

# The Hand That Smites - Caresses

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# The Hand That Smites - Caresse

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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.



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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Vaeira

# The Hand That Smites - Caressees

### The Expressions of Redemption, a Precursor for the End of Time

*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.'"

*Baal Haturim:* "Each of the four expressions of redemption correspond to each of the four exiles that will be experienced by the Jewish people until the end of time (Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Edomite/Roman)... Regarding the Edomite exile G-d states, 'I will take you...' Why did G-d choose this expression of redemption? It is because the Edomite exile is the longest and most intense exile. The expression 'I will take you...' connotes that G-d will need to forcefully take us out of the Edomite exile because they are unwilling to relinquish their dominion over the Jewish people."

*Midrash:* Each of the words of the opening verse of the Torah alludes to the four exiles that will take place in the future.

*Torah regarding Creation:* "Bereishis bara Elokeem es ha'shamaiyim v'es ha'aretz: v'ha'aretz hoysa sohu v'vohu v'choshech al panei sahom v'ruach Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'maiyim (In the beginning G-d Created the heavens and the earth – when the earth was empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters)."

*Midrash:* "Sohu (empty)," refers to the Babylonian exile. "Vohu (chaotic)" refers to the Persian exile. "Choshech (darkness)," refers to the Greek exile; as the Midrash tells us, "they blackened our eyes with their decrees." "Sahom (of the deep)" alludes to the Edomite exile, which is as unending as the "deep" source of water. (We are still experiencing the Roman exile after more than 2,000 years.) "V'ruach Elokeem (the Divine Presence)" refers to the spirit of Moshiach."

*Torah:* Alludes to the four exiles in the verses pertaining to Creation in order to indicate that part of the fabric of Creation and the objective of the world is for the Jewish people to experience and evolve through the four exiles to a state of perfection and ultimately be redeemed with the coming of *Moshiach*. The ultimate redemption will come because G-d will “take” the Jewish people out of exile as it states, “I will take you.”

*Torah:* During the Covenant between the parts, G-d had instructed *Avraham* to take several species of animals and sever them into two parts, each of which represented one of the four exiles that the Jewish people were destined to experience. Why did G-d reveal the four exiles to *Avraham* and not to *Yitzchak* his son? It is because *Avraham* as the founding Patriarch of the Jewish people needed to be informed of the evolution of the Jewish people until the end of time, as G-d had set forth at the beginning of Creation its evolution through the four exiles that were destined to be.

*Torah:* *Yaakov* our Patriarch had a prophetic dream on Mt. Moriah. He had seen angels ascending and descending the ladder that extended into heaven. Each of the angels that ascended and descended the ladder was an archangel of the civilization into which the Jewish people will be exiled.

*Midrash:* *Yaakov* was shown the archangel of Babylon. He ascended 70 rungs of the ladder and then he descended. (Indicating that the Babylonian exile was going to be 70 years). *Yaakov* was then shown the archangel of Persia which ascended 52 rungs before descending. The archangel of the Greeks ascended 100 rungs and then descended. However, when *Yaakov* saw the archangel of the *Edomites* (Roman) it continued to ascend without any indication of descending. *Yaakov* upon seeing this was frightened. He said to G-d, “Is it possible that this angel will ascend without ever descending? (Indicating that the exile of *Edom/Roman* will be forever).”

G-d responded, “My servant *Yaakov*, do not fear. Even if you will see him (the archangel of *Edom*) ascending up to the point that is next to Me, from there I will bring him down.” As it is written, “If they rise like an eagle and perch among the stars, from there I (G-d) will bring them down.” We see that despite the fact that the *Edomite* exile is so severe and overwhelming, G-d will ultimately “take” His people out of that exile. *Yaakov*, being the Patriarch who had fathered the twelve tribes, the Tribes

of G-d, was made aware of the extent of the four exiles in order for him to inculcate the ability to withstand and overcome all of the issues travails of exile into each of his children who are the founding fathers of each of their respective tribes.

The process of redemption had begun before the Jewish people left Egypt. It culminated at Sinai when they were taken as G-d’s chosen people. It is at this time that G-d mentioned the four expressions of redemption that allude to the four exiles that the Jewish people will experience in the future. They were about to begin their evolution through the various exiles, that will culminate with the coming of *Moshiach* when G-d will “take” His people by extricating them from the dominion of the *Edomites*. In order to achieve the objective of Creation, which is to ultimately bring humanity to recognize the Omnipotence of G-d, it is necessary for the Jewish people to spiritually develop through the four exiles. In order to reassure the Jewish people that they will in fact be able to endure the process of the exiles, G-d in advance communicated to them the four expressions of redemption, which allude to every one of the exiles that they will experience in the future.

