



Parashat Vaera



English version

THINKING about ME.org

THE ART OF LEARNING LESSONS

The most important of all the lessons of history, is that men do not learn very much from the lessons of history. Covid, as well, has a lesson for everyone. According to YouGov, a research and data analytics firm, only 8 percent of Brits of England want to go back to life as it was before the pandemic. According to *The Economist*, Covid forced a home-working experiment that is likely to change work life forever, to some virtual/live hybrid model that is more time effective and cost efficient.

The purpose of יסורים, of pain and suffering, is at the root of the word סור which means remove, Mussar, etc. There are other Hebrew words that can be used, like סבל, צער, כאב but our Rabbis use, specifically, the word Yissurim, because if you do not remove something, some habit or some behavior, then the whole purpose of the suffering is defeated. As we learn in Berachot 5b, that if a person does not “appreciate” the pain and suffering he/she goes through, if a person does not learn something from it, it has no value.

This is the lesson of Passover. The Marror on the Seder plate is to be positioned in the place of the Sefirah of Tifferet, which represents G-d’s mercy. What? How could Marror, bitterness, be mercy? The answer is hidden in the custom that we eat Romaine lettuce, which is חסא, which refers to the mercy that G-d had

upon us. Because the Sefirah of Tifferet is truth, long term. Goodness, long term. To have long term goodness, long term truth, one needs, sometimes, to go through bitter times and accept the things that are difficult to accept. Because, as Judasim teaches, the only path to long-term pleasure is, almost always, through short term pain.

This is the reason why, if a person does not have Matzah on Pesach, only Marror, there is no mitzvah of having Marror alone. (Rambam K. Pesach 8;2, Sefer Hamitzvot Mitzvah Aseh 56) According to most opinions, eating Marror is not counted as one of the 613 Mitzvoth, on its own, because it is part of the Mitzvah of Korban Pesach. Why is that so?

The Mitzvah of Matzah is to remember the hasty Redemption, when there was not enough time for the dough to rise. The Mitzvah of Marror is to remember the bitterness the Egyptians put our ancestors through. And the Mitzvah of the Pesach sacrifice is to remember the disconnect from the Egyptian god and the recommitment with serving our Creator, and how G-d skipped over the doors of the undeserving Jews and punished only the Egyptians. If a person does not have Matzah, just Marror, then there is no Mitzvah in eating it, as there is no purpose in remembering only the bitterness. If, together with the bitterness,



you are not reminded of G-d's strength, if you do not rekindle your connection with Him – it's pointless. The Passuk teaches us this concept, as well. **בְּעָבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְקֹנֵךְ לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:** Because of this, for the sake of the Mitzvah of Matzah and Marror for all generations, G-d took me out of Egypt. (See Rashi Shemot 13;8) It is not that we eat Matzah and Marror because we went through Exile and Exodus. Quite the contrary. We went through Exile and Exodus, because G-d wants us to have this Mitzvah of Matzah and Marror. What? How does that make any sense? What is the purpose in of itself of eating Matzah and Marror?

Eating Matzah and Marror is a reminder of this timeless lesson, that all the pain and suffering we go through has a purpose, a lesson to be learnt, a way of life that can be altered, a perspective that can transcend with a paradigm shift. This is the element our Rabbis refer to as **מתחיל בגנות ומסיים בשבח** behind the Hagaddah story, beginning with difficulty and ending with praise. If, at the end, you can't express praise for the difficulty, you have missed the whole purpose.

The lessons learnt from self-reflection in the moments of difficulty are the building blocks of the story of our identity. Only these experiences spearhead lasting change. The interventions from Above to what we thought was “normal” challenge us to rethink our values, which ripple-effect through our thoughts and actions. It forces us to ask ourselves what's most important in life, and what we stand for. It helps us learn which values we can drop, and the values that do not help us get to where we really want to end up.

The first Mitzvah taught at Har Sinai, was how to treat slaves. Because that was a major lesson learnt from the experience of slavery in Egypt,

of pain, of degradation, so that we can have empathy for those who are dependent and reliant on us. This lesson is fundamental in the whole Torah, “Don't do to others what you don't want done to you.”

But, some people live their life not listening to their messages. Some people never learn, never pay attention, never take insight. This was the lesson of the Plagues, and why each one was given in a measure for measure format. Of course, G-d could have just struck the whole of Egypt with one big lightening flash, and called it a day. But G-d allowed the back-and-forth with Pharaoh, his Egyptian nation and the Jewish people, to teach us this lesson of what happens when people do not learn the lessons. When G-d warns that all animals that are left outdoors will die in the Plague of Pestilence, only those who “feared G-d” listened. And those who did not fear G-d, and ignored His word, who left their animals outdoors, lost them to the Plague. What? This is called “G-d fearing”? You have to be a fool to not listen to Moshe's warning, after the first four Plagues! But this is what G-d-fearing means, at its core. It means **not ignoring G-d's messages**. From all the things that were bad about Amalek, the epitome of Amalek's wickedness was **וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹקִים** *And he is not G-d fearing.* (Devarim 25;18) What? Amalek has plenty of things to work on before expecting from them fear of G-d. Because G-d-fearing means not ignoring the messages of G-d. And the core of all Amalek's wickedness was ignoring the strength of G-d in the Exodus.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored, and G-d does not cease to exist because He is ignored. Ignoring G-d's messages has a hefty price tag. If a person ignores G-d's message, **לֹא יִשְׁמַח אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמָיו** G-d won't want to forgive the person, ever. (Devarim 29; 19) G-d's message in the Exodus

