



Parashat Vaera



English version

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THE ART OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Effective communication is the key to success in so many life areas. How do we improve our communication skills? Where does one start?

An excellent place to begin is with the Meshech Hochma in this week's Parasha. Moshe claimed to G-d that there is not a chance that Pharaoh would listen to Moshe that he is their redeemer, and the time of Exodus had arrived if the Jewish people were not listening to Moshe. Moshe claimed that the reason why the Jews did not listen was that he had halting speech.

G-d ignores Moshe's claims of his difficulty in communicating and commands Moshe to go back and speak to the People and Pharaoh. As the Passuk says, *וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּצִיֵם אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל-פַּרְעֹה מִלְּפָנֶיךָ מִצְרַיִם לְהוֹצִיאֵם: And YKVK spoke to Moshe and Aharon, and He commanded them to Bnei Yisrael and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt, to take out the Jews from the land of Egypt.*

How did G-d command Moshe to go back and try communicating again, if Moshe had good reasons to believe that he was just not good at communicating the message? It almost seems as if G-d totally ignored Moshe's seemingly legitimate claims of why he was not being

effective in communicating the prophesy of G-d!

The Meshech Chochma answers that G-d was not ignoring Moshe's frustration when He told Moshe to go back and tell the Jews and Pharaoh that the Jews should exit the land of Egypt. G-d was teaching Moshe, and all of us, the essential tool to communicate effectively.

G-d told Moshe that the reason why the Jews did not listen was because of what Moshe told them. *וַהֲבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-נְדָוִי וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם לְאֶרֶץ לֵיצָחָק וְלֵיִצְחָקב And I will bring you (the Jewish People) to the land that I (G-d) raised My Hand to give it to Avraham, to Yitzhak and Yaakov.* Moshe was promising his People the Land of the Patriarchs, the land flowing milk and honey. But G-d told Moshe that this is the reason why the message was not getting across! The Jews did not even have such dreams of fantasy lands on their radar! They were only interested in stopping their 86 year holocaust. This is what the passuk means when it says *וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִקֶּצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה And they did not listen to Moshe because of the short spirit and the hard work.* All they wanted to hear about, all they wanted to talk about or think about or dream about was that the work and misery would end. *Moshe, we do not have time, energy, or even headspace to*



hear about fantasy lands of flowing milk and honey!

G-d was saying, *Moshe! If you want to communicate with your people, you need to listen to what it is on their minds! Go and tell them only that they will leave the land of Egypt! Don't mention the Land of Israel and watch how they will listen to you!!!*

If we want to be better communicators, the main way we can improve is by listening to what is going on in the head of the person with whom we are trying to communicate. Most times, we think that the problem is that we are not explaining ourselves well enough. ערל שפתיים Or that the problem is that they don't understand, trust, or respect the one who is trying to communicate — הם לא יאמינו בי. But most of the time, that is not the issue!! The issue is that we are not listening to what is going on in their heads.

Before you give a public talk, before you communicate, ask yourself first what the audience wants to hear. The question you should ask yourself when starting to prepare your speech should not be what **you** want to say, but what **they** want to hear. The question should not be, do **you** want to inform, entertain, motivate, inspire, or advise. The question that will make your speech great is, do **they** want to be informed, entertained, motivated, inspired, or advised. It's all about them, not about you.

The key to being an effective communicator is not improving your vocab, or how you say what you say, although those are important. It

THE WATER IN YOUR STRAW

The best producers, artists and authors know how to give the illusion that something inanimate is actually alive. So, too, G-d created the world with the illusion that it is

is not changing your tone of voice, threatening, or complaining, because doing so will not communicate as much as confuse. Effective communication is mostly dependent on how well you actively listen, understand, ask Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How questions, so that you can learn and understand the one with whom you are communicating. Effective communication is dependent on how present you can be with those you communicate with, how much empathy you can have, and how much trust and rapport you can build. Effective communication is about speaking short, clear, and to the point, of what they want to hear. Effective communication is dependent on understanding where the person you are communicating with is at, and where they want to be.

So how do we become better communicators? Here are the selfie steps:

- Engage. Make sure that when you communicate, you are doing 20 percent of the talking, and the one you are talking to is communicating with you 80 percent of the conversation. Ask and see if they understood what you said.
- Know the person you are communicating with at as deep a level as you can.
- Become a good listener by actively listening, showing with your body language that you are focused and present on the conversation.

independent of Him. This is what is meant, in the words of the Talmud, that G-d is the best Producer ever. אין צור כאלוקינו means, אין צייר כאלוקינו (Berachot 10a).



There is a principle in writing stories and plays that every element mentioned or used must be an integral part of the plot. "If, in Act I, you have a pistol hanging on the wall, then it must fire by the last act" (Anton Chekhov). No element should be mentioned or appear to make "false promises" by never coming into play. Why do producers keep this rule religiously? Because in the real Movie called Life, where G-d is the Producer, everything has a time and place. אל תהי בז לכל אדם ואל תהי מפליג לכל דבר שאין לך אדם שאין לו שעה ואין לך דבר שאין לו מקום (Avot 4:3). Nothing is superfluous.

There is something in the Exodus story that seems superfluous. Moshe's Staff. What was so important about this staff that Moshe's becoming a leader started with it, and it is mentioned over and over throughout his life's story? (Amalek, Korah, hitting the rock) In what way was it so integral?

