

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parasha of Va'era begins with some fateful words. It would not be too much to say that they changed the course of history because they changed the way people thought about history. In fact, they gave birth to the very idea of history. Listen to the words: G-d said to Moses, "I am Hashem. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as E-I Shaddai, but by my name Hashem I did not make myself fully known to them. (ex. 6: 1-2)

What exactly does this mean? As Rashi points out, it does not mean that Abraham Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah did not know G-d by the name Hashem.

To the contrary, G-d's first words to Abraham, "Leave your land, your birthplace and your father's house," were said using the name Hashem. It even says, just a few verses later (Gen. 12: 7), Vayera Hashem el Avram: "Hashem appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So G-d had appeared to Avram as Hashem. And in the very next verse it says that Avram built an altar and "He called on the name of Hashem" (12: 8). So Avram himself knew the name and had used it. Yet it is clear from what G-d says to Moses, that something new is about to happen, a Divine revelation of a kind that had never happened before, something that no one, not even the people closest to G-d, has yet seen. What was it?

The answer is that through Bereishit, G-d is the god of creation, the god of nature, the aspect of G-d we call, with different nuances but the same overall sense, Elokim, or E-I Shaddai, or even Koneh shamayim va-aretz, Creator of heaven and earth.

Now in a sense, that aspect of G-d was known to everyone in the ancient world. It's just that they did not see nature as the work of one G-d but of many: the god of the sun, the god of the rain, the goddesses of the sea and the earth, the vast pantheon of forces responsible for harvests, fertility, storms, droughts and so on.

There were profound differences between the gods of polytheism and myth and the One G-d of Abraham, but they operated, as it were, in the same territory, the same ball park. The aspect of G-d that appears in the days of Moses and the Israelites is

radically different, and it's only because we are so used to the story that we find it hard to see how radical it was.

For the first time in history G-d was about to get involved in history, not through natural disasters like the Flood, but by direct interaction with the people who shape history. G-d was about to appear as the force that shapes the destiny of nations. He was about to do something no one had ever heard of before: bring an entire nation from slavery and servitude, persuade them to follow him into the desert, and eventually to the promised land, and there build a new kind of society, based not on power but on justice, welfare, respect for the dignity of the human person and on collective responsibility for the rule of law.

G-d was about to initiate a new kind of drama and a new concept of time. According to many of the world's greatest historians, Arnaldo Momigliano, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, J. H. Plumb, Eric Voegelin and the anthropologist Mircea Eliade, this was the moment history was born.

Until then, the basic human drama was struggling to maintain order against the ever present threats of chaos, whether through natural disasters, foreign conquest, or internal power struggles. Success meant maintaining the status quo. In fact religion in the ancient world was intensely conservative. It was about teaching people the inevitability of the status quo. Time was an arena in which nothing fundamentally changed.

And now G-d appears to Moses and tells him that something utterly new is about to occur, something the patriarchs knew about in theory but had never lived to see in practise. A new nation. A new kind of faith. A new kind of political order. A new type of society. G-d was about to enter history and set the West on a trajectory that no human beings had ever contemplated before.

Time was no longer going simply to be what Plato beautifully described as the moving image of eternity. It was going to become the stage on which G-d and humanity would journey together toward the day when all human beings, regardless of class, colour, creed or culture, would achieve their full dignity as the image and likeness of G-d. Religion was about to become, not a conservative force but an evolutionary and even revolutionary one.

Think about this. Long before the West, the Chinese had invented ink, paper, printing, porcelain

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manufacture, the compass, gunpowder, and many other technologies.

But they failed to develop a scientific revolution, an industrial revolution, a market economy and a free society. Why did they get so far and then stop?

The historian Christopher Dawson argued that it was the religion of the West that made the difference. Alone among the civilizations of the world, Europe "has been continually shaken and transformed by an energy of spiritual unrest." He attributed this to the fact that "its religious ideal has not been the worship of timeless and changeless perfection but a spirit that strives to incorporate itself in humanity and to change the world." [1]

To change the world. That is the key phrase. The idea that together with G-d we can change the world, make history, not just be made by it: that was born when G-d told Moses that he and his contemporaries were about to see an aspect of G-d no one had ever seen before.

