

The Hand That Smites - Caresse

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Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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Hypersensitivity Elicits A Response Of Insensitivity

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1. Moshe said to G-d, "Why have you brought difficulty upon this People?"
2. Midrash: Dasan and Aviram accused Moshe of souring their relationship with Pharaoh.
3. They blasphemed and cursed him.
4. Moshe was so deeply effected by their onslaught: their claim was a desecration if G-d's name.
5. Because of his pain he expressed himself to G-d in this manner.
6. This is similar to Avraham- when told by G-d that he was going to destroy Sodom.
7. Avraham's concern: there may be a mis-perception regarding the standing of the members of the Sodom community.
8. The population may believe G-d destroys the righteous together with the evil.

Heightened Intensity Yields Outstanding Results

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1. Moshe comes to Egypt as G-d's Agent to redeem the Jews.
2. He performs 3 miracles to prove he is the Redeemer.
3. The Jews believe and want to leave Egypt to go in the desert for 3 days to worship G-d.
4. Pharaoh withdraws the straw subsidy and demands the same quota of bricks.
5. The Jewish Overseers are beaten by Egyptians for not producing numbers.
6. They complain to Pharaoh it is impossible.
7. Pharaoh's response is they are lazy have too much time to think.
8. The overseers meet Moshe as they're leaving Pharaoh and fault him for all.
9. Moshe pleads to G-d: "Why are you making it so difficult for the people? Why did you send me?"
10. If the redemption was to begin with Moshe coming to Egypt why did the bondage intensify?
11. Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh: As G-d created the world, whenever there is transition from one state to another there is always resistance.
12. The darkest part of night is right before dawn; the end of winter is the coldest part of winter.
13. As transition is to take place from bondage to redemption, resistance causes an intensification of bondage before the redemption.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vaeira

The Hand That Smites - Caresses

The Egyptian Purview of Existence

Torah in Shemos: G-d instructed Moshe to go to Pharaoh along with the elders of the Jewish people and present themselves as His agents to request that the Jewish people be released from bondage.

Torah: "You and the elders of Israel shall come to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'Hashem, the G-d of the Hebrews, happened upon us. And now please let us go...'" When Moshe and Aaron later appeared before Pharaoh the verse states, "Afterwards Moshe and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, 'So said Hashem (YKVK), the G-d of Israel, Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness.'" Pharaoh replied, "Who is Hashem (YKVK) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel!"

It is clear from the verses, that Moshe and Aaron did not communicate to Pharaoh as they were instructed by G-d to do. G-d had told them to present themselves as the agents of "G-d of the Hebrews (*Elokei Ha'Ivrim*)."

They presented themselves as the agents of "Hashem (YKVK) the G-d of Israel" However after Pharaoh rejected their representation as being the agents of "YKVK," Moshe restated his representation and referred to G-d as the "G-d of the Hebrews (*Elokei Ha'Ivrim*)."

Why did Moshe not initially communicate to Pharaoh as he was instructed? He was told to represent himself as the agent of "the G-d of the Hebrews" but he chose to say, "the G-d of Israel."

Initially, when Moshe and Aaron were to go Pharaoh, they were to be accompanied by the seventy elders of the Jewish people.

Rashi citing Chazal: By the time Moshe and Aaron had arrived at the palace, all of the elders had chosen to remove themselves out of fear. Moshe and Aaron were left alone to go before Pharaoh. Moshe had understood that the reason that G-d had told him to present himself as the agent of the "G-d of the Hebrews" because he was being accompanied by the seventy elders who were a representation of the Jewish people who at that time were

pagans. The pre-Sinai status of the Jewish people was “Hebrews (*Ivrim*).” However, after the elders disassociated themselves from *Moshe* and *Aaron* and were not present, *Moshe* understood that the proper appellation that he should use was one that referred to entity of the Jewish people as “Israel.” He not representing the physical entity that was in Egypt at the time but rather they he was representing the Jewish people as an entity of holiness.