## **Egypt, Constrained by Limitation**

*Torah* in *Shemos*: G-d instructed *Moshe* to present himself to Pharaoh as His agent and demand that the Jewish people be released from bondage. The *Torah* 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!”

*Midrash:* “*Moshe* and *Aaron* said, ‘Perhaps Pharaoh hardened his heart because we did not present ourselves to him as G-d had instructed us. G-d had initially said that we should represent ourselves as His agents by saying, ‘the G-d of the Hebrews (*Elokei Ha’Ivrim*)’; however, we chose the appellation of ‘*Hashem* (YKVK), the G-d of Israel.’ This is the reason Pharaoh had denied our request.’ Because of their understanding *Moshe* and *Aaron* resubmitted their initial presentation and referred to themselves as the agents of ‘the G-d of the Hebrews.’”

*Rabbeinu Bachya:* The monarch of Egypt was known as “Pharaoh.” This appellation contains within it the

Hebrew letters “*ayin, fay, raish*” which spell the word “*aafar* – dust/earth.” This indicates that the foundation and belief of the Egyptian civilization was built on the understanding that existence was limited to the physical and the powers at hand (deities) were created to maintain physical existence. They rejected the belief of a spiritual realm, which transcends the finite (physical existence). Thus, it is befitting that the king of Egypt, who personified this belief, was known as “Pharaoh,” which connotes earthiness and physicality.

*Sforno* at the beginning of *Bereishis*: The appellation “*Kail*,” which is one of the unpronounceable Names of G-d, means “power.” The appellation of “G-d (*Elokeem*),” which is the plural form of the word “*Kail*” means “almighty/all powerful.” This reference of G-d demonstrates His All-Encompassing Power. This reference to G-d was plausible to the Egyptians because they believed in deities that were single-powered regarding their involvement in physical existence.

*Ramban*: There was a position of belief among pagans that G-d created the world; however, because of His exalted state as a Creator, He only had relevance to Creation but not to the minutia of the governance of existence. He thus transferred the responsibility of existence to the powers that He had created. In contrast, the appellation of “*Hashem* (YKVK),” which connotes that G-d exists in the past, present, and future identifies Him as the Infinite and Omnipotent Being.

The belief in an infinite G-d who continuously wills the natural order and is not bound by limitation was rejected by Pharaoh. It was a concept that was in direct contradiction to Egyptian belief. This is the meaning of his initial response to *Moshe*, “...I do not know *Hashem* (YKVK), nor will I send out Israel!” There is no such Being or Power that transcends and wills the finite. After seeing Pharaoh’s reaction to their credentials, *Moshe* and *Aaron* restated their position as the agents of “*Elokei Ha’Ivrim* (G-d of the Hebrews).” This was a reference to a power that has multiple capabilities. Thus, Pharaoh was able to entertain their request.

*Torah*: *Yosef* was summoned from prison in order to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. “Pharaoh said to him, ‘Now I heard it said that you comprehend a dream to interpret it.’” *Yosef* responded to Pharaoh saying, “That is beyond me; it is G-d (*Elokeem*) Who will respond with Pharaoh’s welfare.” It is interesting to note that *Yosef* did not refer to G-d as “*Hashem* (YKVK).” *Yosef* understood that

Pharaoh, as a pagan, did not have the capacity to fathom “YKVK.” After *Yosef* had interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams and had instructed him exactly how Egypt should manage the impending plenty and famine, Pharaoh said to his servants, “Could we find another like him- a man in whom is the spirit of G-d (*Elokeem*)?” Thus, confirming that this was within Pharaoh’s purview of belief.

In contrast, when *Yosef* was a slave in the house of *Potiphar*, his Egyptian master, and had been appointed to oversee all of the affairs of his household, the *Torah* states, “*Hashem* (YKVK) was with *Yosef*, and he became a successful man...His master perceived that *Hashem* (YKVK) was with him, and whatever he did *Hashem* (YKVK) made succeed through him.” It was only because *Potiphar* personally witnessed *Yosef*’s level of success and degree of effectiveness did he understand that it had no relevance to a power with limitation, but rather, to the infinite. However, Pharaoh who did not witness G-d’s Omnipotence rejected the notion of an unlimited G-d (YKVK).