I still find that a spine-tingling moment when, each year we read Va-era, and recall the moment history was born, the moment G-d entered history and taught us for all time that slavery, oppression, injustice, are not written into the fabric of the cosmos, engraved into the human condition. Things can be different because we can be different, because G-d has shown us how. ©2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe faces a crisis of faith at the onset of this week's parsha. He apparently has made no headway with and little impression on the Pharaoh of Egypt. The situation of the Jewish slaves has worsened considerably and the leaders of the people place blame upon Moshe for that situation.

So, Moshe is apparently unsuccessful with the Pharaoh and unsuccessful with the Jewish people all at one and the same time. Is it any wonder that Moshe complains to the Lord about this mission which, he now reiterates, he wishes to abandon? And even though the Torah does not state so in so many specific words, it is obvious that Moshe, so to speak, is disappointed in G-d as well.

The Lord patiently sends him back to his task and reassures him that all will yet turn out well for him and his people. And by the end of the parsha, we find Moshe in full strength and confidence delivering his message of redemption to Pharaoh and to the Jewish people.

This crisis of faith has somehow passed, though we do not find that Moshe's earlier concerns have been addressed. The Lord merely reiterates the message that Moshe has already heard from Him a number of times. Yet Moshe is revitalized now that he hears G-d's promise once again, of Jewish redemption from Egyptian bondage.

Repeated promises rarely if ever inspire. So what causes this change of spirit and attitude within Moshe's thoughts and actions? What is the catalyst for his new found optimism and boldness of speech and purpose?

I have often felt that it was the very crisis of faith that Moshe endured that was the main contributing factor to his future steadfastness and strength of purpose. Only someone who has experienced doubt can truly come to faith.

The Lord created a world that tests our faith in Him daily. Life automatically introduces doubt into our existence. It is in dealing with our omnipresent doubts, with the unfairness of life itself and with the illogic and irrationality of it all that one achieves the plateau of faith and spiritual strength. Only the doubter can become a strong believer.

It is Moshe's crisis of faith that now anneals and strengthens his belief in his mission as the savior of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The rabbis stated that, "All things are in the hand of Heaven, except for fear and belief in Heaven itself." Therefore the Lord, so to speak, does not respond to Moshe's complaints directly. He does not explain to Moshe why the process of redemption has seemingly taken on such a difficult and negative turn. The Lord makes no excuses for what has occurred. He only tells Moshe to keep on persevering and redemption will eventually arrive.

Moshe has to overcome his crisis of faith on his own. There is no one that can help make one believe except for the person himself. This is probably the most important message that one can derive from the study of this week's parsha. ©2010 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“This is what the Lord says: By this you will know that I am the Lord: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it

will be changed into blood." (Exodus 7:17)

What was the purpose of the plagues? If G-d's intention was to redeem the Jews from slavery, wasn't there a more efficient way? In Genesis, we saw that when people behave badly, G-d gives them time to repent, but once punishment begins, it is swift and effective, leaving no further opportunities to repent.

Why should Egypt be different? When G-d decided to suspend the laws of nature, the Egyptians could have been eliminated in an explosion of fire and brimstone, liberating the Israelites instantly. Why do we need these ten steps, turning the screw tighter and tighter until even the most resistant Egyptian could not maintain his stubbornness? To answer this, we need to determine the purpose of the plagues - were they just sent to free the Israelites, or was there more involved?

The liberation from Egypt represented the inauguration of a people brought together not by geography but by ideology - a holy kingdom. The most powerful nation on earth would be challenged by a group of slaves who, despite their long years of bondage, were chosen by G-d to stand at the center of history. They were to become the living expression of a way of life which stands in direct opposition to that of the pharaohs.

Ancient Egypt was the prototype of civilizations built on slaves. At the apex of the pyramid, we find the man-god Pharaoh, while at its base were the faceless slaves. Sandwiched in between were the priests, who held tremendous power and whose status was exceeded only by Pharaoh himself.

The Ten Plagues not only served to free our nation from the despotic Egyptians, but also demonstrated that the time had come when "Egypt shall know that I am G-d, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring out the children from among them" (Exodus 7:5). Throughout the duration of the plagues, this idea is constantly repeated as G-d breaks the chains of bondage and establishes fundamental truths for all time.

