:51 | SYDNEY 8:53 |
| 8:03 | CANBERRA 9:06 |
| 8:30 | LAUNCESTON 9:39 |
| 8:25 | AUCKLAND 9:30 |
| 8:39 | WELLINGTON 9:48 |

Dedicated to the beloved, revered leader of World Jewry

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

צוקללה"ה נבג"מ ז"ע

May he succeed in imploring the Almighty to redeem His people speedily in our days.