was בַּעֲבוּר תִּלְעַ פִּי אֵין כְּמִנִּי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ So that you will know that there is none like Me in all the land. That there exists no being like G-d – that was the lesson of the first three Plagues, דַּצ"ךְ. No other being or entity is aware of the world and involved in it as G-d is; this is the lesson of the next three עַד"ש Plagues. There is no being, no entity with the infinite strength and power that G-d has. That is the message of the Plagues of בֹּאֵה"ב. (See Kley Yakar)

The world is still scratching its head trying to figure out how the invisible enemy that brought the world to its knees was created. But that, sometimes, is not as important as the lessons that we can learn from this whole mess. If we can learn just some of the lessons that are being sent from Above during Covid, we can change our lives!

Selfie steps for learning life lessons

1. All humans make mistakes. Not all humans learn from them. To learn lessons from your mistakes, you need to look past your shame, past your failures, ignore feelings of regret... all of which are temporary, while lessons are hopefully permanent. Nothing can empower you for your future like the lessons learnt from the mistakes of your past. Unfortunately, some of the best lessons of life can only be taught to us the hard way.
2. The experiences, the people, the adversities, the challenges of your life, are all there to teach you lessons. Nothing was put into your life randomly.
3. Never fail to learn lessons in life from the most unordinary places. Oftentimes, G-d packages lessons in the most ridiculous, unexpected, annoying, packages.

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 Pharoah 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 Pharoah. As the Passuk says, וַיִּדְבֹר יְקוֹקֵ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּצִיאוּ אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל־פַּרְעֹה מִלְּפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם לְהוֹצִיא

אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם: *And YKVK spoke to Moshe and Aharon, and He commanded them to Bnei Yisrael and to Pharoah 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 Pharoah 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. וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יְדִי לָאֶרֶץ לְאֶבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלַיַּעֲקֹב *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 מִקְצָר 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 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.

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 independent of Him. This is what is meant, in the words of the Talmud, that G-d is the best Producer ever. אין צורך כאלוקינו means, אין צורך 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 Hanoach, 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? דצ"ך עד"ש באה"ב 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.

מי יקוק אשר אשמע בקולו ? (5, 2) 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 עדש באחב. Your joy, דיצה means happiness. (גילה רינה דיצה וחווה) עדש – באחב – with a brother who needs to pay (אה חב).)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.

A LETTER FROM G-D

Read the next few lines, and then close your eyes for a minute. When your eyes are closed, try to picture a letter in an envelope, handed to you by a stranger. The stranger shows you his ID card. Eliyahu Hanavi. He tells you that in this envelope is a letter to you, personally, from G-d. You look up again to see the stranger, but he has disappeared. You are left alone holding the envelope, and in it, a letter from G-d. Now, close your eyes and try to imagine what G-d wants to tell you, a letter from G-d to you.

One day, last month, I got such a letter. It was a photocopy handed to me from a person on the street, someone I don't know, written in Hebrew. I was offered this paper for giving the stranger a hand. As he handed it to me, the stranger said, “Read it once a day, and you will have a life of quality and clarity. Guaranteed.” The heading in bold said, **A LETTER FROM G-D. And this is what “G-d” wrote to me.** Read it out loud, and remember: this letter is written to you by G-d, Who knows your whole life story, from before you were born. Here it is:

My dear, beloved son!!! Do you remember me? Are you living with Me in your life (?), or do you just mention my Name sometimes, (Baruch Hu Baruch Shemo, Be'ezrat Hashem, Im Yirtzeh Hashem) in somewhat a lip service? I want to remind you that I am your Father, and I love you very much. I am always with

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.

you, every time and everywhere. I know what is the very best for you. I do everything with your best interest in mind. I am, after all, bringing you closer to your life's destiny. You see only one piece of a gigantic puzzle, and from that one piece, you try to understand the whole, entire picture. But it is simply not in your capability to understand, so let go, relax...

*Believe Me, I am doing the best possible thing for you. I only put a person through a trial he can overcome or a test he can pass successfully. Rely on Me. Trust Me. Depend on Me. Confide in Me. Pray to Me. **Speak to Me.** I am right here! With you ! Always!*

I am the Shadchan. I am the Doctor. I am the Boss at work. I am the Peacemaker. I grant babies to parents. I am in charge of how successfully you raise your children. I, and only I, give you the gift called Life.

