

# The Hand That Smites - Caresses

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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

### Evil, a Context for Challenge

*Torah* in *Shemos*: G-d said to *Moshe* that he must return to Egypt to redeem the Jewish people. *Moshe* had initially fled to Midian because *Dasan* and *Aviram* had informed on him that he had killed an Egyptian. In order to allow *Moshe* to return to Egypt without concern that his life would be in jeopardy, G-d said, "Go, return to Egypt, for all the people who seek your life have died." Meaning, *Dasan* and *Aviram*, who initially informed on *Moshe*, had died and *Moshe* thus no longer needed to be concerned that they would again attempt to have his life taken. If G-d wanted *Moshe* to be the Redeemer, why should *Moshe* be concerned about *Dasan* and *Aviram*?

*Gemara* in Tractate *Nidarim*: When the *Torah* states, "... those who seek your life have died," it cannot mean that *Dasan* and *Aviram* actually died, because we see from the continuation of the narrative that they were still alive. However, we are able to draw from this a principle that when one loses his wealth and enters into an

impoverished state he is the equivalent of one who has died. It is because he has lost his status and is no longer influential – just as one who deceased has no status or influence. It was only because of their wealth that *Dasan* and *Aviram* were able to inform on *Moshe* because they had relationships within the upper echelons of government. When they became impoverished, they no longer had any degree of influence because they lost all of their previous relationships.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: There was a man who was riding a horse on *Shabbos*, which is a only Rabbinic violation, and was put to death by the Court. If it was only a Rabbinic violation, why was the Court empowered to have him put to death? The *Gemara* answers that if one causes a breach in Jewish law that could undermine the respect the way the community regards the *Torah*, the court has the right to put the individual to death. Until *Dasan* and *Aviram* were swallowed up by the earth along with *Korach*



and his community, they had continuously sought to undermine the law that G-d had given to the Jewish people, by usurping *Moshe's* authority. They thus put the *Torah* in jeopardy.

Regardless of how many times *Dasan* and *Aviram* had demonstrated their insubordination to *Moshe* and displayed a disrespect to G-d and His authority, *Moshe* never punished them. *Chazal* tell us that *Moshe* himself was the equivalent of the seventy elders of Israel and had the authority to secure the *Torah* by enforcing the law. Why did *Moshe* never put an end to *Dasan* and *Aviram's* insubordination?

*Moshe* returned to Egypt, understanding that *Dasan* and *Aviram* were still alive, he saw that they were incapacitated by G-d, through their impoverishment, and not destroyed. If they were to be an impediment to the redemption, why did G-d not simply destroy them? *Moshe* understood from this that *Dasan* and *Aviram* were necessary for the setting of the evolution of the Jewish people. They were a necessary element for the redemption and ultimately standing at Sinai to receive the *Torah*.

*Torah*: After the Jewish people believed that *Moshe* was the Redeemer, who would take them out of Egypt, there was a work stoppage. In response to the secession of work, Pharaoh ordered that the straw subsidy that was given to them by the government to make bricks should be withdrawn and that they should gather their own straw to fulfill the same quota. Consequently, the predicament of the Jew became untenable.

*Torah*: "They (*Dasan* and *Aviram*) encountered *Moshe* and *Aaron*... and said, 'May *Hashem* look upon you and judge, for you have made us putrid in the eyes of Pharaoh...to place a sword in their hands to murder us!' *Moshe* returned to G-d and said, "My Lord, why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me...G-d said to *Moshe*, 'Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh...'"

*Chazal*: *Dasan* and *Aviram's* attack upon *Moshe* precipitated his complaint to G-d. It was because of this that *Moshe* was only able to take the Jewish people out of Egypt but would not be able to enter into the Land of Israel. *Moshe* did not entering into the Land was a necessity for the survival of the Jewish people.

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: If *Moshe* would have entered into the Land of Israel he would have built the Temple.

*Chazal*: The handiwork of *Moshe* was eternal. Anything that came about through his involvement assumed an eternal status, such as the *Mishkan*. G-d said at the time of the destruction of the First Temple, "It is because I have expended My Wrath on the wood and stones that I did not expend it on the Jewish people." It was only because the Temple was destroyed that the Jewish people were not. Thus, *Moshe's* questioning of G-d in Egypt, regarding the plight of the Jewish people guaranteed their existence. This was precipitated by *Dasan* and *Aviram*.

## One's Capacity to Internalize Truth

*Torah*: "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 be a G-d to you...'"