Torah: *Yaakov* our Patriarch was given the name “Israel” after he had defeated the archangel of *Esav*. It is a name that established him as the one who lords over angels and man. Although *Yaakov* was a physical being, his dimension was spiritual. He transcended the physicality of the world. The Jewish people who are his descendants possess that same innateness of spirituality.

Initially, the Jewish people were known as “Hebrews” which is an appellation that identifies them based on their origin (“Hebrew” means “from the other side of the river.”). Since Pharaoh believed that all existence was limited to the material, the appellation of “Israel” was something that he could not fathom or accept. He thus rejected *Moshe*’s representation of “YKVK” and “Israel.” Upon seeing Pharaoh’s reaction, *Moshe* and *Aaron* restated their representation as being the agents of “the G-d of the Hebrews” (not YKVK).

Rabbeinu Bachya: The title “Pharaoh” which was given to all the Egyptian monarchs, contains the Hebrew letters “*ayin pey raish*” which spells “*afar*” (earth/dust), indicating that the foundation for the Egyptian civilization was based on the belief that all existence is limited to the mundane. There was no spiritual element that has relevance to existence.

Midrash: “*Moshe* and *Aaron* said, ‘Perhaps Pharaoh did not heed our request because we altered the words of G-d. G-d had initially said to us to represent ourselves as the agents of ‘the G-d of the Hebrews’; however, we chose the appellation of ‘*Hashem* (YKVK), the G-d of Israel.’ This is the reason he rejected us.’ They thus altered their initial presentation and referred to themselves as the agents of ‘the G-d of the Hebrews.’ Pharaoh gritted his teeth and responded to them in a disrespectful manner...”

After *Moshe* and *Aaron* understood that they needed to present themselves as the agents of the “G-d of the Hebrews,” they appreciated that G-d’s initial instruction was not because they were supposed to be accompanied by the seventy elders who were the representatives of the people who were pagans at that time, but rather, because they

needed to address Pharaoh within his own purview of belief, which was that everything was limited to the physical.

Recognition and Reflection

Torah: G-d spoke to *Moshe* using four expressions of redemption. The *Torah* states, “Say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am *Hashem* and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you; and you shall know that I am *Hashem* your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.”

Sforno: “You shall know that I am *Hashem*...” means, “One who recognizes and reflects upon what had transpired will know that I am *Hashem*, your G-d.” It is not sufficient to merely experience the various phases of redemption but rather one must contemplate and reflect upon the happenings of redemption in order to appreciate their significance.

Sforno: “One must verify and reflect upon every detail of the Divine Providence that was revealed. If one does so, he will have no doubt that G-d will fulfill the promise that He made to bring about the future.” Even if one believes in G-d (*emunah*) – that He is the Omnipotent and Almighty Being, it is has no bearing on one’s faith/trust (*betachon*).

In addition to belief, one must have trust in G-d; however, one is only able to achieve faith if one recognizes and reflects upon what G-d has done for him in the past and the present. This will thus allow him to have faith in Him in the future. Thus, as *Sforno*, explains, “Then you will be worthy that I will bring you to the Land that I have promised to your forefathers.” As the verse states, “I shall bring you to the Land about which I raised My hand to give to *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* and I shall give it to you as a heritage...”

The term that the *Torah* uses regarding the Land that was promised to our forefathers is “heritage” (*morasha*) and not “inheritance” (*yerusha*).

Torah: Regarding the *Torah* itself in *Vezos Haberachah*, “The *Torah* that *Moshe* commanded us, is the heritage of the Congregation of *Yaakov*.”

Rabbeinu Bachya: There is a difference between a “heritage” (*morasha*) and an “inheritance” (*yerusha*). An inheritance is something that one receives as an heir

and because it belongs to him, he may do with it as he chooses. If he chooses to destroy or squander it without passing it to the next generation, it is his prerogative because it belongs to him. In contrast, a heritage is given to one with the express intent that he must safeguard it in order to pass it along to the next generation intact. Thus, he must maintain and secure it so that future generations will appreciate its value. The Torah was given to the Jewish people as a heritage to be theirs and to transmit to future generations until the end of time. A heritage comes with criteria to which one must adhere.