The first principle of Judaism is the existence of one G-d, who takes a specific interest in His creation and has the ability to establish and destroy civilizations.

The second principle is that the world is not an arbitrary place, where those on top are entitled to treat their slaves however they wish while living off the fruit of their labors. There is a Divine system of reward and punishment, and people who act cruelly and cause pain to others will be held responsible.

The third principle is that there is a plan to history. Judaism promises a final Redemption with the arrival of the Messiah, the return to Zion and the rebuilding of the Temple. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

From a theological perspective, the Ten Plagues hammered away at the idolatrous beliefs of the Egyptians, demonstrating that they were based on

foolish superstition. The Egyptians worshiped the Nile, attributing Egypt's position at the helm of civilization to the divine powers of this mighty river. When its waters were turned to blood and then infested with frogs, the absurdity of this idea was exposed, forcing the Egyptians to rethink their ideas as they saw their fertility god transformed into a source of death and destruction.

Apart from the Nile, the Egyptians worshiped animals, birds and insects, but as the plagues progressed, these deities appeared to devastate the local agriculture and were then themselves destroyed. As the Egyptians witnessed the decimation of their livelihoods and the ruin of their country, the country's idolatrous infrastructure began to buckle, and the people realized that it was not a man-god in charge, but the Creator of the Universe.

So the plagues offered a profound lesson in theology, including an important message about social justice. Slavery is one of the great sins of the ancient world, and the perpetrators had to suffer in a manner so graphic that it would illustrate for all time the relationship between the crime and the punishment.

The Egyptian reign of terror against the Israelites began with the decree that all Hebrew male children be cast into the Nile. Pharaoh's use of the river as a means to persecute Jewish families led G-d to appropriate it for the punishment of Egypt. With the plagues of blood and frogs, the source of Jewish suffering becomes the focus of Egyptian suffering. Then the plague of boils mimics the boils and blisters inflicted on the Israelite slaves when they were beaten by their taskmasters. Plagues on the animals show that it is forbidden to dehumanize a person. In this way, the plagues offer a measure-for-measure punishment for the persecution of an innocent slave population.

Through each plague, G-d teaches Pharaoh and his people basic lessons in theology, and informs him of the Divine concern for every human being.

Most importantly, the plagues form the backdrop for the liberation of the Israelites so that they can sacrifice the Paschal Lamb, showing that it's not enough to end slavery; one must begin serving G-d in freedom. In this way, the plagues exchanged the Egyptian obsession with death to a life-enhancing focus on the G-d of freedom, redemption and hope. © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Although the plagues may seem like random punishments, they are actually a Divine plan to teach the Egyptians some fundamental lessons.

Consider for example the first plague of water turning into blood. It can, as the Midrash points out, be seen as an attack on the Egyptian god?the Nile River.

The point of this plague was to drive home to the Egyptians the true impotency of their god.

Alternatively, the plague of blood can be viewed as a measure for measure punishment. Since, as the Midrash adds, the Egyptians drowned Jewish children, shedding their blood in water, hence their water was turned into blood.

The Maharal insists that the plagues reveal G-d's unlimited power. The first three are attacks from below—turning the land and sea against the Egyptians (blood, frogs and lice). The next three are attacks from the ground level (beasts, pestilence and boils). And the last three emerge from the heavens (hail, locusts and darkness).

Most important: the plagues do not reveal a G-d of vengeance but a G-d of compassion. The movement of the plagues is from the external (blood first attacking water outside the house) to that which is closer (the frogs which enter the home) to the body itself (lice affecting individuals).

Rather than increasing in intensity, the plagues then diminish in power, withdrawing once again to the external (beasts), moving to the inner home (pestilence) and finally to the body (boils). The seventh, eighth and ninth plagues repeat the same cycle. The plagues fluctuate and after each triplet, they give the Egyptians the chance to repent.

Some commentators even insist that in reality there were only three plagues prior to the smiting of the first born as only the third, sixth and ninth plagues impacted directly on the bodies of the Egyptians. From this perspective, the first two of each triplet were in effect warnings for plagues three, six and nine.