*Torah*: "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 proven to the Jewish people through revealed miracles that he was the Redeemer who was meant to take them out of Egypt, and communicated to them that their redemption was imminent, they nevertheless could not embrace his words because they were overwhelmed with the demands of their taskmasters. They thus did not have the capacity to internalize what *Moshe* had told them, although it was incontestable truth.

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: The term "*kotzeir ruach*" means 'of limited capacity'. "Since the Jewish people in Egypt did not engage in *Torah* study (except for the Tribe of *Levy*) they were limited in spirit. It is the study of *Torah* that broadens the heart of man." Although one may be able to comprehend a concept or a fact through one's intellect, if one does not engage in *Torah* study, one will not have the broadness and depth of heart to internalize the value of what is at hand.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah*: "A *Torah* sage (*Talmid Chacham*) whose inside is not consistent with his outside is not a *Torah* sage." Meaning, a *Torah* sage is one who has fully integrated his *Torah* knowledge with his behavior and emotions. He is not merely a repository of information but rather an embodiment of G-d's holiness.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Taanis*: If one sees a *Torah* sage reacting with anger when the *Torah* is being violated, it is the *Torah* that is “burning within him” that causes him to react. As the verse states, “My (G-d’s) words (*Torah*) are like fire.”

*Rashi*: Because of his *Torah* study, the *Torah* sage has a broadness of heart – and thus he possesses a depth of understanding and sensitivity to fully appreciate the seriousness of what is being transgressed. This is the basis for his reaction. Therefore, one should not regard the *Torah* sage negatively when he reacts in this extreme manner. It is because of his profound appreciation of the transgression, due to the broadness of his heart that he reacted. In contrast, one who does not engage in *Torah* study can only intellectualize that a transgression is a violation, but cannot appreciate the ramification or dimension of the transgression.

We recite every day in *Uva l’Tzion*, “May He open our hearts through His *Torah* and imbue our heart with love and awe of Him...” It is only through the study of *Torah* that one can have an appreciation of who He is. Without studying the *Torah*, G-d is something that is abstract, that cannot be understood or appreciated as it should.

This principle is also clearly seen in the first paragraph of *Shema*, which states, “You shall love *Hashem*, your G-d with all your heart and all your soul...Teach them to your children (students)...” When one engages in *Torah* study and disseminates it, one will internalize its value and thus it will give one the capacity to understand and appreciate G-d which causes an intensity of love for Him. The basis for this level of love and self-sacrifice emanates from the broadness of heart that comes through the study of *Torah*.

*Midrash* in the introduction to *Eicha*: that G-d said regarding the Jewish people prior to the destruction of the First Temple, “Hopefully they will only abandon Me, and My *Torah* they should keep.” It is because there is an innate light (illumination) in *Torah* that will bring them back to the Good. There is an innate holiness in the *Torah* itself that has the ability to spiritualize the Jew and give him the capacity to internalize truth.

## **Moshe’s Vulnerability to Death**

*Torah* in *Shemos*: “A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt, who did not know *Yosef*.” After *Yosef* and

his generation had passed away, Pharaoh established a new mandate that was against the Jewish people. He acted as if he did not know *Yosef*. *Yosef* had been the Viceroy of Egypt who was responsible for Egypt’s survival during the years of famine. In addition, it was only due to *Yosef*’s ingenuity and integrity that Egypt became the most advanced and wealthy civilization. *Yosef*’s family was initially revered by the Egyptian people during his lifetime. They were treated as royalty. However, after his generation passed away, the bondage was implemented and they were eventually reduced to slaves.

*Midrash*: “The Prophet says, ‘They (the Jewish People) betrayed G-d and they fathered children who were alien to their heritage. Because of this, they will be consumed by ‘*chodesh*.’ They bore children and did not circumcise them. We learn from this that when *Yosef* passed away, the Jewish people nullified the *mitzvah* of circumcision. They said, ‘We shall be like the Egyptians.’ When G-d saw that they no longer wanted to identify themselves with Him, by nullifying the sign of the covenant, He nullified the love of the Egyptians for the Jewish people. As it states, ‘He changed their heart to despise His people...’ Now they will be consumed by ‘*chodesh*.’ As it states, ‘A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt.’ (Without vowels the word *chodesh* is read *chadash* ‘new’) The king that had arisen enacted new decrees to embitter their lives through their bondage.”

*Torah*: When *Moshe* returned to Egypt after G-d commanded him to do so, he had not yet circumcised his youngest son. “It was on the way, in the lodging, that *Hashem* encountered him (*Moshe*) and sought to kill him.”

