

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וארא

וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן ויצום אל בני ישראל ואל פרעה מלך מצרים להוציא את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים

“Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt” (6:13)

What does it mean that Hashem commanded Moshe regarding the Bnei Yisrael? Rashi says that Moshe was instructed to speak to them nicely and with a calm tone. The Talmud Yerushalmi says that he was to teach them the mitzvah of freeing slaves after six years. This is a very puzzling interpretation of the posuk. Why would Moshe tell them about this mitzvah now?

R' Chaim Shmuelevitz, the former Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva, explains that there are certain times in life when a person receives inspiration. When that happens, one has to know how to use it to its fullest and get mileage from it. He has to internalize it so that he can draw strength from it in the future. Hashem wanted to create an atmosphere that would make it easy to do the mitzvos. In their current state, Bnei Yisrael would be inspired to keep this mitzvah properly. They understood what it meant to be a slave and they would commit to fulfill this mitzvah to free their slaves in the future. Many years later, their descendants would forget the experience in Egypt and not feel the same way as when they were actually in that situation. In fact, we find that the Jewish people did not keep this mitzvah properly years later and this was one of the causes of the exile listed by Chazal. That is why it was appropriate to give this mitzvah at that time.

R' Shmuelevitz answers another question with this same principle. Why did Hashem need to create the rainbow as a sign of His covenant not to destroy mankind? Does Hashem need symbols to remember things? He answers that Hashem assigned a symbol, not for Himself, but to teach us an important lesson about how to retain inspiration that we get from certain events. How does a person draw the strength to stay strong? He has to

make a sign for himself to remind him of his original inspiration and when he visualizes that, he will be as inspired as he was the first time.

This was the greatness of Yisro. Yisro heard about Hashem's miraculous redemption of Bnei Yisrael and felt inspired to convert and join Hashem's people. In the Shiras HaYam, we read that all the nations of the world heard of the salvation and were inspired too, but they forgot about it and went back to their life as usual. Only Yisro acted on his inspiration and made it permanent.

Everyone is inspired every so often, but rare is the individual who knows how to take advantage of that moment's inspiration. Whether one reads an inspiring book or attends a funeral or hears a good dvar Torah, Hashem constantly sends us messages but we have to take that inspiration and act on it. R' Chaim Shmuelevitz concludes by noting that after the Six Day War in 1967, the Jewish nation as a whole was inspired but people were unable to preserve that inspiration and, after a while, things went back to status quo for many people. If a person remembers his feelings at the moment of inspiration he can grow tremendously from it.

ויאמרו החרטמים אל פרעה אצבע אלקים הוא ויחזק לב פרעה ולא שמע אלהם
כאשר דבר ה'

“The sorcerers said to Pharaoh: It is a finger of Hashem; but Pharaoh's heart was strong and he did not heed them, as Hashem had spoken” (8:15)

R' Moshe Feinstein points out that even when they were able to replicate the plagues, they could not do it in such a way where they differentiated between the Jews and Egyptians. They could not exactly copy the way in which Hashem had wrought the plague. Even so, they failed to take the miracles to heart. Later, when even the sorcerers admitted that the hand of Hashem was bringing the miraculous plagues, Pharaoh refused to heed them. We have to be different than Pharaoh and take inspiration from miracles and recognize the hand of Hashem in this world. Hashem's providence is continuous and constant. We should always be aware of this fact. Three times a day, in Modim, we thank Hashem "for Your miracles that are with us every day, and for Your wonders and favors in every season -

evening, morning and afternoon." We should take note of these words as we say them and truly feel indebted to Hashem for the tremendous kindness that He does for us day in and day out.

וידעו מצרים כי אני ה' בנטתי את ידי על מצרים והוצאתי את בני ישראל מתוכם
“And Egypt shall know that I am Hashem, when I stretch out My hand over Egypt; and I shall take the Children of Israel out from among them” (7:5)

Why does the posuk say that Hashem will remove the Bnei Yisrael “from their midst” instead of “from Mitzrayim?” The Meshech Chochma explains that Hashem not only needed to remove them from Mitzrayim physically, but mentally as well. He had to erase their Egyptian mentality and outlook on life and transform them into a holy nation. They needed to be taken out from the ideology of Egypt, from the foreign philosophy that had taken root within them. The message that the plagues proclaimed, the portrayal of Hashem as the sole Ruler of the world, was directed to the Jews as well as to the Egyptians. Upon seeing the wonder of the plagues and how they were unaffected by them, the people were to recognize that Hashem was the one and only God and that they should dedicate themselves to him. This is why they had to wait forty-nine days after leaving Mitzrayim before receiving the Torah. In Mitzrayim, the Jews had become wallowed in the depths of the forty-nine levels of impurity and needed forty-nine days of purification to counteract the effects of living in Egypt for many years.

ויצא משה מעם פרעה את העיר ויפרש כפיו אל ה' ויחדלו הקלות והברד ומטר לא
נתך ארצה

“Moshe went out from Pharaoh, from the city, and he stretched out his hands to Hashem; the thunder and hail ceased and rain did not reach the ground” (9:33)

Why was it necessary for the hail to be miraculously suspended in midair at the end of the plague? R' Moshe Feinstein writes that we often take nature for granted. In order to impress upon the world that nature only runs its course because it is so decided by Hashem, it was important to show that the laws of nature can be overridden at His command. Gravity only operates

as defined by Newton because Hashem decrees it to be so. This lesson is recorded in the Torah so that it is remembered for all eternity.

This idea is similar to the story in the Gemara of R' Chanina ben Dosa who told his daughter to light vinegar for her Shabbos candles when she ran out of oil. He said that Hashem, who decreed that oil should burn, also has the power to make vinegar burn. The oil itself only lights because Hashem decided that it should. How could R' Chanina ben Dosa ask for vinegar to light? We generally do not pray for miracles?! The answer is that to him, burning vinegar was no more of a miracle than burning oil. It was all equally miraculous in his eyes. Vinegar burning was just one miracle instead of another. Although we have generally become accustomed to nature running its course because we see it all the time, we should try to take a step back every once in a while and appreciate even the small things that we have come to take for granted and be thankful that they operate in the way that they do.

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