Another display of G-d's compassion was the nature of the warning. Note that for the first, fourth and seventh plagues Pharaoh was warned near the Nile. For the second, fifth and eighth he is warned in the privacy of his palace. But for the third, sixth and ninth there are no warnings, as the first two of each of the triplets serve that purpose.

Even the plague of the first born, the one that seems to be the harshest, was not random and it reveals a G-d who judges mercifully. After all, the elders were the priests, the leadership in Egypt, who, together with Pharaoh masterminded the enslavement of the Jews. G-d's mercy is manifested in that virtually all of Egypt was spared. Only the elders who had orchestrated the whole plan were attacked.

There is one other approach to the plagues that ought to be noted. The story of Genesis is the story of a G-d unleashing his power to create the world. The story of the plagues is another display of that G-dly creative energy. Our rabbis say that "with ten sayings the world was created." (Ethics 5:1) And here, with ten plagues, a section of the world was being unraveled.

As creation was carefully carried out by G-d for a world that was potentially "very good," (Genesis 1:31

) so too were the plagues a carefully designed plan by G-d to undo part of that creation which had gone wrong.

But when G-d undoes creation, he does so slowly. Indeed, all of these approaches to the plagues reflect a G-d who is reticent to inflict pain. It is a G-d of endless love who hesitates to destroy; and a G-d who, even when punishing, does so with the hope that those affected will examine themselves and learn from their mistakes. ©2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Hebrew language has so many hidden lessons, and one such lesson lies within this week's Parsha (portion), Vaeira, where G-d promises to take the Jews from under the 'burdens' of Egypt (6:6). But as the Rebbi of Gur explains, the Hebrew word that means 'burden' also means 'tolerant', which would make the Passuk (verse) read... "I will deliver you from being tolerant of Egypt". We find proof for this tolerance when even after the Jews were released from Egypt, when the situation looked bleak, they wanted to go back to slavery. Had their slavery been such a burden, why would they ever consider going back?

The answer is that the problem was not that they were overworked, but that they were too tolerant of their surroundings! Hashem therefore told them, and is telling us, that the first step Jews have to take is to realize when we are 'slaves' to our society. If we tolerate our surroundings, not only will we not appreciate how LUCKY we are to be different, but also we'll forget that we even ARE different! In a society where some people hide their religious identity, the Torah is telling us to always keep in mind our ultimate differences as Jews, to never settle for being just like everyone else, and to love it, show it, and prove it in constructive ways every chance we get! In response to this Parsha, we should all pick one way to show the world, and OURSELVES what it means to be a Jew, whether it's by volunteering to visit the sick, to give charity, or to say one Perek (paragraph) of Tehillim (Psalm) every day. Find a way to find your way! ©2010 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d said to Moshe, 'tell Aharon to take your stick and stretch your hand towards the waters of Egypt.' The plague of blood began with these instructions (Shemos 7:19), as "Moshe and Aharon did so, just as G-d had commanded, and he lifted with the stick and he smote the water that was in

the Nile in view of Pharaoh's eyes and the eyes of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile turned to blood" (7:20). However, despite the Torah insisting that Moshe and Aharon did exactly as G-d had commanded, their actions aren't described as being the same as the instructions they were given. Moshe was told to "take the stick" and "stretch out his (or Aharon's, see Midrash Seichel Tov) hand," yet all that was done (according to the verse) was the "lifting of the stick." What happened to the out-stretched hand?

This discrepancy is not limited to the plague of blood. The frogs came after Moshe was told to "tell Aharon to stretch out your hand with your stick" (8:1) and "Aharon stretched out his hand." Again both the stick and hand are mentioned in the commandment, but only one is said to have been done. Whereas there was no mention of the "hand" when the first plague was brought, for the second plague there is no mention of the stick. The instructions for the third plague only include the stick (8:12), yet when Aharon "did [what was commanded]" (8:13), both his hand and the stick are mentioned. Neither "hand" or "stick" are mentioned for the fourth, fifth or sixth plagues (see Ibn Ezra on 8:12), but for the seventh (hail) and eighth (locusts), only "hand" is mentioned in the instructions (9:22 and 10:12) and only "stick" is mentioned when those instructions were carried out (9:23 and 10:13). The only plague where the commandment is consistent with its implementation is the ninth (darkness), when only the hand is mentioned. Neither is mentioned regarding the smiting of the firstborn, but when the sea was split, both are mentioned in the commandment (14:16) and only the hand is mentioned in its implementation (14:21). Why are both sometimes mentioned in the instructions, but not always, why are both sometimes mentioned when these instructions were carried out, but not always, why are the instructions and their implementation almost never consistent, and what is the significance of either "hand" or "stick" being omitted (or included) in each of these descriptions?