*Midrash*: At the lodging, *Moshe* was swallowed by a serpent from his feet to his waist and from his head to his waist. When *Tzipporah* his wife saw this, she realized that the reason *Moshe* was vulnerable at that moment to this attack was because he did not yet circumcise his son. She immediately took a rock and circumcised him. She then threw the foreskin before the snake and it retreated. Why had *Moshe* not circumcised his son?

*Midrash*: “We had learned that *Reb Yosi* had said, It is not, G-d forbid, that *Moshe* had not taken the *mitzvah* of circumcision seriously, but rather it was because of the danger of traveling, that he did not

circumcise his son before departing *Midian*. If *Moshe* had circumcised his son, before he had left *Midian*, he would have had to delay his journey for three days (because of the danger to the child), which he could not because G-d had commanded him to go to Egypt immediately. If this is so then why did *Moshe* deserve to be killed when he came to his lodging on the way to Egypt? It was because *Moshe* had delayed in attending to the circumcision for a moment, by giving priority to his lodging needs (before the circumcision), he thus deserved to die. It was only because of his wife *Tzipporah's* intervention that he was spared."

*Chazal*: *Moshe* was the only one qualified to be the redeemer of the Jewish people. Had *Moshe* been killed for hesitating to circumcise his son, the redemption would not have taken place and consequently Jewish people would not have come to Sinai to fulfill the objective of existence. If this is so, why was *Moshe* nearly killed for the circumcision?

*Chazal*: The suspension of the *mitzvah* of circumcision precipitated the bondage and suffering of the Jewish people in Egypt. Since *Moshe* was the redeemer, by being lax in the *mitzvah* of circumcision, he had failed in the area that had initially brought about the bondage upon the Jewish people. This was sufficient reason to disqualify *Moshe* from being the redeemer and thus causing him to be vulnerable to be killed. After *Moshe's* encounter with the serpent, he understood that if the covenant of the circumcision was not fully reinstated without any deficiency, redemption could not take place. This is because the correction for the initial failing of the Jewish people needed to be beyond reproach.

## **Sinai the Culmination of Redemption**

*Torah*: G-d spoke to *Moshe* and commanded him to communicate the four expressions of redemption to the Jewish people. "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..."

The first three expressions "I shall take you out...I shall rescue you...and I shall redeem you" are clearly expressions of redemption; however, how is the fourth statement "I shall take to Me for a people..."

also considered to be an expression of redemption? Seemingly, the verse is referring to when the Jewish people were taken to be G-d's people at Sinai.

*Torah* regarding the Ten Commandments that *Moshe* had received at Sinai: They were "*charus* – engraved" onto the tablets.

*Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers)*: The word "*charus*" (without vowels) can be read as "*cheirus* – freedom." Meaning, the only truly "free" person is the one who is engaged in *Torah* study. Only through *Torah* study, can one be truly free to make proper choices. *Torah* study allows one to have sufficient clarity to take control of one's life.

One who does not engage in *Torah* study is conflicted by his physical desires and drives and thus cannot make appropriate choices due to his own conflicts of interest. Thus, he is a slave to his own physicality and not truly a free individual. Therefore, the fourth expression of redemption is the ultimate freedom that one gains through being taken as G-d's people and spiritualized through the *Torah* itself. The first three expressions of redemption were only a prerequisite to the culmination of what freedom truly is.

*Torah*: "...and you shall know that I am *Hashem* your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt." Seemingly, G-d is saying to the Jewish people that they would only know after the Sinai event that it was He who took them out of Egypt. One would think that after witnessing the plagues of Egypt and the splitting of the Sea, the Jewish people would understand with clarity that G-d Himself took them out of Egypt. However, the verse indicates that it is only after the Sinai event that they would surely know, in retrospect, that it was G-d who had taken them out of Egypt.

Prior to Sinai, the *Torah* tells us on many occasions that the Jewish people acknowledged with certainty that what had transpired in Egypt was attributed to G-d Himself. As the verse states after the Sea had split and closed upon the Egyptian armies, "They (the Jewish people) believed in G-d and His servant *Moshe*..." Meaning, the Jewish people attributed the miracles of the sea to G-d Himself.

*Torah*: Regarding the plague of hail, "...you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world." Regarding the last three plagues, "...so that you may relate in



the ears of your sons and your son's sons that I made a mockery of Egypt and My signs that I have placed among them- that you may know that I am *Hashem*." Seemingly, it was clear to the Jewish people, before Sinai that G-d had redeemed them from Egypt.