*Always remember that I am the One Who runs the World, and all your life's pain and suffering are given to you with love and abundant mercy. **I never make mistakes.***

It is a pity for you to think, “If only things would be different...”, “If I would have done things differently...”, “If only I wouldn't have said...”. All this is your Evil Inclination speaking inside.



Stop blaming people, thinking, "It's his fault. Or, it's her fault..." It's just Me, G-d. I am the One Who Created the Universe, and I watch over you each and every second of the day. I DO EVERYTHING THAT IS DONE IN YOUR LIFE!!! All the people in your life are My messengers !!! Always remember that this test you are going through right now in life, as well as every other test life brings you – it is all My Will.

*I hope that you will bring Me into your life, ...
Love you with a passion,
your Father.*

Each time I read this letter, I get more strength to deal with any upsetting circumstance life brings about. It is probably the only technique that works when the self help techniques of the gentiles fail. Because it is not a technique; it is reality. Most techniques are only needed because there is no Emunah.

This is the message G-d told Moshe to relay to the Jews suffering in slavery. The Jewish Nation was going through the worst holocaust of all time, the longest holocaust. The last 86 years before the Exodus were the hardest of the 210 years in Egypt. And this is the message G-d tells them. עמו אנכי בצרה *I am with him (the Jewish people) in his pain.* 24/7. G-d appeared to Moshe in a burning bush, hinting to the fact that G-d, too, is to be found with us in the thorns. Not that G-d feels sorry along with us or has empathy for us, but much deeper than that. When we are in pain, He is with us, there in the pain. (At Mt. Sinai, the Jews saw that there was a sapphire brick at "G-d's feet" . G-d was constantly mindful of the Jewish slavery, their toil with the bricks.) He

PLAN FOR A CHANGE

A few weeks ago, I coached a yeshiva student who was in somewhat of an identity crisis. He

does not leave us to circumstance. אהיה אשר אהיה , Hashem tells Moshe, 'Go tell the Jews that I am with them in the Galut. Literally translated, *I am* or *I will be*. What does this mean, that G-d *is* or that G-d *will be*?

People tend to forget, in their personal pain, G-d's existence. G-d is in the suffering with you, and this is the beginning of your redemption from your personal Mitzrayim. (Mitzrayim is like the word Meitzar, suffering, or straits, but in the plural form, many sufferings.) מן המיצר From my suffering, I call out to G-d. Because that's when G-d is so close, despite His hiding so well. Sometimes, the best hiding spot is right in front of your nose. And when G-d hides Himself the most, He, also, hides Himself much closer to you than you could imagine.

When G-d asked Moshe to go down to Egypt and redeem the Jews, Moshe said he was afraid that they would not believe that G-d still had them in mind. G-d considered this as gossip and punished Moshe with leprosy, the plague for speaking gossip. One of the signs Moshe would display, proving that he was the redeemer, was that his hand would come out leprous after he would slide it into his cloak. This proved their ability to believe, even from the depth of their downcast condition. At the time when their condition could not possibly get any worse, at the moment of the greatest suffering and, ostensibly, the point of complete absence of faith, the innate belief of the Jewish people was revealed in full force! G-d knows that *belief* is a core trait of the Jewish people. They have the ability to believe in G-d, even in the darkest of times. And this ability is what gets them out the darkest of times, as well.

decided that he wanted to be what he called "a Halacha Jew". He wanted to keep halacha



down to the smallest detail. The problem was that this boy was very far from the goal he was aiming for, which caused him great confusion. As he started learning halacha after halacha, he saw that he was not anywhere near where he wanted to be; he wasn't ready for all that change in life, and he wanted to give up. He felt, somewhat, an identity crisis. "If I can't be a Halacha Jew, than I will be a Jew that doesn't keep halacha. I might as well give up now, before I get more confused."

We reexamined and redefined what a Halacha Jew actually is. "A Halacha Jew is a Jew that decided that everything he does is going to be in accordance with halacha. He will do the best he can to live his life according to halacha from his present level, or to improve his situation, constantly *trying* to reach a greater degree of observance."

The reason why most people do not change in life, even after they realize the value of the goal that they have set for themselves, is because they have not made a firm decision. It is not because they are "not ready for change". People who change, change now, today, not tomorrow, even if they are not ready. It is the ability to decide that makes a difference; the decision to change, and that decision needs to be made immediately after they are fully aware of the value in the change. How, though, is a different story. But when people do not change, the reason they give is usually, "I was not ready for the change. You need to be ready, in order to change." People who wait until they are ready, never get ready. The people who are able to change have a different order of putting things together. The fact that they are not ready is just in the temporary reality of the moment; but in their mind, in their identity, in their belief system, the change has already been made. It is just a matter of time, until the change in the person is actually

put into action. Every day, they do what they can to put their planned changes into effect; they try to get closer to making the change a reality. This is something we can learn from our Parasha, and from R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l.

R' Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, adopted this self-help tool in spirituality. He lived for Kavod Shamayim, Kiddush Hashem and Torah learning in quality and quantity to a maximum degree. He knew that his greatest strength was that G-d was behind him. "Of course, I cannot carry out all of my plans for the future Mir. My greatest advantage is that I realize I can't possibly do everything I would like to do. Other people fool themselves into thinking that they can do whatever they want. I am in the hands of Ribbono Shel Olam, and I can only try my best."

R' Nosson Tzvi would explain. At the beginning of the Parasha, even before Moshe and Aharon actually followed G-d's directive to go to Pharaoh, the passuk says, *Moshe and Aharon did as Hashem commanded them: so they did* (Shemot 7;6). How could the Torah state, in present tense, that they did what G-d commanded them to do, even before they had done it?

We see from here that when you resolve to do something- even if it is beyond your natural capabilities, G-d considers that you have already done it. But, I believe that R' Nosson Tzvi had another secret. He did not just plan. He planned on paper. He told others to plan their life goals, their spiritual goals, and their learning goals on paper. In February 2003, USA Today reported a study of people who had made New Year's Resolutions the year before. Out of the people who had not made their resolutions in writing, only 4% had followed through. But, of those people who



had written down their resolutions, fully 46% had carried them out. This is a difference in success rates of more than 1100%!

I believe that the greatest human feat, the greatest change, that was performed in the Torah was taking the Jews out of Egypt. How did Moshe do it? He didn't. G-d did. That is why Moshe's name is not mentioned in the

Haggadah on Passover. But still, Moshe went through the motions, being the perfect, ultimate messenger of G-d.

לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה *The job is not up to you to complete. And you are not free to ignore your responsibility to do what needs to be done, to make the job happen.* (Avot 2 16)

BEHIND THE BLUEPRINTS

The wisest of men said, in Kohelet, (קהלת ב) ופניתי אני לראות חכמה והוללות וסכלות כי מה האדם שיבא אחרי המלך את אשר כבר עשוהו. *And I turned to see wisdom, folly and foolishness, for what is left for a man to do, a man who comes after the King; only that which has already been done.* The Midrash teaches that this comment refers to both King Solomon and Moshe Rabbeinu. Despite their greatness, they each made a grave mistake. King Solomon married one thousand women, foreign princesses, in his attempt to bring the world together to serve G-d. He transgressed one letter of the Torah, לא ירבה לו נשים, *The king may not have many wives.* A Jewish king is not allowed to have more than eighteen wives, for they may make his heart stray away from serving G-d. King Solomon thought that he was too smart for that to happen to him. But the letter י of the word ירבה leveled his accusation against King Solomon before G-d, and G-d punished King Solomon. The passuk in Kohelet teaches that after G-d has decided how things are supposed to be, it is foolish to think that one can reevaluate or reexamine G-d's decision.

The Midrash continues, saying that Moshe, as well, made this mistake of "outthinking" G-d. G-d told Moshe that He was not going to let Pharaoh send out the Jews. But still, Moshe questioned G-d by asking למה הרעותה לעם הזה *Why did you cause evil to this nation? Why did you send me on this*

mission? (Moshe was punished because of questioning why and he was not allowed to enter the Land of Israel (See Rashi 6, 1). And this is why the Torah uses the word וידבר *And G-d spoke to Moshe* אל משה וידבר is used when speaking sternly. And then, when G-d saw that Moshe had asked this question out of the pain he felt for his brethren, G-d softened his speech to Moshe, using the word – ויאמר which is used when G-d speaks gently (Shemot Rabbah 6 A).

Questioning G-d is something we do all too often without noticing it. And on a level of effectiveness it is the worst thing we can do. The Serenity Prayer is something we must often recite, and we can never repeat it often enough: "G-d, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." Not always can you choose. Choice is a gift from G-d. You can't choose your past, your parents, or the presents that G-d gives you. You can't choose your genes, your generation, or your gender. You can't change your siblings, your son, or your spouse's nature. But you can change your identity, what you consider important, and your intentions. Basically, Judaism teaches that all you really control in life is your attitude. Most things have already been decided by G-d. And that is a basic fact of life that that even the



greatest of men need to accept consciously, daily.

The Ramban (Bereshit 15; 14) asks the age-old question: Avraham was told about his descendants, that they would need to be enslaved four hundred years, and then G-d will judge the nation that enslaves them. ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי. So, why was Pharaoh punished for enslaving the Jews? Wasn't he doing his job? Wasn't that his destiny?

Several answers are given to resolve this question. Although G-d said that the Jews would have to be slaves, who's to say that Pharaoh had to be the one to enslave them? (Rambam Teshuva 6, 5) Also, even if he had to enslave them, why did he overdo it? Why did he drown baby boys in the Nile?