The Pirkei D'R Eliezer (40) tells us that this was not just another staff. This staff was created at twilight before Shabbat, on the sixth day of Creation, as one of the ten things that were created for the sake of Jewish People (Avot 5,6). It was given to Adam, who handed it over to Hanoah, and was subsequently handed down to Noach, to Shem, to Avraham, to Yitzhak, to Yaakov, to Yosef. When Yosef died, his property was confiscated and taken to Pharaoh's house. Yitro, who was then one of Pharaoh's sorcerers, saw the staff, the letters on it, and wanted to possess it. He took it with him and planted it in his garden. No one was able to get close to it. And when Moshe came to Yitro's house, he saw the letters that were on it; he felt a desire to have it, and was able to take it. Yitro saw this and realized that Moshe would become the redeemer of the Jews from Egypt, so he gave his daughter, Tziporah, to him as a wife.

This staff was made out of sapphire. What was written on the staff? ע"ש באה"ב דצ"ך which is the acronym of the ten plagues (Midrash Rabbah, Yalkut Shimoni). It had G-d's Holy Name of YHVH on it (Y.B. Uziel Beshalach 14, 21). What was the point of these inscriptions? And why, with them, was Moshe to use it as a "prop" to bring about the redemption?

In the beginning of the Parasha, G-d told Moshe that, in contrast to how He revealed Himself to the Forefathers, He reveals Himself with His Name, YHVH, to Moshe at the Exodus. In the Exodus, the great revelation was not only that G-d is in control of Creation, but that the whole of Creation is nothing without G-d! YHVH means that G-d is מהוה, that He makes things happen and exist. And nothing exists without Him. This is a basic, fundamental principle in Emunah. And the Exodus was the ultimate Emunah Academy.

Why did G-d bring ten plagues? Why did G-d not wipe out the Egyptians with one strong earthquake? The answer is because G-d wanted to show, once and for all, that there is no other power in Creation other than Him. That even Nature, all of Nature, is a Miracle. We know that each plague took a week, and then, there was a break for 3 weeks. The ten plagues took about ten months. Why didn't G-d just bring plague after plague? Why did He give three weeks' time to allow Pharaoh to have a breather?

The answer is because G-d wanted *the Jews* to learn, from the precision and detail of each plague, that He is the Producer. For example. If an Egyptian wanted a bottle of Mei Eden water from a Jew during the Plague of Blood, the Jew could charge \$1000. If the Egyptian did not want to pay and tried to put a straw into the Jew's cup, the Jew continued to drink



water, while the water in the Egyptian's straw turned into blood. These are fundamentals in Emunah: whatever you got in life, and whatever you did not get in life, G-d is the Producer. Down to the last drop. (See שיעורי נס וטבע – דעת – נס וטבע)

Moshe's Staff was called a Matteh, not a Makel. Why? Because the Matteh was there to tilt, להטות, to steer the heart of the People to G-d. (Sfat Emet) That was the Purpose of the Miracles and the staff was to make this point clear. It is a staff that can become a snake, and a snake that can be a staff, because it is all G-d shining differently through the prism. Of course, we all have a Pharaoh inside us, the Yetzer Harah, that tells us not to be impressed. ? (5, 2) מי יקוק אשר אשמע בקולו ? But it is up to us to realize that when something happens to us, G-d has a reason for making it happen. To us. Now. And here. And if something that we wanted to happen did not happen, if we felt we deserved something and did not get it, it is because G-d knows that it is not good for us. Because G-d is the Ultimate Producer. The staff was the baton passed on from person to person to bring the responsibility of this revelation to the person who would reveal it to Humanity. And when Mashiach will come, he will come with this staff. (Y Shimon Hukat תשנ"ט)

Why do some people have such a hard time believing this? Because they are missing Lesson Two of the Exodus. בני בכורי ישראל. Yisrael is my firstborn son. At this point in time, G-d signed the deal in which Esav sold his firstborn rights to Yaakov (See Rashi Shemot 4; 22). And this is the meaning of דצך

דצך Your joy, דיצה means happiness. באהב – with a brother who needs to pay (אהב).)Mishnat Chasidim)Your joy in buying the firstborn rights, Milah and Korbanot, freed you from Egypt. ואראך מתבוססת בדמיך.

What is the big idea about being Firstborn? Because sometimes, the other kids in the family feel as if everything is a hand-me-down life. As if all my parents' life decisions were for the firstborn; and then, we all had to follow suit, as if I am just an additional child, and whatever I got or did not is by default. But no. Every Jew is a Firstborn, and everything in your life was designed specifically for you. G-d, the Producer, has a way of writing the Grand Script in such a way that each person has his own script, one that fits perfectly into the Grand one. The two beliefs, you being G-d's Firstborn and G-d making everything in your life exist, are interdependent beliefs. YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE WITHOUT THE OTHER!

This is the reason why spiritual motivation is down by so many people. Because of the belief that "I am just a second child, and my life is in default to the lives of other people". But this is a HUGE mistake. G-d does not play favorites. You are G-d's only child. What you have was given to you by G-d. And G-d is waiting for you to build and activate a relationship with Him on a personal level, just the way He produced your life, on a personal level. And when you are joyous about being G-d's Firstborn, G-d will take you out of your own personal Mitztrayim as well.

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