Rav Saadya Gaon* is among the commentators who pose this question (on the plagues; the discrepancy regarding the splitting of the sea is not mentioned) without suggesting an answer. After quoting RS"G, the Tur says "some explain that for all of them there was an outstretched hand with the stick, as

is stated explicitly regarding blood, which is the first [plague], and by the others there was no concern about saying so explicitly; sometimes it mentions stretching out the stick [without mentioning the hand], and sometimes it mentions stretching out the hand [without mentioning the stick], whether regarding the command or the doing, but the command for all of them always [included both the] stretched out hand and the stick, and so they [Moshe and Aharon] did." In other words, G-d always commanded Moshe to take the stick and stretch out his hand (or for Aharon to do so), and the commanded was always followed exactly, but there is no need for the Torah to state so each and every time. Being that a hand is used to take the stick, it is understood that every mention of the stick must somehow also include the hand. And it makes sense that once the stick being in the outstretched hand is mentioned, any subsequent mention of the hand also implies that it was holding the stick before being "stretched out." Nevertheless, there must be a reason why things were stated the way they were each time, why even after the first mention sometimes the hand is mentioned, sometimes the stick is mentioned, and sometimes both are mentioned.

The splitting of the sea may be a separate issue. Some commentators (e.g. Chizkuni) explain the word "ha'reim" not as "lifting up," but as "removing," with G-d telling Moshe to put away the stick and use only his hand, so that no one will attribute the miracles to the stick. The Sefornu separates the functions of the stick and the hand, with the stick bringing the wind (to dry the seabed) and the hand causing the sea to split. Therefore, at least for now, I'd like to focus only on the plagues.

Although the question is posed starting with the commandment to Moshe to tell Aharon to "take your stick and stretch out your hand," Moshe had previously (7:17) been told to tell Pharaoh that he will "smite with the stick that is in my hand on the water that it is in the Nile, and they will change into blood." Both the hand and stick are mentioned here too, but whereas "hitting the Nile" isn't mentioned in the subsequent command to Moshe, it is mentioned here (and in the fulfillment, see 7:20). Therefore, the first plague cannot establish the precedent that each plague that mentions either "hand" or "stick" includes both, with the hand holding the stick as it is stretched out. G-d wanted two things to happen before He brought the plague of blood; He wanted Aharon to hit the Nile and to stretch out his hand, while holding the stick, towards the other bodies of water in Egypt (see Ibn Ezra). First we are told that the Nile will be hit (7:17), then (7:19) that the stick should be held by an outstretched hand. We are then told (7:20) that Moshe and Aharon did exactly as they were commanded, as not only was Aharon's hand holding the stick while stretched out (as mentioned in the previous verse), but first he hit the Nile.

* Peirushay Rav Saadya Gaon L'Sefer Shemos, published in 1998 by Mosad Harav Kook, where the source given is the longer commentary of the Tur. Although RS"G is quoted there, it is unclear if this part is a continuation of the words of RS"G or is a resumption of the Tur's own words. Rabbeinu Yochanan Luria (Meshivas Nefesh) also discusses these discrepancies without mentioning either the ninth plague or the splitting of the sea, concluding by saying, "tzaruch iyun rav."

Without having been able to establish yet what the normal procedure was, at the next plague (frogs) we are told again that Aharon was to "stretch out his hand with his stick" (8:1), i.e. while holding it. There should no longer be a need to mention both, as now the precedent, that both the hand and the stick are always used together, should be set. And, in fact, only the hand is mentioned in the fulfillment (8:2). Why is the hand the one mentioned, and not the stick? Perhaps it was because this time G-d didn't want Aharon to hit the Nile (see Ibn Ezra), and mentioning the stick might imply, or be misunderstood to imply, that the stick was used the same way in the second plague as it was in the first (to hit the Nile before being outstretched in the hand). Therefore the hand is mentioned, not the stick.