## Truth as an Absolute, is not Necessarily Convincing

*Torah*: Regarding the plague of Blood, “*Moshe* and *Aaron* said to Pharaoh, ‘Behold with the staff that is in my hand I shall strike the waters that are in the River, and they shall change to blood. The fish that is in the water shall die and the River shall become foul.’” If the Nile were to be transformed into blood, it would seem obvious that the fish contained within it would die. After some time, the river would become foul because of the decaying fish in the blood. If these order of events was certain and obvious, why was it necessary for *Moshe* to articulate all of the consequences of the plague?

*Sforno*: If something has been transformed through sorcery, the change cannot effect its essence. Although the appearance and physical make up may seem to have changed, it actually has not been changed. The sorcerers and magicians of Egypt were able to change the appearance and texture of the water to seem that it had assumed the properties of blood. However, its essence remained water. If the water had been transformed into blood through witchcraft, the fish in the Nile would have continued to live.

Therefore, when *Moshe* had stated the plague of blood, he needed to communicate to Pharaoh the consequences, which was that the fish would die and the Nile would become foul. This was to indicate that

the change was not merely in appearance, but rather a true metamorphosis of water into blood, with all of its properties. This change could have only been brought about by G-d. Although there was a compelling distinction between the miracle that was performed through the staff of *Aaron* and the sorcery of the Egyptians, it was not sufficient to cause Pharaoh to take notice. He remained unmoved by the miracle. Why was this so?

Pharaoh, in addition to being the monarch of Egypt had deified himself and proclaimed himself as a god. If he were to acknowledge that there is an Omnipotent Being who was responsible for transforming the water of the Nile into blood it would diminish him in every respect. He therefore ignored the truth by dismissing the miracle as being insignificant. Despite the fact that the miracle was undeniably the Hand of G-d, Pharaoh remained unaffected.

*Torah*: *Avraham* had been given an ultimatum by king *Nimrod* to either bow to the idol or be thrown into the fiery kiln of *Kasdim*. *Avraham*, because of his belief in G-d chose to die and not bow to the idol. He miraculously emerged unscathed. One would think that after witnessing such an obvious miracle that *Nimrod* would abandon his pagan beliefs and declare G-d's glory. However, he did not. How is it possible to witness the Hand of G-d and remain oblivious to truth?

If *Nimrod* would have acknowledged the event as G-d's intervention to save *Avraham*, he would have to abandon all that he had believed and all that he had accomplished throughout his life. Therefore, he chose to ignore the event. Subsequently, *Nimrod* presented the same ultimatum to *Avraham's* brother, *Haran*. Unlike *Avraham*, his brother entered into the fire and did not emerge. Rather than saying that *Haran* was not worthy to be saved through a miracle, *Nimrod* chose to use this to confirm his pagan position that there is no Omnipotent G-d. *Avraham* emerging from the fire was something that he needed to reserve judgment upon.

When the angels had come to *Sodom*, *Lot Avraham's* Nephew had offered his hospitality to them. After they had entered into his house, all the men of *Sodom* surrounded the house and demanded that *Lot* handover the guests to them. When they attempted to break down the door, the angels struck them with blindness.

*Torah*: In their state of blindness, the *Sodomites* groped for the door in order to capture the guests. How is it possible that after being so severely limited by losing

their eyesight that the *Sodomites* continued in their pursuit without any degree of interruption or hesitation? It was only because they were steeped in their depraved a perverted way of life that their affliction of blindness did cause them to recognize the evil of their ways.

## **Moshe's Exceptional Attribute was the Basis for His Failure**

*Torah*: After *Moshe* had proven that he was G-d's agent, who would take them out of Egypt, the Jewish people acknowledge him as such and they immediately ceased working. In response to their defiance, Pharaoh ordered that the straw subsidy that was provided to them by the government to make bricks should be withdrawn and they must gather their own straw and meet the same quota. Consequently, the predicament of the Jew became precarious and untenable.

*Torah*: "They (*Dason* 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...'"