The third answer is that Pharaoh's intentions were off. His intention was not to act as G-d's messenger in enslaving Avraham's children. Quite the contrary. In his very first response to Moshe's request on G-d's behalf, Pharaoh responded with the disclaimer, מי ה' אשר אשמע בקלו. *Who is G-d that I need to listen to His voice?* (Shemot 5 2) Pharaoh was very clear about this. He was not in G-d's employ: he was just doing his own thing.

The Rebbe from Pasische would focus on the third answer and tell his Chassidim, "You see from Pharaoh how important it is to say the לשם יהוד the prayer in the Siddurim for the right Kavvanot, to have the right intentions before performing a Mitzvah. The main problem with Pharaoh's behavior was his intention. If Pharaoh had intended to do G-d's will, if he had said the לשם יהוד prayer, everything would have turned out differently. And this is what is meant by the words דן אנכי, G-d will judge the nation that enslaves

Avraham's descendants for their intentions. כי בדבר אשר זדו עליהם, the Egyptians were punished more for plotting against them than they were for the actual enslavement (Shemot 18, 11).

One of the things that my mother always reminds me is that every day that G-d gives us, wherever life takes us, we need to ask ourselves what it is that He wants from us. And sometimes, all he wants from us is our hearts, our good intentions, because at times there is not much more that we can do. Your intentions mean more to your identity than your actions. You can pray, learn, and do mitzvoth, without even having a feeling of subservience to Hashem. But G-d judges the intentions of our actions, not our actions alone.

The world of productivity can be divided into three kinds of people: Great people create. Ordinary people wait. Foolish people hate. When you look at the world this way, you see it in a new, different light. But even for the great people who create, their biggest problem is that they focus too much on the how, and not enough on the why. The Why is the foundation of whatever you are trying to create in your life. It is your motivation, your driving force, your battery. Don't forget to recharge it. Even G-d, in running His world, is driven by a Why, His Torah, His blueprint,(See Bereshit Rabbah, chapter 12) and G-d is not willing to erase even one letter of His Torah, even a tiny little י of the word ירבה, not even for a great man like King Solomon. Because King Solomon was going up against G-d's intention.

The greater your why, the greater you are. The stronger your why, the stronger you are. And the more subservient you are to G-d and His plan for you in life, the more productive you will be.



DON'T BE A WHY'S GUY

I recall one of my father's great lessons to my family as we grew up. למה? ככה! **Why? Because!** In coaching we were taught the power of a question. The greater the questions one asks, the greater the person. The less intelligent the questions one asks, the less intelligent the person. The six questions we ask are : Who, What, When, Where, How, and Why. "Why", however, is different from the others. It is a turbo question. It can stump you, make you feel like a fool, or, if used correctly can be the question that brings you your greatest successes in life.

There is a great Hassidic twist on the words of King David, למה יאמרו הגויים איה נא אלוהיהם . Why should the gentiles say, "where is their G-d?" Instead, read it, "*Why*", is a question the gentiles ask; where are **their** gods? 'Why' is a gentile question. Use it gently.

I was taught by Rabbi N. Geisler, my master coach, to use the 'why question' sparingly. It is actually even better to change the tune to, "What is the reason?" Be especially careful when the why question is asking a person about something they did wrong, where they failed, etc. The truth is that if you ask someone a few whys, if you dig deep enough, you will hit rock bottom. There will be no answer. *Why did you come late? Because I slept in. Why did you sleep in? Because I did not set my alarm clock. Why did you not set your alarm clock? Because I forgot. Why did you forget? Because I am an idiot.*

You are not an idiot. You are G-dly. If I would ask 'Why you are an idiot', there would be no answer. The answer is G-d. Play this "Why" game on people you don't want to like you. The Midrash says that asking people "Why did you do this?" gets them angry. The

reason why people can't answer why is because that is where G-d is in their life, an area of confusion for many. I do not ask myself, or the people in my life, Why. Unless I have to. Unless it is focused on the positive. Why did you get such a great mark on your test? Why are you doing the dishes for Mom? Why are you reading this article? Why do you like self-help articles? Why do you learn Torah? Why do you enjoy it? These "Whys" recharge motivation batteries. Self help gurus believe that if you have enough "because" to Why, or reasons for your goal, you are unstoppable.

The only blemish that Moshe had on his life record was – asking why. למה הרעותה לעם הזה . Why have you brought evil upon this nation, and why did You send me? Moshe asked this, of course, to help out His Nation. He put himself on the line for the Jewish People. But because he did, he received his worst punishment. He was not allowed into the Land of Israel (see Rashi 6; 1) . Why the Land of Israel? How was that punishment 'measure for measure'? Because the Land of Israel is given to the Nation that does not ask Why. It is a Land about which the Whys are left unanswered. Why do all the nations fight over it? Why is Israel the Chosen Land? etc.