For the third plague, the stick is used to hit the dust of the ground, which is all that is mentioned in the instructions (8:12). To make sure that we know which was done first (and that the hitting didn't supersede the stretching out), we are told that first Aharon stretched out his hand while holding the stick and then he used it to hit the ground (8:13). By now, the procedure has been well established, and telling Moshe to stretch out his hand (9:22 and 10:12) is enough, as he knows it means to do it while holding the stick in his hand (9:23 and 10:13). By the time the ninth plague is described, and the procedure not only established, but confirmed through the description of the seventh and eighth plagues, even we are well aware that "stretching out the hand" means doing so while holding the stick.

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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

From earliest childhood, we are taught to express our gratitude for anything we receive. Think back. What were the first things your parents taught you? "Say please" and "Say thank you." Appreciation and gratitude seem to be fundamental universal values. Why is this so? Is it only to give our benefactors a good feeling? Or is there some deeper purpose? What exactly do these words mean?

In this week's Torah portion, we find a rather strange form of gratitude. As the story unfolds, Pharaoh defiantly refuses to release the Jewish people from bondage. The Ten Plagues begin. First, the Nile River turns to blood. Pharaoh persists in his stubborn refusal, and the river spawns and disgorges myriad frogs that swarm over all of Egyptian. Pharaoh still resists, and the very dust of the earth is transformed into lice. But this, too, does not convince Pharaoh to release the Jewish people, and as the plagues continue, Egypt is overrun with beasts of prey. And so it continues until Pharaoh finally lets the Jewish people go.

If we look carefully, however, we notice an interesting distinction between the first three plagues and all the rest. Moses was the divine messenger to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and he personally administered the plagues. Nonetheless, Hashem chose his brother Aaron to administer the first three plagues. Why was this so?

The Sages tell us that for Moses to strike the river and turn it into blood or to generate a plague of frogs from its bowels would have been an act of ingratitude. During the decree of infanticide, Moses had been concealed among the bulrushes of the Nile, and in effect, the river had saved his life. How could he now afflict it with plagues? Furthermore, Moses had struck down an Egyptian taskmaster who had been tormenting a Jewish laborer and buried the body in the soil. Therefore, it would have been an act of ingratitude for him to transform the soil into lice.

But wait! What sort of gratitude was Hashem demanding from Moses? What is the point of being grateful to inanimate entities such as the river and the soil?

Clearly, the primary purpose of gratitude is for our own benefit. People sometimes have a tendency to avoid expressing their gratitude, because somehow doing so makes them feel diminished. Their egos do not allow them to acknowledge that they are beholden to others. In order to counteract this tendency, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes the importance of expressing thanks. Indeed, the Hebrew word for gratitude is *hakaras hatov*, acknowledgment of the favor. Acknowledgment is the key, regardless of whether the benefactor is another person or an inanimate river.

The tendency to ingratitude, the commentators explain, is one of the major obstacles to a close relationship with the Creator. A person whose ego does not allow him to acknowledge his own limitations and needs will not recognize the limitless presence of the Creator in the world. Only by becoming conditioned to express gratitude at every appropriate occasion, to acknowledge dependency on others, can a person break out of the ego-driven illusions of self-sufficiency and gain a clear vision of the world. This knowledge and humble acceptance is the first step towards connecting with the Master of the Universe.

A great sage was having dinner with one of his young disciples in a hotel dining room. "The owner of this hotel is a fine person," remarked the sage. "Look at this dinner he prepared for us. And the service!"

"Well, what do you expect?" said the young disciple. "He is getting paid very well for it."

"Naturally, he has to get paid," said the sage. "He has expenses, you know. That's the only reason he takes our money. But he is such a considerate, wonderful host."

"He takes more than to cover expenses," the young man persisted. "He make quite a tidy profit here."

"Of course, he makes a profit," said the sage. "Otherwise, how is he to support his family? Nonetheless, he is such a warm host. But you, my young friend, have thought of every which way to avoid being grateful to him. Do you why? Because you are afraid that acknowledging the good in others may make you indebted to them and thereby diminished. But the opposite is true. Recognizing the good in others makes you a better person."

