

Parshas Vaeira

This week's Parsha, Vaeira, begins the process of Moshe and Ahron pushing, at the instruction of Hashem, for the Jews to be taken out of Egypt. Hashem told Moshe that Pharaoh would be stubborn and, therefore, cause many plagues to befall him and his people. The posuk says that, due to his stubbornness, there will be hardship. It is common for people to critique the plagues as a situation that lacked free choice, as the posuk repeatedly emphasizes that Hashem told Moshe that Pharaoh would remain stubborn. Rashi on 7:3 states that for the first 5 plagues, Hashem didn't need to make Pharaoh stubborn, since he, on his own, was stubborn. The mindset Hashem clarified for Moshe and Ahron was that Pharaoh was an adversary who believed so strongly in himself that he would never change his mind. It's like in a sales meeting where a salesperson is trying to convince someone to buy their product, even though the potential customer has some other competitor or doesn't even need the product. For the salesperson to be successful, there needs to be a situation where the potential client is open-minded enough to take the plunge with them. With Pharaoh, his mind was made up, as evidenced by his trying to one-up Moshe and Aharon by using his demonic sorcerers to accomplish the same goal. In one-upmanship, there is no room for another. This characteristic is true of many people and dynamics, and it

is a fundamentally toxic trait. To truly overcome such an existence, one must recognize and live with the idea that Hashem is in control, and all outcomes are powered by Hashem. Much like the pesukim say that the purpose of bringing the miracles and plagues was so that the Egyptians, beginning with the head, i.e. Pharaoh would ultimately recognize that everything is Hashem, even if you think you're doing the same thing. Which is why Hashem's strategy to Moshe was to visit Pharaoh, who fancied himself a deity, to meet him at the river (when using the washroom like a mortal). As explained in Rashi 7:3, the nation had no sense of spiritual pleasure in repenting. The issue arises: what about the Jews who didn't at first believe in Moshe? Notice that the Posuk explains 6:9: they didn't listen to Moshe because they had a physical impediment (shortness of breath due to the work). Then Hashem, in the pesukim (as explained by Rashi using the holy name of Hashem), explains that the signs will also be to give a spiritual enlightenment to the Jews.

In the following pesukim, Moshe challenges Hashem, so to speak, by using a Kal V'chomer: just as the Jews didn't believe Moshe about redemption, how much more so will Pharaoh not believe Moshe. And Moshe blames himself for his speech impediment, which in last week's Parsha was resolved, so that Moshe will use his brother. We know the Midrashic explanation that Moshe had a stutter or

some other speech impediment that made him feel like recipients of his communication wouldn't take him seriously, but Hashem gave him Ahron. Here, though, it would seem Moshe is blaming himself for not being taken seriously, i.e., I must be saying the wrong thing if the people to whom I am communicating do not believe me. At the point Hashem doesn't say, "Use your brother," rather, Hashem commands Moshe to plow ahead, and Rashi explains that they were reminded (and we in the Pesukim) of their ancestral lineage, which would render them eligible to challenge Pharaoh. Moshe's concern wasn't for the spiritual value or obviousness of Hashem's power, but rather how he was going to be taken seriously in a natural world.

The answer can be explained in terms of nuance in Rashi. Rashi explains on 6:9 that the word of Hashem is like a hammer that shatters a rock (about the multiplicity of explanations in the midrash). Further explanation in the Gemara in Shabbos 88b and Sanhedrin 34a explains that just as a rock can be split into many shards, yet retains its source. Meaning, if applied here (although Rashi was drawing a metaphor for a separate reason), the Jews, though splintered, are from a singular source, Hashem, and therefore, even if they don't listen initially, they will be drawn to their spiritual source and repent. Furthermore, even though their predicament in Egypt means they are

fractured and splintered, nevertheless, due to Hashem's promise to Avraham, Hashem will reunite the rock to its source. A rule that cannot be applied to the Egyptians, who, on both a spiritual and physical dimension, would not repent, and would be stubborn to Hashem for their toxic and stubborn ways. Hashem tells Moshe not to think about the physical impediment for the Jews, and rather focuses on what Moshe needs to do to get the message across to the adversary, and not to worry how the message will be communicated (as the posuk continues on 7:2 where Moshe is reminded that Ahron will communicate). Because the earlier "speech impediment" reference was resolved on a spiritual dimension by Hashem commanding Moshe to plow ahead, and in Chapter 7, all the references to the physical impediment were resolved (i.e. Ahron will be a speaker).

The point being that the Jews are Hashem's chosen people, therefore the aim to convince them is on a spiritual level, and that was accomplished through command and resolve, whereas our enemy, Egypt in this place, is far off from accepting Hashem, so they need a complete program of miracles and plagues to get them to turn their opinion in the fullest sense of Hashem, and let the Jews go.

The model, therefore, for us, in our Golus is that although there are moments we are "short of breath" and we may not see

the light at the end of the tunnel, or heaven forbid, we may not believe that Mashiach (our redemption) is on the way, we can help that by aligning ourselves spiritually, and the the “speech impediment” will be removed, at the same time, the world around us will learn about the greatness of Hashem, and we will overcome our adversaries.

Good Shabbos