This week's Parasha starts off, וידבר אלוקים אל משה . The word Elokim represents G-d's attribute of Judgment, and Moshe was subjected to judgment for having asked this question. G-d told Moshe, "The ancestors *never* asked Me why! I will give **them** the Land of Israel." Our rabbis learn from here (that G-d will give the Land of Israel to our Forefathers) a fundamental precept of our religion. Afterlife and Resurrection. Such a major, fundamental precept of our religion –



where would G-d mention it? In our Parasha, where G-d reveals Himself to His nation, as the One you don't ask Why. In our Parasha, where G-d answers, once and for all, the question of 'why do bad things happen to good people', צדיק ורע לו. The answer is, 'אני ה', I am G-d. You can't know Why. Because I am G-d, and you are human. There are things that we will never understand, till we die. The Arizal taught that sometimes G-d's reason is connected to Gilgulim, Reincarnation. Sometimes, the Why has to do with the previous me: my destiny, the destiny of the world, etc. The scary thing is, that when we ask Why in the wrong place, we could be bringing the Attribute of Judgment on ourselves.

When Moshe came to the people and performed the three signs, changing river water to blood, a healthy hand to one afflicted with leprosy and turning a staff into a snake, that wasn't convincing enough for Serah Bat Asher to accept that the redeemer of the Jews had arrived. When she heard that he said פקוד פקוד, she exclaimed – "That's the one!! He's got the password!!". The word פקוד has the numerical value of 190, or the numerical value of the word קץ (see Baal Haturim) . Moshe doubted that the Jews would believe the redemption had arrived, for they had been in Egypt for only 210 years, while Avraham had been told by G-d that they had to be in a stranger's land for 400 years! But פקוד, the 190 years that were left – G-d has them 'written in on the account'.

And if G-d said that He remembers us, with 190 years left, then our time has come!

A simple question. These words, פקוד פקוד , were the words that Yosef told the brothers, before he died. Moshe's father was the Chief Rabbi of the people at the time, and he probably knew the golden password from home. So why did they believe that he heard these words from G-d? Maybe he heard them at home?

The answer is, the big Why of Moshe's life. Moshe, in his whole life, was never really a part of the B'nei Yisrael in Egypt. He was thrown into the Nile as an infant, brought up in Pharaoh's house, ran away to Kush, to Midian, and now he comes from the burning bush and says the password. During Moshe's life, if you had asked him why G-d gave him such a weird, strange life, he probably would have told you, "G-d has a plan. I do not know the reason." But the only way the suffering Jews in Egypt would buy the idea that Moshe was the redeemer was if he lived this weird, strange life outside the Jewish Community. This was proof that G-d revealed Himself to him and gave him the password. For if he did not hear the password from G-d, where did he hear it?

So Moshe placed himself in this predicament and asked G-d the sinful question. Why. Why did you do evil to this People? The answer to Moshe, and the answer to humanity, is, I am G-d. And you are human. I am G-d, and mortals cannot comprehend. I am G-d, and be careful when asking "Why".

LESSON FROM A FROG

Anyone who gets angry is considered as one who practices idolatry. (Shabbat 105b) Why is it like that? The last time I got angry, I did not feel that I do not believe in G-d. Such a thought did not even cross my mind. As a

matter of fact, when people get angry, they do not forget that they do not like getting angry. They do not "decide" to get angry. There is just a thought that comes to mind that is an angry thought. And then they get angry. What

is the core belief of all angry thoughts? And why is it like idolatry?

The Steipler would explain something interesting about anger. He pointed to “the frog” (ותעל הצפרדע) mentioned by Rashi in the parasha. *There was one frog: they were hitting it, and it would spit out many streams of frogs.* That was it. Just one frog. G-d brought just one frog to the Egyptians in this plague. That one frog got hit by the first Egyptian, who was not happy to see such a thing, and then it spit out more frogs. The Egyptians continued to hit it, and endless streams of frogs jumped out. Had they stopped hitting it and just left it alone, then there would not have been a plague of such enormous proportions; there would not have been so many frogs. If so, why didn't they stop hitting it? – Because they saw that the frog did not listen. It did not behave the way they wanted it to, so they hit it repeatedly to teach it a lesson. Even if the whole of Egypt would be filled with frogs. They believed that *this frog* is going to learn who is boss. (Angry people never think rationally nor do they notice the outcome of their actions when they are angry). But on an even deeper level, they believed that if there was no such frog yesterday in town, it should not be here now, either.

This is what anger is all about. *I am going to teach reality a lesson.* Not only does it not work, *but reality teaches us a lesson.* And the reason is because reality is G-d. Allow me to go beneath the surface of all thoughts.

80 percent of thoughts are past and future thoughts, thoughts that are not actionable. Thoughts that bring us stress. Man is stressed when he wants a choice that he cannot have. G-d gives us free choice only in the present. We have no choice either in the past or in the future. We cannot change anything that is not

in front of us. What is in front of us is reality. What was just a minute ago was history, a memory. The future is just our imagination or dream, until whatever happens -happens. But man has a tendency to think thoughts that are not actionable.