In our own lives, we must never underestimate the importance of expressing gratitude and appreciation to others. We must recognize every good turn that is done for us, and we must declare our acknowledgement in no uncertain terms. We owe it not only to our benefactors but to ourselves even more. A person wise enough to thank the doorman for opening the door is exalted enough to be in touch with eternity.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah teaches us a profound lesson in arrogance and self dependency. Hashem instructed the prophet Yechezkel to deliver a crushing blow to Pharaoh and his Egyptian empire and predict its total destruction.

Hashem said, "Behold I am sending the sword after you that will decimate man and animal. Egypt will lay desolate and ruined...in response to your saying, 'The river is mine and I developed it.'" (29: 8,9) Hashem held Pharaoh and Egypt fully accountable for their arrogant approach to prosperity crediting their sustenance solely to their technology.

The background for this is that Egypt relies upon the Nile River for her basic existence. Rainfall in Egypt is so scarce and infrequent that she must maintain an elaborate irrigation system for her basic agricultural needs.

Over the years, Egyptians grew accustomed to their highly effective system and viewed themselves self sufficient. They viewed the Nile River as their sole provider and regarded its developer, Pharaoh their deity. He was, in truth, responsible for the system's efficiency and was therefore considered by all, their source of goodness. Pharaoh gladly accepted his title and lured his foolish nation into recognizing him as their deity. Hashem responded to this arrogance and informed Pharaoh that Egypt's days were numbered. Her mighty empire would soon fall and her country would lay desolate for forty years.

Pharaoh's absurd status as Egypt's deity finds its parallel in the ancient Pharaoh of this week's parsha. Hashem repeatedly chose a special meeting place for Moshe and Pharaoh and instructed Moshe, "Go to

Pharaoh in the morning; behold he is going out to the water." (Shmos 7: 15) Moshe Rabbeinu was sent to meet Pharaoh far from his palace-at the foot of the Nile River.

Rashi (ad loc.) explains that Hashem chose this auspicious site in response to Pharaoh's arrogant claim to the masses. He proclaimed himself as a deity without common bodily needs. In order to preserve this myth, he secretly traveled early each morning to the Nile River to relieve himself there.

Hashem therefore chose this perfect moment to send Moshe to remind Pharaoh of his mortality and disclose his secret identity.

In truth, the parallel lines between the Pharaohs extends much further. In our haftorah Yechezkel states in Hashem's name, "Behold I am turning against you and your river...Neither man nor animal shall pass through the land for forty years." (29: 10,11) The Sages place special significance on the number forty predicted here. They note the Biblical discussions between Yosef and Pharaoh wherein seven years of famine are mentioned six times. They explain that these refer to forty-two years of ordained famine for Egypt. (see Breishis Rabba 89:9) Tosfos explain that ultimately only seven years were decreed upon ancient Egypt. Yosef intervened on behalf of his household and asked Hashem to limit the famine to seven years. Hashem answered Yosef's request and Yosef subsequently limited Pharaoh's dream to seven years of famine. (see Baalei Tosfos to Breishis 41:27) Chazal add that, in reality, only two years of famine transpired. Soon after our patriarch Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt he blessed Pharaoh with prosperity and brought the famine to an immediate halt. (see Rashi Breishis 47:19)

Accordingly, forty years of famine remained to be seen. Those were reserved for a later period in history when Egypt would deserve Hashem's harsh response. In Yechezkel's days, the time finally arrived and the remaining forty years were decreed upon Egypt.

Chazal's powerful insight suggests that Egypt was presently suffering for her ancient fault committed one thousand years before. Apparently, this decree of Egyptian desolation was Heavenly ordained many centuries earlier for a similar fault of hers. It follows logically that the earlier Pharaoh must have possessed a similar approach to prosperity to that of the later Pharaoh. Indeed, this was the case and we discover a similar scenario in the earlier Egyptian empire. The Midrash notes a discrepancy in Pharaoh's dream when expressing it to Yosef. In Pharaoh's true dream, the Torah reveals him standing above the Nile River. Yet when informing Yosef of his dream Pharaoh conveniently referred to himself standing next to the river. Chazal explain that Pharaoh took full credit for creating and developing his Nile River. In his dream he

beheld himself standing above the Nile reflecting his position that, "the river was his and he developed it." He was, however, embarrassed to reveal this arrogance to Yosef and he carefully altered the truth. (Tanchuma Voeira 8)

