

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yentel Bas Avrohom.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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26 TEVET

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS VA'EIRA

Close to You

And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God... (6:7)

This week's *parsha* opens with Hashem discussing with Moshe His plans for rescuing Bnei Yisroel from Egypt. Herein we find the well-known "*arba leshonos shel geula* – four iterations of salvation," i.e. four different words describing the process of Hashem taking Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt. The fourth word that the Torah uses is "*velokachti*" – generally translated as "I will take."

Yet, both Targum Onkelos and Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel translate the word "*velokachti*" as "*ve'escorev*" from the language of "*kiruv*" as in "I will draw near." This is odd; in general there are two Aramaic translations for taking: "*ud'var*," which is used when referring to taking people (see *Bereishis* 12:5 when Avraham took his wife Sarah), and "*u'nesiv*," which is used when referring to taking inanimate objects (see *Bereishis* 28:18 when Yaakov takes the rock and places it under his head). So why did both Targumim deviate from the usual translation of the word "to take" in this particular instance?

We find another place where the Torah uses the word "to take" and both Targumim translate it as "*ve'escorev*": When Hashem asks Moshe "to take" ("*kach*") Aharon and his children (*Vayikra* 8:2). Here too both Targumim translate the word "to take" as "*karev* – to draw near." In fact, when the Torah itself describes what Moshe did it says, "*vayakrev Moshe es Aharon ve'es bonov* – and Moshe drew near Aharon and his sons." Why does the Torah describe this "taking" in such a manner?

Moshe is asking Aharon and his children to take a position of responsibility within

the Jewish people. This kind of responsibility has to be accepted as a matter of free will. The way to get someone to accept it is to draw them close and allow them to make their own decision. Ask any professional involved in "*kiruv*" and they'll tell you that the only effective manner of drawing someone near to Judaism is to be "*mekarev* – to bring them close," meaning to allow them to make their own decision to continue forward.

Chazal teach us that this fourth language of salvation ("*velokachti*") refers to Bnei Yisroel receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai (See *Sforno* and *Ibn Ezra* ad loc). Thus, standing at Mount Sinai Hashem draws us near, but we must choose to move forward and accept the Torah. It is quite significant that the very act of accepting the Torah has to be done as an act of free will.

Maharal in the introduction to his work *Tiferes Yisroel* explains that this is the meaning of the verse "*and this is the Torah that Moshe placed in front of Bnei Yisroel*" (*Devarim* 4:24). We weren't forced to take the Torah, it was placed in front of us and we chose to come and take it. In other words, when you're trying to get someone to develop in a certain area you cannot force them to change, they need to choose to want to change and take positive steps in that direction.

Accepting the Torah as a way of life wasn't about getting Bnei Yisroel to act a certain way; it was about getting them to develop in a certain direction. This kind of "buy-in to the program" only happens if one completely accepts it of his or her own



free will.

This is perhaps the most enduring message for both parents and educators; all too often we spend the majority of our efforts focusing on teaching our children and students how to act. This of course is the wrong approach to *chinuch*. We must focus on exposing our children and *talmidim* to the beauty and brilliance of the Jewish way of life. This in turn will cause them to be inspired and choose to lead a meaningful life of Torah and *mitzvos*. Only by guiding our children to choose properly for themselves can we ensure an enduring impact on the next generation.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, the Torah recounts the first seven of the ten *makkos*. These plagues were truly a measure for measure retribution for all the horrible things that the Egyptians did to Bnei Yisroel, and wrought great devastation on both the land of Egypt and its inhabitants.

Though we know what happened because we have our holy and perfect Torah, we thought it would be interesting to see if we could find corroborating evidence from ancient Egypt as well.