Only G-d is in the past, present and future at the same time, not man. When G-d presented himself to Moshe, He told him to say to the Jewish People א-היה אשר א-היה שלחני אליכם “*I will be what I will be*” sent me to redeem you. In the midrash (*Shemot Rabba 3;6*) we find that G-d actually said אני שהייתי , ואני הוא , עכשיו ואני הוא לעתיד לבא . *I am the One who was, I am now , and I am in the future.* This is the way that G-d introduced Himself. This does not mean only that G-d is immortal, for immortality is only a display of G-d's Eternalness, not His Name. The Name of G-d, יהוה contains within it the concept of היה הוה ויהיה . Was, Is, and Will always Be. That is His Name. Why is this His Name? Because G-d is reality, whenever it is. Everything that we hear, see, smell, taste, and feel is G-d. This is why the best question to ask people who come for advice is many times “What are your options ? ” because that question wakes us up out of the past and future and brings us face to face with reality. Once we are in reality, we have choice. Because that is where G-d **gives** us choice.

Now, someone who does not accept reality is not accepting G-d. Such a person believes that *he should have choice.* He is attached to the thought of “*should*”. This means that he believes that he can have choice over G-d's choice. And that is a lethal thought.

Imagine a fellow decides, and I have witnessed this, that there should not be a stop sign or red light at this street corner. And he goes against reality. The results? BOOM! Imagine that a



parent decides that his child or spouse should be something or someone else? DOUBLE BOOM! When you go against reality, reality will teach you a lesson.

As long as we think that *the way things should be...*, we are in denial. In denial of the Now. We are either under the impression that the past should be the present, or that our previous

thoughts of the future will create the Now. But the past, present and future, are all G-d.

We feel G-d and notice Him the most in the place where we do not have free choice. And when we do not accept that this is the choice of G-d, we think that our choice can override G-d's choice. And that is something like serving idols.

THE HARDEST WORKERS OF THE WORLD

The Rambam wrote in a letter to his son, R' Avraham, that Pharaoh is none other than the Evil Inclination. R' M. Shwab writes that if we can learn the story and behaviorisms of Pharaoh, then we can learn the story and behaviorisms of our Evil Inclination. By opening our eyes and doing some soul searching, we can find many of these "inner traits of Pharaoh" on our own. The Messilat Yesharim (ch. 2) writes that the way that Pharaoh ensured that the Jews would not plot against him to rebel or leave was by increasing their slavery. Just by being busy, one does not get a chance to see what the reality is or what his options are. This plot of Pharaoh is the way of the Evil Inclination as well. As we will soon see, we may be able to learn from Pharaoh's own behaviorisms more about our Evil Inclination.

After Moshe's first unsuccessful attempt to free the Jews from slavery, G-d commanded Moshe to return to Pharaoh a second time. Moshe was reluctant. *The Jews did not listen to me* (when I told them that their redemption has come). *How, then, will Pharaoh listen to me, especially as I speak haltingly?* (Shemot 6:12))

The Midrash explains that this is one of the ten "Kal Vachomer", logical deduction methods that are used to understand Torah texts, that are explicit in the Torah. (Breishit Rabba 92:7) *If the Jews who are short spirited and harshly*

enslaved, and despite all this do not believe me that You sent me, then how can I expect Pharaoh, who benefits by enslaving the Jews, to believe me that You desire to free Your People?

It is commonly asked if this is, at all, a fair deduction. The Jews, in their difficult slavery, overworked and tortured, did not have the strength to raise their eyes to glimpse the dim ray of light at the end of the tunnel. This is the reason why they did not believe that they would be redeemed. Pharaoh, on the other hand, who was neither enslaved, nor forced to do hard work, might believe that the Redemption has arrived. How, then, can this be considered a fair, logical deduction at all?

The answer R' Yitzchak Eizrachi, shlita, gives is a lesson for life. Pharaoh was also *working very hard*. He was also "enslaved". Being the ruler of the greatest empire in the world, Pharaoh developed a belief that *he was a god*. After Yaakov blessed Pharaoh, each time Pharaoh would go to the Nile, the water would rise toward his feet. Pharaoh used this to support his claim. *"The Nile is mine, and I created it and myself,"* (Yechezkel 29:3) became Pharaoh's new slogan. In order to prove that he was not human, Pharaoh would claim that he does not need to relieve himself in the bathroom. Instead, Pharaoh would go to the Nile every morning and



secretly relieve himself there, refraining himself during the rest of the day. If we stop and imagine all the things that one has to do in order to support a belief that he is not human, we discover that such a project becomes a full-time job! Pharaoh was enslaved by this belief, and so, he was always at work. To prove to himself that he was a god was so tiring. Pharaoh, then, was also too tired to listen to Moshe saying that G-d wanted to free His children. This was Moshe's claim.

This sheds light on those who are, in fact, the hardest workers of the world: *they are none other than those who must prove that they do not make mistakes*. People who deny that they sometimes need help, like all humans do. People who rose to the top, who feel that they have to deny that they were ever at the bottom. These people are enslaved.