We now see a direct corollary between the Pharaohs, both claiming to be the sole source of their prosperity. Hashem initially responded to this abhorrent arrogance and decreed forty-two years of Egyptian desolation. This decree would undoubtedly clarify to Pharaoh who controls prosperity and upon whom everyone must rely. The Nile River was soon to be of no use and Egypt would be forced to recognize Hashem as their ultimate provider. Pharaoh quickly learned his lesson. Mysteriously, once Yaakov came to Egypt and blessed Pharaoh the famine ended. This miracle convinced the ancient Pharaoh that Hashem controlled the world. Once Pharaoh learned his lesson the forty remaining years of famine were suspended. In the interim Egypt developed a hostile attitude towards Hashem and His people. On the heels of Egypt's recent lesson Hashem completed the process and destroyed the entire Egyptian Empire. It would take many years for Egypt to raise her head in pride and take credit, once again, for her accomplishments.

Now, nearly one thousand years later Egypt returned to her arrogant ways.

After her massive devastating blows she finally rebuilt her empire. Pharaoh, in his height of success, began viewing his Nile River as Egypt's sole source of prosperity. He, like the earlier Pharaoh, maintained that he created the Nile and developed it. Hashem refused to tolerate this arrogance and when the first signs of this absurdity resurfaced Hashem responded harshly. The time had finally arrived for Egypt to experience her long awaited forty years of desolation. Through this, Hashem displayed to Mitzraim and the world over that He controlled the world and provided their prosperity.

The above lesson reminds us never to forget our limited role in our personal success. We must never forget that Hashem is our true provider and He develops and secures our efforts with their ultimate success. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

There are two gifts that were bestowed upon the Jewish People that are referred to as a morasha. The first reference appears in Parshas Vaera (Shemos 6:8), where Hashem promises to bring the Jewish People into Eretz Yisroel and present it to them as a morasha. Moshe Rabbeinu, in his final words in Parshas Vezos Habracha (Devarim 33:4), provides the second reference when he describes the Torah as the morasha of the Jewish People. What is the significance of this term as it relates to these precious possessions of our people?

Morasha is related to the word yerusha-an inheritance-and yet it has a very different meaning. A yerusha belongs entirely to the recipient to do with it as he chooses. In contrast, a morasha is not an inheritance but rather a heritage. It must be preserved to be transmitted to subsequent generations. We are guardians over the precious gifts of Torah and Eretz Yisroel, making sure to hand them over to our children as we received them from our parents.

There is another important distinction between yerusha and morasha. A yerusha is received without any effort. However, one must earn the privilege of being part of a morasha. For this reason Chazal teach us (Berachos 5a) that Torah and Eretz Yisroel are acquired through suffering. Furthermore, a yerusha is only temporary. If the recipient consumes it during his lifetime, there is nothing left for the next generation. A morasha, by contrast, is eternal. Torah and Eretz Yisroel remain part of the heritage of the Jewish People for eternity.

Concerning the Torah which is a morasha, Chazal say (Pesachim 49b) that the word morasha can also be interpreted as a meorasa-a betrothed woman. Presumably, this can also be applied to Eretz Yisroel. What is the connection between a woman who is a meorasa and the gifts of Torah and Eretz Yisroel?

There are two stages of marriage-erusin and nisuin. Although today we perform them together, in olden times the woman was first betrothed (i.e. erusin) and then remained in her father's house awaiting the nisuin-entering her husband's home. The period between erusin and nisuin was a time of great excitement and anticipation. It is these feelings that Hashem wants us to have about the Torah and Eretz Yisroel. In Shema (Devarim 6:6) the obligation to have the words of the Torah on our hearts "hayom-today" is highlighted. Rashi comments that the word "today" teaches us that we must look at the Torah as something new each day. When a farmer brings his first fruit each year, he declares that he has arrived today in Eretz Yisroel (Devarim 26:3). Why? Because he must relate to Eretz Yisroel with the excitement of someone arriving there for the first time. It is these feelings of excitement and anticipation which are associated with the stage of erusin that must permeate our eternal relationship with Torah and Eretz Yisroel. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel and Project Genesis, Inc.