The *Torah* refers to the Land of Israel also as a “heritage” since the Jewish people must meet certain criteria in order to retain it and benefit from its bounty. They must live upon the land in full conformance with the Torah in all of its aspects. G-d forewarned them, “You should not behave as the Canaanites that lived in the Land because it will expel you.”

One’s responsibility for the future generations is to live in the Land as the Torah prescribes. One can only have an appreciation of G-d and for what He has done on our behalf, if one reflects upon and contemplates every detail of the blessing that He has bestowed. As *Sforno* concludes, if the Jewish people will reflect and contemplate upon what G-d has done for them, then they will be worthy to enter into the Land, as a heritage.

The Essence of Every Jew

Torah: G-d told Moshe to communicate the four expressions of redemption to them.

Torah: “Therefore, say (*l’chein ehmor*) to the Children of Israel: ‘...I shall take you out...I shall rescue you...I shall redeem you...I shall take you to Me...’”

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: “The term ‘*l’chein*’ is an expression of an oath.” G-d bound Himself to the Jewish people with an oath, that He will bring about the four phases of redemption, culminating with taking the Jewish people to be His.

Baal HaTurim: “The numerical value (*gematria*) of the word ‘*l’chein*’ is 100. This is alluding to that in the merit of *Avraham* who fathered a child at the age of 100 G-d took an oath to redeem the Jewish people. It also alludes to *Yitzchak* whose yield of crop during the year of famine was a hundred fold (*mea shearim*) a harvest during an ordinary year. It also alludes to the merit of *Yaakov* who had fathered all of his children by the age of 100.”

Thus, in the merit of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* G-d committed Himself to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt through the four expressions of redemption.

Although the Jewish people were not worthy in their own right to be redeemed, G-d nevertheless bound Himself with an oath to redeem them in the merit of the holy Patriarchs. As we see from the *Midrash*, when the Jewish people and the Egyptians were both crossing the Sea after it had split, the angels had come to G-d with a claim, “Why are the Egyptians the only ones to be destroyed? The Jewish people also deserve to be destroyed because they (the Jewish people) are pagans and they (the Egyptians) are pagans.” Despite their unworthiness, G-d redeemed them in the merit of the holy Patriarchs.

Before the High Holidays, a member of the *Brisk* community had auditioned to be a cantor in one of its synagogues for the High Holiday services. To his dismay, he was rejected by the committee. Demanding to be reconsidered, the man came before *Reb Chaim Soloveitchik z’tl* who was known as the *Brisker Rav*, the *Rav of Brisk*. He claimed that he was indeed highly qualified to be the cantor for the High Holidays. *Reb Chaim* asked him why does he feel qualified?

The man cited Jewish Law, “The *Ramah* writes in the Code of Laws that the most qualified cantor for the High Holidays should be minimally thirty years of age. He should be married with children. And he should be a Torah scholar with good deeds. Since I have all of these qualifications, I feel I am qualified for the position.” *Reb Chaim of Brisk* said, “It is good that you have these qualifications, but could you give me a sample of your performance as a cantor?” The individual began to sing.

Reb Chaim immediately realized that every note that the man had sung was off pitch. *Reb Chaim* said to him, “The qualifications that are cited by the *Ramah* in the Code of Law have relevance to an individual who is qualified as a cantor. However, if one has no relevance to being a cantor, because he cannot sing, these qualifications are not relevant.”

The Jewish people in Egypt were idolaters. They only retained their identity in the context of their language, dress and names as Jews. Other than these areas, they were fully acculturated with the Egyptian culture. The only objective for redemption from Egypt was to go to Sinai and become G-d’s people. Being at the lowest level of spirituality, seemingly would indicate that the Jewish people had no relevance to becoming G-d’s people, (similar to the man who wanted to be a cantor but could not sing).