We may work hard trying to live up to a picture we painted of ourselves with a tint of haughtiness. The efforts needed for this can be totally exhausting. In actual fact, the hardest workers in the world are those who work

MY UNCLE'S FREE WILL

And Aharon took Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon for a wife etc. (Shemot 6 ; 23). The Talmud (Bava Batra 110a) asks: what is the importance of mentioning that Nachshon was her brother? Don't we know this already? It was previously mentioned that her father was Aminadav, and we can deduce on our own that Nachshon was her brother.

The Talmud answers that *from here we learn that when one marries a woman, he needs first to see what her brothers are like. Most sons are similar to the brothers of their mother*.

A serious yeshiva student of marriageable age once consulted R' Shach, zt"l, with concerns

against reality. People can overwork themselves trying to live on a standard that is, in reality, above their ability to reach. They can hide their true identity as they gasp for air under the mask of who they wish they were. There is no greater enslavement than this: enslaved to the self-important me.

We might ask ourselves why G-d troubled Himself to bring about ten plagues. He could have just brought the Plague of the First Born, the harshest of them all, and the Jews would have been freed. The answer to this is that G-d does not reveal Himself outright to the arrogant at the outset. He gives man an opportunity to choose to recognize His power and greatness. After each plague, Pharaoh found some excuse for his not having to listen to G-d. This is the way of the Evil Inclination and of the arrogant, as well. When we have something we are arrogant about, we can fight all the way and work so hard as we try to keep up the fabrication. G-d gives the opportunity to choose this behavior, for this is part of the expression of free will.

about a similar matter. He was suggested a great girl from a very respectable family; her father was also a well respected rabbi. Her brother, on the other hand, had stopped being observant. The boy very much wanted to meet the girl and see if it would, indeed, be a suitable match, as it sounded like such a great opportunity. At the same time, he was worried about the advice of the Talmud, and how it might have ramifications for his own sons.

R' Shach answered firmly, " No need to worry! The Chazon Ish has already ruled that the children will be like the brother of their mother *only* in regard to his *middot* (character traits), which are genetic. Regarding the



brother's way of life, however – this is dependent on free will, and there is no need to worry as to the effect of the way of life the brother chose for himself!”

When the boy came home to tell his mother, she had a difficult time accepting this. *“I understand the point. But the amount of suffering that this boy has caused his parents and the disgrace he caused them through his behavior cannot be overlooked. This boy not only chose to leave his parents, but he must have horrible middot as well!”*

The boy went back to R' Shach. “My mother claims that there is no greater proof of bad *middot* than causing so much anguish to the parents who brought him up...”

R' Shach did not accept this, either. “Tell your mother that the enticement of the street is so great, and the pull of the tide (into the depths) is so strong that it is too hard to conclude anything about a boy's *middot*, just because he could not cope with the trials and tests that the street has to offer! The boy's “falling out from religion” does not stem from bad or evil traits. Rather, it stems from the difficulty of coping with the temptations of the street. Do not hesitate. Go out happily with the girl, and may you merit building a home of Torah and Mitzvot! “ And that is exactly what had happened. (Story adapted from אורחות הבית compiled by R' Shach's grandson, Asher Bergman).

We can get a lot out of this story. Singles who are searching for a spouse would do better looking into what type of *middot* are in the

family than in finding out how the family utilizes their free will. We can also learn that *middot* are genetic, and *bechira* (free will) is not. And that the world (of prior generations, and so much more so of today) is so full of temptations that despite one's great *middot*, he can still fall to temptation. And that the negative traits we see in our parents and siblings are most likely in us as well.

There is even more to learn. Although people like to believe that fear of G-d is dependent on intellect or character, we see that it has to do with free will. We see in this weeks *parsha* that fearing G-d is a decision one has to make. The decision is not really effected by circumstance, as we see by the plague of *Dever*. Even when there is clear knowledge of certain damage for disobeying His word, the choice to disobey is still open! The Egyptians were told that if they wanted to save their animals during this plague, they had to put them indoors. *And those who feared the word of G-d obeyed, and their animals were saved.* One can know that there is going to be a plague, but still not fear G-d. One can have the greatest traits of kindness and good heartedness and still choose to be a bad person. One can have the greatest wisdom, and still choose not to believe in G-d.

As we are told, *“ha kol b'y'dei shomayim, chutz mi yir'at shomayim”* – everything is in the Hands of Heaven, except Fear (respect, awe) of Heaven”. May we merit the wisdom to utilize our free will in order to perfect our *middot* and to become G-d fearing Jews. Amen.

IF YOU ARE ENJOYING THESE ARTICLES FREE EACH WEEK, PLEASE HELP SUPPORT THIS PUBLICATION!

One week's sponsor to cover all costs is \$100. These articles are being distributed to over 20 thousand readers each week!

To support this publication, or receive it by e-mail, please email me at rabbiyoseffarhi@gmail.com.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A”H

And Malka bat Gerez 7 Shebat