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: The verse, "Now you will see (the exodus)..." can mean "Because you questioned My ways... you will see the redemption from Egypt, but you will not (in the future) merit to witness what I will do to the seven nations of *Canaan* when I will bring the Jewish people into the Land." The *Torah* attests to the fact that *Moshe* was the most humble man who ever walked the face of the earth. He had totally negated himself to G-d and would thus never question His Word. If so, why did *Moshe* confront G-d by asking, "Why have You done evil to this people, why have You sent me?" Seemingly, this is inconsistent with *Moshe's* persona and demeanor to speak to G-d in this manner.

*Midrash* citing *Ecclesiastes*: "'Exploitation makes the wise man foolish...'" When the wise man engages in various endeavors he can become confused and act foolishly."

*Eitz Yosef* in his commentary on the *Midrash*: *Moshe* reacted to G-d's dictate as he had, because *Dason* and *Aviram* had openly castigated him for the predicament of the Jewish people. They had accused him of being the cause of bringing greater hardship and suffering upon

the Jewish people. They were the ones who had initially informed on *Moshe* to Pharaoh after he had killed the Egyptian, thus causing him to flee Egypt. They were the ones who sought to continuously provoke the Jewish people against *Moshe* and the Word of G-d. They had attempted many times to usurp his authority as G-d's spokesman.

When *Dason* and *Aviram* had accused him of making the predicament of the Jewish people unbearable, he was greatly pained. It was not because he was concerned for his own reputation or image in the eyes of the Jewish people, but rather for how it reflected upon G-d. Their accusations were in essence were saying that *Moshe* was not G-d's agent but rather he had taken his own initiative to bring this about. *Moshe*, understanding the nature of these two individuals and their potential to undermine his credibility and consequently put the Jewish people in a compromised and culpable position, he confronted G-d in an inappropriate manner as an expression of his pain and concern. The ultimate result of their accusation would bring about a desecration of G-d's Name (*chilul Hashem*). *Moshe* could not tolerate this.

*Moshe* was an individual who lived his life selflessly for G-d, to bring about a sanctification of G-d's Name (*kiddush Hashem*). When *Moshe* came to Egypt as the Redeemer of Israel, he did so as G-d's agent. Thus, the ramifications of his actions and statements were meant to bring about *kiddush Hashem* and not desecration of His Name. Although the fate of the Jew had become more tenuous, rather than improving, it was not considered to be an issue until *Moshe* was castigated by *Dason* and *Aviram*.

Before the comments of *Dason* and *Aviram*, *Moshe* had no reason to approach G-d. However, after their severe reproach and accusation, *Moshe* realized that because of the nature of *Dason* and *Aviram*, which was extremely contentious, it would result in a desecration of His Name. Therefore, *Moshe*, because of his sensitivity to G-d's Glory, approached G-d in pained state and expressed

himself in an inappropriate manner. This is an example of the "exploitation of the wise man."

It was because of *Dason* and *Aviram*'s distortion of truth that *Moshe* was compelled to speak to G-d in an inappropriate manner. He was seeking an understanding in order to elucidate and clarify to the Jewish people the reason for the intensification of the bondage rather than its cessation. He did not want it to be perceived for a moment that he was not truly G-d's representative. Because *Moshe* allowed himself to react to the statements of others, he was exploited and thus denied entry into the Promised Land.

We find another example of *Moshe*'s exceptional sensitivity to *chilul Hashem*. This was demonstrated regarding his sending of spies into the Land. The Jewish people had approached *Moshe* prior to the moment they were about to enter into the Land. They had said to him, "We want send spies into the Land to avert a desecration of G-d's Name. G-d had promised us that when we enter into the Land we will find houses filled with all goodness (wealth). Do you think that the nations of *Canaan* would not bury their wealth before we enter into the Land, so that we should not be able to locate it? If this should happen, the word of G-d will not be fulfilled, thus causing His Name to be desecrated."

The Jewish people's understanding of the temperament and sensitivity of *Moshe*, could only present their request in this manner. They understood that if they asked to send spies to determine if the Land was conquerable, it would have been rejected by *Moshe* because this would have been a demonstration of their lack of faith. They had ensnared *Moshe* with the threat of *chilul Hashem* in order to bring about their own objective. G-d's response to *Moshe* was, "Send for yourself spies..." Meaning, "I permit you to send spies, but I do not endorse it." On one hand *Moshe*'s sensitivity to *chilul Hashem* was one of his greatest attributes. However, on the other hand it was the basis for his failure.