G-d, nevertheless, took an oath to redeem them from Egypt and take them to be His, because they were the descendants of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*. This is alluded through the word "*l'chein*" to indicate that although the Jewish people at that moment were assimilated, their essence is spiritual. Thus, the potential of every Jew, because he is a descendant of the holy Patriarchs can rise to become close to G-d to be taken as His people. This communication is expressed through the word "*l'chein*" to give every Jew a sense of who he truly is.

Opening One's Heart

Torah in *Shemos*: "...*Moshe* grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their suffering ..."

Rashi: "He allowed his eyes and heart to sense their suffering." *Moshe* not only observed the plight of the Jewish people, he reflected upon their predicament and was thus able to internalize their pain. The *Torah* is revealing to us that in order for one to be affected by what he sees, it is not sufficient to only realize something, he must reflect upon it.

Torah: "And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren...so he struck down the Egyptian." When *Moshe* saw the Egyptian beating the Jew, he could not tolerate the injustice that was being perpetrated. He thus killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. *Moshe* did not merely observe an injustice being perpetrated, but rather he was pained and affected by it because of the degree of his internalization of the suffering of the Jewish people.

Torah: G-d told *Moshe* to communicate the four expressions of redemption to the Jewish people. After *Moshe* had done so and proven that he was the agent of G-d the *Torah* states, "So *Moshe* spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to *Moshe* because of shortness of wind (*kotzeir ruach*) and hard work." Although *Moshe* had communicated to the Jewish people that their redemption was imminent, they nevertheless could not accept it because they were overwhelmed from the bondage. They did not have the capacity to internalize what *Moshe* had told them.

Sforno: "The Jewish people did not listen to *Moshe* because they did not reflect upon what they had heard to understand that they should have the trust in G-d to redeem them. They did not appreciate the value of what was being presented to them. They could not understand that G-d would redeem

them as a kindness. As we find with *Avraham*, our Patriarch. *Avraham* and his wife *Sarah*, were barren.

Torah: When G-d told *Avraham* that he would have a son, 'He believed' and it was considered a 'righteousness.'... It is because of this lack of faith and their unwillingness to appreciate what *Moshe* had said to them, this generation was not worthy to enter the Land of Israel. However, their offspring would enter into the land." The reason the Jewish people were not able to appreciate what *Moshe* had told them was because they chose to not reflect and contemplate upon it.

Torah: "You should know in your heart that Hashem is G-d... " It is not sufficient for one to understand that G-d is the Almighty, one must reflect and contemplate upon it so that one can have a sense of who G-d is. This is the meaning of "You shall take it to your heart..." When one will sufficiently reflect upon this, he will be moved to action to do His Will.

Torah: After the plague of blood came upon Egypt, "Pharaoh turned away and came to his palace. He did not take this to heart." Although the Egyptian people were denied water for seven days because all of the water had turned to blood, Pharaoh chose not to allow what he saw to affect him. He chose not to reflect upon what was happening. He did not contemplate for a moment the magnitude of what was happening around him, that his subjects could only survive if they depended on their Jewish slaves for water. Although Pharaoh saw what was happening he remained unaffected because he chose not to reflect upon it.

The Importance of Balance

Torah: "*V'yedaber Elokim* – G-d spoke to *Moshe* and said to him, "I am Hashem..."

Rashi citing *Chazal*: *Moshe* was addressed by G-d in a formal and reprimanding context. The appellation of "*Elokim*" connotes the Attribute of Justice, indicating that *Moshe* was being faulted for a failing. Additionally the usage of the term "*v'yedaber* (spoke)" is a formal manner of speech rather than "*vayomer*(said)." *Moshe* was addressed by G-d in this manner because of an inappropriate question that he had asked. After Pharaoh had withdrawn the straw subsidy from the Jewish people and demanded the same quota of bricks to be produced, *Moshe* approached G-d with the question, "My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have you sent me?"