First, we must understand that →

In the Presence of the King

And Moshe said to him, as soon as I am gone from the city, I will spread out my hands to Hashem... (9:29)

Towards the end of this week's *parsha*, the Torah recounts the events surrounding the seventh plague – the plague of hail. After being bombarded with the miraculous form of hail (the Torah tells us that the hail was a deadly combination of fire and ice, see 9:24 and Rashi ad loc), Pharaoh summons Moshe and begs him to *daven* to Hashem to remove the plague. Moshe informs him that he will leave the city and beseech Hashem to remove the plague.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Moshe had to leave the city because it was full of idols. Presumably this means that Moshe wasn't permitted to *daven* in a city so rife with idols and idol worship. Ramban wonders why Moshe chose this time to go outside the city when previously he didn't feel compelled to leave to communicate with Hashem. Ramban answers that on prior occasions Moshe *davened* in his house, but this time he wanted to spread his hands towards the heavens and doing that in the city would

be inappropriate.

There are several issues with this understanding of why Moshe chose this particular time to leave the city. First of all, the Torah doesn't say anything about spreading his hands towards the heavens. Second, the Gemara frowns strongly on someone who prays in an open area (*Brachos* 34b, see also *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 90:5). If Moshe could have *davened* quietly in the privacy of his home, why did he venture out of the city?

There are different types of *davening* to Hashem. There are many prayers that are, for lack of a better term, like placing a phone call to Hashem. In other words, we reach out to Hashem in many different circumstances and for a variety of reasons. Many *teffilos* beseech Hashem for different needs, such as asking Hashem to heal a relative, and one can do these kinds of *teffilos* even while laying down in bed or while riding a

bike. The same goes for all of the general things we wish to communicate with Hashem.

However, there is another kind of prayer, that of standing in Hashem's presence. This is typified by the *shemoneh esrei*. There are very specific rules about how a person must conduct himself in the presence of the King. *Shemoneh esrei* isn't like a phone call to Hashem, rather it's like standing directly in front of Him.

Moshe told Pharaoh that he needed to spread his palms toward Hashem. Holding up your hands with your palms open facing someone is an indication of surrender. One can only surrender to another in their presence, thus this prayer required the presence of Hashem. This is the first time that Moshe wanted to *daven* in this manner. Moshe was actually bringing the presence of Hashem down, and it would have been inappropriate to have the presence of Hashem in a city filled with idols. Therefore, Moshe had to leave the city.

the world of archaeology, like many inexact sciences, is somewhat convoluted with "facts" often disputed, even among the leading minds in the field. So, while there isn't any substantial evidence for the plagues being in the year 1312 BCE (2448 in the Jewish calendar – the year we left Egypt), this could easily be due to a miscalculation in Egyptian history. There are experts who actually claim this very argument (that our version of history is far more reliable) and propose that the Egyptian timeline should be moved up quite a bit, by around 400 years. While this might seem strange, it is well-known that Egyptian history is famously unreliable and likely differs greatly from what we currently know (Gardiner, Alan. [Egypt of the Pharaohs](#). Oxford University Press, London, UK, 1964. p.53).

However, if we look at the readjusted time frame, suddenly many details surrounding this time period start to make sense. The Pharaohs seem to fit in better with the Torah's accounting, and Egypt's position as a world power makes more sense. Moreover, we even have physical evidence from this time period. For example, in the British museum in London, there is a royal staff from this period in the form of a snake, and it's entirely possible that using this type of "snake staff" is related to the story of Moshe and the magicians of Pharaoh (*Shemos* 7:11).

But perhaps the most clear piece of evidence is the "Admonitions of Ipuwer" (*Papyrus Leiden* 334), an ancient Egyptian papyrus from the same time period. The papyrus contains a poem about tragedies that befell Egypt at the time, and

certain details in the poem sound remarkably similar to the ten plagues: "Plague is throughout the land. Blood is everywhere [...] The river is blood [...] Gates, columns and walls are consumed by fire [...] Cattle moan [...] The land is not light." These tragedies seem eerily similar to the Torah's account and lead us to wonder if this is indeed a historical reference to the ten plagues. Of course, if it is this obvious, why hasn't the world paid attention? The answer is that while many leading archaeologists will not accept a poem as historical evidence (a literary work that may be fiction or exaggerated for dramatic effect), there are other scholars who simply refuse to give credence to anything that might indicate that the Torah is actually historically accurate. Nonetheless, we found it interesting.



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