*Rambam* in *The Fundamentals of Torah*: The basis of Jewish belief that *Moshe* was G-d's prophet is not based on the miracles that he performed. If one's belief is based solely on witnessing miracles, it is considered to be "inconclusive (*dofee*)" because one's belief could be questioned by attributing the miracles to sorcery. The basis for the veracity of *Moshe's* status as G-d's Prophet is based on the fact that the entire Jewish people witnessed G-d openly communicating to *Moshe*.

If the Jewish people's belief in G-d was based upon *Moshe's* performance of miracles, then it could be said that the basis for his supernatural ability was not due to G-d but rather that he was a greater sorcerer than those in Egypt. Thus, the confirmation of the Sinai event was vital and pertinent to indicate that everything that had transpired before that time was in fact the Hand of G-d.

*Torah*: "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 burdens of Egypt."

## **A Predicament that is Seen as a Failing**

*Torah*: "*Moshe* and *Aaron* went and gathered all the elders of the Children of Israel. *Aaron* spoke all the words that *Hashem* had spoken to *Moshe*...and the people believed." After *Moshe* had proven himself to be the Redeemer, through the miracles that he was instructed to perform, they believed. Since they had believed that the redemption was imminent, the Jewish people chose to cease working. Pharaoh reacted to their defiant behavior by withdrawing the straw subsidy that was provided to them by the Egyptians. He nevertheless demanded the same quota of bricks to be produced. An obvious consequence of *Moshe's* influences and presence was that their bondage intensified.

*Torah*: "Say to the Children of Israel: 'I am *Hashem*, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt...' G-d said to *Moshe* to inform the Jewish

people that He was going to free them from their enslavement. They were destined to experience three levels of extrication from bondage before they would be taken as G-d's people.

Despite the assurances that they were given by *Moshe*, the *Torah* continues, "So *Moshe* spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to *Moshe* because of shortness of wind (*kotzer ruach*) and hard work." Because the Jewish people were overwhelmed and limited as a result of the intensified labor, they did not have the capacity to absorb and internalize what *Moshe* had told them.

*Sforno*: The Jewish people did not listen to *Moshe* because they did not sufficiently reflect upon what was being said because they did not have trust in G-d that He would redeem them. If they would have had faith that He would, it would have been considered a righteousness for them as it was regarding *Avraham*, our Patriarch. As we find with *Avraham*, our Patriarch. *Avraham* and his wife *Sarah*, were barren.

*Torah*: us that when G-d told *Avraham* that he would have a son, "He believed" and it was considered a "righteousness." When the *Torah* tells us that "*Avraham* believed" it is not referring to his intellectual acceptance of G-d's promise, but rather, he internalized the good tidings as if he already had fathered the son. This special level of belief was considered a "righteousness." Because the Jewish people did not have this level of faith in G-d it was considered a failing.

*Sforno*: "It is because of this lack of faith and their unwillingness to accept their predicament that this generation was not worthy to enter the Land of Israel. However, their offspring would enter into the land." *Sforno* is seemingly difficult because the *Torah* states explicitly that the generation of the desert did not merit to enter into the Land because of the sin of the spies. When the Jewish people had heard the negative reports of the ten spies, they began to cry and bemoan their fate because they believed that the Land was a location that devoured its inhabitants. As a result of their lack of faith, G-d decreed that every Jewish male between the ages of 20 and 60 should die in the desert over a 40-year period.

In order to understand *Sforno*, one could say that had the Jewish people had sufficient faith in G-d, they would not have been overwhelmed by their labor.

This would have been considered a “righteousness” just as *Avraham’s* faith in G-d was considered a “righteousness.” If this would have been so, they would not have asked *Moshe* to send spies to scout out the Land, because they would have had sufficient faith in G-d. They would have believed that the Land was within their reach to be conquered as He had promised them. However, because they did not have the capacity to internalize what *Moshe* had presented to them, it subsequently caused them not to merit the Divine Protection that would have prevented the sin of the spies.

One must continuously strive to attain additional merit, because one cannot know if that merit will be needed at a later time in order to deal with an issue or overcome a challenge.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Menachos*: When *Rav Katina* had his garments tailored, he would make sure that their corners would be rounded so as to not require fringes (*tzitzis*). An angel came to *Rav Katina* and told him that although the rounding of the corners of his garment absolved him of the obligation of *tzitzis*, it was nevertheless something that was considered inappropriate for him to do.

If the Wrath of G-d would come upon the Jewish people, the non-performance of a *mitzvah* that is easily attainable would bring prosecution upon the individual. Doing more, rather than doing less could avert tragedy. Although there are many instances in which one is not obligated to perform a *mitzvah*; however, if one has the ability to create the context in which he would, it is something that should be initiated. This would generate merit that may be needed at a later time.



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