

Va'eirah

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Self-Sacrifice- the antithesis of Egypt

This week's parsha Va'eirah is the next episode in the Bnei Yisrael's journey out of Egypt. The parsha begins with Hashem continuing to reveal himself to Moshe. Commentaries such as Rashi explain that Hashem was critiquing Moshe's attitude toward hearing a revelation by stating that I am Hashem who revealed Himself to Avraham Yitzchak and Ya'akov who listened without question to my word, whereas you Moshe seem to be pushing back (questioning) in wanting to heed my word.

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵי אֶנִּי ה'.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדָּי וַיִּשְׁמֵי ה' לֹא נִוְדָעְתִּי לָהֶם:

Chassidus explains that there is a difference in the revelation of Hashem in the level of Kel Shakkai versus Hava¹. While the Jews were in Egypt in the height of the exile it was impossible for them to believe in the plausibility of being redeemed. Comes Hashem to Moshe, to renew the promise and say expose from the highest levels that through the name Hava' the Jews will be redeemed. It is only through the loftiest revelation (name Hava') that the order of the world (at that time from exile to redemption) could take place. This is what Hashem is telling Moshe. Furthermore, Egypt was the antithesis of anything similar to the monotheistic theocracy that Hashem is the king over. Egyptians were pagans who served themselves, the Pharaoh and multiplicity of other deities such as the power of the Nile River as the deliverer of sustenance to

their nation. When in fact it was Hashem who presided over the control of the universe.

The fundamental shift in attitude of the Egyptians, but more importantly for the Bnei Yisrael needed to come about from the loftiest revelation (name Hava') as opposed to the level of Kel Shakkai that was known to the forefathers.

From the creation of the universe in Bereishis, Hashem was revealed and exposed in the world, and slowly over generations the light of Hashem receded until the generation of Noah, which reset the Earth, and drew the light of Hashem back into the world, until Avraham was born. Over the subsequent 7 generations until Moshe Gdliness receded, whereas Moshe² the 7th had the power (through name Hava') to overturn what had been receding and draw down the light of Gdliness through the redemption, and ultimately the revelation at Har Sinai. The revelation at Har Sinai was so lofty, the revelation of Torah remains with us to this day. No matter how far or receded we seem to be from our creator, and how devoid of spirituality our world seems to be, we remain as servants to Hashem, and continue to follow and study His Torah, and we continue to have the power to draw down His light into this world.

The plagues that rained upon Egypt and Pharaoh were specifically used to combat, in a completely opposite form of how the Egyptians viewed that particular resource. The miracles (Such as Aharon's snake from the staff devouring the other snakes- i.e., that a few will overpower many, or that the young will be served by the old) is how Hashem has reign and control over this world. Therefore, when Hashem brought blood as the first plague Hashem was telling the Egyptians that just by changing the chemical balance of the water, the Nile which was their god would be rendered powerless.

¹ Hava' is a short form for describing the 4-letter holy name of Hashem Yud, Kay, Vov, Kay.

² Avraham → Yitzchak → Ya'akov → Levi → Kehat → Amram → Moshe

The next plague reptiles or frogs/toads is questionably appropriate as a plague. The Rebbe in a sicha asks this question. Specifically framing it that everything Hashem created He did so with purpose and intentionally. For example, some species are on this earth for medicinal purposes, and the Rebbe brings an example from Eliyahu on Har Carmel, that a particular snake was created to save Eliyahu through its venom. But frogs the Rebbe wants to know seems to be a benign animal, with no medicinal or higher purposes. The Rebbe then states that the frog represents the specific combat in attitude of the Egyptians. There are 3 categories of non-believers, the atheist, agnostic, and the worst, the Egyptian attitude of replacing Gd with themselves. An atheist by denying the existence of a theocracy supports the plausibility of a higher power to exist, as logically, one cannot deny something if there isn't a possibility of its existence. In this level it is possible for the person to have a change of heart. The next level agnostic doesn't deny the existence of a higher power, rather they have a poor attitude toward a higher power, again through some revelation or life experience they may have a change of heart. The lowest level, and most difficult to combat is the person who replaces the higher power with themselves. Hashem therefore brought frogs, a benign creature, who as the Torah states jumped into the furnaces, they were even willing to sacrifice themselves for a higher power (Hashem).

Chanania Mishael and Azaria in Daniel when asked about their willingness to self-sacrifice referenced the frogs of Egypt who are not commanded to self-sacrifice (i.e., jump into the ovens), whereas humans who have the commandment to serve Hashem, would we not self-sacrifice?

We recently read an interesting reference in the Gemara Pesachim (Daf 50b) to self-sacrifice and how one achieves connecting to Hashem in the

highest levels through self-sacrifice. The gemara speaks of actual martyrdom i.e. dying in the name of Hashem³, but chassidus teaches us that Mesiras Nefesh is not necessarily only achieved through death, rather it is also the hard work of serving Hashem in our own lives. The Alter Rebbe in Tanya is constantly referencing self-sacrifice as a method of service through which one can attain the highest levels of sanctification of Hashem's name, and draw down Hashem's light into this world to make it a dwelling place for Him.

The self-sacrifice and benign nature of the frog, which even it can do something extreme, is a combat to the selfishness and benignity of the Sodomite traits that I referenced and exhaustively explained in previous papers.

The narrative of the plagues and the entire episode of the exile in Egypt is the synthesis of opposites, that only Hashem has the power to control and reveal. This revelation happens through the highest levels of omnipotence. Just when you think 'it' (whatever 'it' is) cannot happen, Hashem says "ushmi hashem, lo nodati lohem" i.e., it can happen. If one year ago I said that an event will take place that will debilitate the entire world equally I would be considered a mad man. Yet, a tiny, microscopic virus proliferated and demised the world over which has resulted in a fundamental shift in attitude in my mind of what is and isn't possible. That is, I believe even more than ever, that anything is possible.

May we merit, through our actions, the level of "Ushmi Hashem Lo Nodati" in a way we never thought possible with the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days.

³ Such as with Rabbi Akiva and the 10 martyrs, or Lullianus and Pappus two brothers who died to save their

town from Roman accusation of the crime of the death of the Roman legion's daughter.