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: “The question that was posed by *Moshe* to G-d was especially inappropriate because he had posed it to G-d Himself, a Great King. Why did *Moshe* allow himself to ask a question that seems to be clearly inappropriate? It was because of his familiarity and intimacy with G-d. G-d had shown him a joyous Countenance that He had not previously revealed to anyone other than *Moshe*. As it states, ‘...My Name *Hashem* (YKVK) I did not make Myself known to them (the Patriarchs).’ This establishes the special relationship that *Moshe* had with G-d.

“After *Moshe* had asked the question that was inappropriate G-d revealed to him His Countenance of Judgment, which instills fear and awe. The verse states, ‘*V’yedaber Elokim – G-d spoke to Moshe.... I am Hashem*’ Meaning, although G-d revealed His Countenance of Joy, through the Name *Hashem* (YKVK) *Moshe* should have experienced that joy within a context of trepidation. As the *Gemara* states, ‘Even in a moment of joy there should be trepidation.’”

Due to G-d demonstrating His overwhelming love for *Moshe*, he felt close to Him and thus took the liberty to pose the question that he should not have asked. It was *Moshe*’s love for G-d that compelled him to ask the question because he was concerned for the glory of G-d. Since *Moshe* had come to the Jewish people as G-d’s Redeemer, which was proven and confirmed through the revealed miracles that G-d had instructed him to perform, indicating that it was immanent that the bondage would improve. However, when the bondage intensified, it created a setting for a desecration of G-d’s Name.

Moshe’s question emanated from his love for G-d. He was concerned about how G-d would be perceived by the Jewish people.

Torah: *Pinchas* as a zealot killed *Zimri*, the Prince of the Tribe of *Shimon* because he was openly desecrating the Name of G-d by cohabiting with *Cozbi* the Midianite princess. *Pinchas*’ act of zealotry was rooted on his love for G-d and thus merited many miracles which protected him from being killed.

Ramban: The commandment to love G-d is a more advanced level than the commandment to fear G-d. Love is

something that motivates while fear causes restraint. If this is so, why was *Moshe*’s question considered inappropriate?

King David in Psalms: “But You offer forgiveness so that we may fear You...” Meaning, the reason G-d grants forgiveness is so that the Jewish people should fear Him. Understanding that only He can grant forgiveness will evoke fear and awe of G-d.

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: Although *Moshe* and the Jewish people were the direct beneficiaries of the revealed miracles of the exodus, they had not said “*Baruch Hashem!* (Blessed is G-d).” However, *Yisro* after hearing all that had transpired regarding the Jewish people when they had left Egypt, did acknowledge G-d in this manner.

Gemara: “It is something unbecoming (and a blemish on their record) that *Moshe* and the 600,000 Jews who left Egypt did not say ‘*Baruch* (Blessed)’ while *Yisro* did say ‘*Baruch*.’”

Although the Jewish people acknowledged every aspect of miracle that had transpired during the splitting of the Sea through the Song of the Sea, they did not express their thanks to G-d as *Yisro* had done. Despite the fact that the Jewish people had the clarity to describe the miracles in detail, they were not moved to the point of expressing their thanks. Similarly, one can have an overwhelming love for G-d; however, one may take liberties because one does not simultaneously sense the awesomeness of His Being. Thus, it will not evoke fear within him. By fearing and revering G-d, one will understand the boundaries that exist between himself and the Creator.

Moshe had a unique love for G-d, because what G-d had revealed to him but as the *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* explains his fear of G-d was not commensurate with his love. Thus, he took the liberty to ask the question. G-d responded, “Now you will see (the redemption).” *Chazal* explain that the word “Now” infers that *Moshe* will merit seeing the present redemption from Egypt but will not merit bringing the Jewish people into the Land of Israel.



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