

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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PARSHAS VA'EIRA

Group Therapy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, and gave them a charge to Bnei Yisroel... (6:13)

The Talmud Yerushalmi (*Rosh Hashana* 3:5) derives from this *passuk* a fascinating teaching: R' Shmuel son of R' Yitzchak asked, "With what did he charge Bnei Yisroel? He charged with the *mitzvah* of *Shiluach Avadim* (freeing one's slaves)." Remarkably, according to the Talmud Yerushalmi, the very first *mitzvah* that Hashem asked Moshe to command the Jewish people was to free their slaves.

At a glance, this can be difficult to comprehend: Why would the *mitzvah* of freeing one's slaves have the importance of being the first *mitzvah* given to the nation as a whole? One would expect that perhaps the *mitzvah* of Shabbos or keeping kosher or family purity laws would surely take precedence.

Furthermore, none of the Jews even had any slaves at this point, and the law couldn't even be observed until they settled in their homeland of Eretz Yisroel! Why charge them with a *mitzvah* that could not even be fulfilled at the time, and why give it the importance of being the first *mitzvah* they were commanded to do?

Psychological studies show that those who were abused as children have a tendency to become abusers themselves. Obviously, not everyone abused as a child becomes an abuser; but studies show that there is a threefold higher risk for abused children to become abusers later in life. Psychologists have offered a few possible reasons for this link. One of the prevailing theories is that children rationalize this

abuse by thinking that abuse is normal behavior. So as they mature they don't fully understand that the behavior is wrong, and therefore don't have the same barriers in place to prevent such behavior.

This is problematic for a few reasons: 1) if someone experienced something difficult or painful he should be more sensitive to it, and thereby take extraordinary measures to ensure that he does not cause the same pain to another, particularly a child and 2) this reasoning doesn't explain why they would have a stronger tendency toward deviant behavior. At some point in their lives they would certainly learn that society considers such abuse wrong. Why shouldn't that be enough to stop them?

A much more compelling theory is that an adult who has unresolved issues from being abused as a child acts out as a way of coping with the feelings of helplessness experienced as a child. In other words, those abused become abusers to prove to themselves that they are no longer helpless victims. By becoming abusers they psychologically reinforce within themselves that they are no longer the ones abused.

We see this in many other instances as well. Smokers who are finally able to quit for good often become crusaders and feel compelled to lecture others to quit smoking; overweight individuals who manage to lose weight are suddenly weight loss experts and have no problem sharing their opinions about how much



you should weigh; religious leaders struggling with their own demons become virulent anti-smut and lascivious behavior crusaders, yet nobody is surprised when scandals about them emerge. These "crusades" are merely a coping mechanism for their unresolved issues.

This is exactly what Hashem is telling Bnei Yisroel. You have been slaves now in Egypt for close to two hundred years. Bnei Yisroel needs to emotionally deal with the fact that they are now truly free and no longer slaves. One of the ways to emotionally get past one's own slavery would be to have and hold on to slaves of your own. This is why Hashem commanded them to observe the *mitzvah* of freeing slaves. The ultimate proof that they have internalized their freedom and are in a healthy emotional place, is the fact they no longer need slaves of their own. At that point they will be truly free.

Did You Know...

In last week's *parsha*, Hashem shows Moshe what he can do with his staff – when he turns it into a snake and then back – as a proof to others that Hashem spoke to Moshe. We also find that some of the ten *makos* were performed with this staff. So what makes this staff special? →

It's All About Me

These are the heads of their fathers' houses; The sons of Reuven the firstborn of Yisroel; Hanoch, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuven... (6:14)

Rashi (ad loc) is bothered by why the Torah suddenly finds it necessary to record the genealogy of Yaakov's family right in the middle of the story of the Exodus. Rashi goes on to explain that the Torah wanted to record the *yichus* (lineage) of Moshe and Aharon; and once it mentioned Moshe and Aharon, it begins from the firstborn of the family – Reuven.

This is unusual for a few reasons. Generally, when the Torah records the lineage of an individual, the Torah begins with the individual and works its way backwards (e.g. Pinchas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the Kohen). So why did the Torah begin with Yaakov? Moreover, why does the Torah mention the families of Reuven and Shimon at all?

Sometimes, when attending someone's *simcha*, during the speeches the attendees are subjected to a detailed recollection and description of all the prominent antecedents in the family. While it is true that a family's *yichus* does add, at least somewhat, to that individual and family's prominence – as the *possuk* says, "the glory of children are their fathers" (*Mishlei* 17:6) – most people tend to forget the beginning of that very same *possuk*: "the crown of grandfathers are their grandchildren."

In other words, the crowning achievement of one's family isn't in the past, it's in the future. We have to develop ourselves into people who our forbearers would be proud of and become their crowning

achievement. That means that all they did in their lives, their sacrifices, their own accomplishments, etc. all become for naught if we fail to fulfill our own mission in life. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah – Toldos*) says that the only reason Avraham was saved from the fiery furnace was because he would have a grandson named Yaakov. In essence, we can and must justify the lives of our ancestors.

This is an awesome responsibility to fulfill. While all of us are descended from a glorious past – that of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov – our personal obligation is to fulfill their mission. If we, G-d forbid, fail to live up to that responsibility then all is for naught. As great as our forefathers (and all our forbearers throughout history) were, **they need us** in order for the world to come to its final culmination and fulfill the destiny of why **all of us** were created.

That is what the Torah is telling us here. Moshe was supposed to lead Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt and into Eretz Yisroel to the final purpose of why the world was created. Therefore, this is the story of Yaakov's family. That is why the lineage begins with him. Continuing with his first born Reuven and then Shimon, great as they were, they didn't succeed in fulfilling the family's mission. But Levi, through Moshe and Aharon, justified the entire family and their purpose in fulfilling Avraham's vision of bringing Hashem down to this world, and on to the final redemption.

Did You Know Continued

1. This was no ordinary staff. Adam gave this staff to Chanoch, who gave it to Metushelach; he in turn passed it on to Noach. Noach bequeathed it to his son Shem, who transmitted it to Avraham. From Avraham to Yitzchak, and then to Yaakov, who took it with him to Egypt. Yaakov gave it to Yosef; upon Yosef's death all his possessions were removed to Pharaoh's palace. Yisro, one of Pharaoh's advisors, wanted it so he stole it and stuck it in the ground in his garden in Midian. From then on no one could pull out the staff until Moshe came. He read the Hebrew letters on the staff, and pulled it out (*Pirke D'Rebbe Eliezer* 40).

2. Where did Adam get it? It was one of the ten things Hashem created at twilight of the first Shabbos (*Pirkei Avos* 5:6), which he then gave to Adam.

3. Why was no one else able to lift it? Well, the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 8:3) says that it was the weight of 40 *se'ah*, which the Me'em Lo'ez (*Torah Anthology Shemos* 1 chapter 4) explains to be equivalent to 672 pounds!

4. Similar to the Luchos, the Me'em Lo'ez says the staff was made out of sapphire.

5. Also, since we know that Moshe was 10 Amos (around 20 feet) tall from the Gemara (*Berachos* 54a), his staff must have been pretty big as well.

6. The staff was engraved with the forty-two letter name of Hashem, the names of our patriarchs, our matriarchs, Yaakov's sons, and the abbreviation of the ten plagues: *Detzach Adash Be'achav* (*Shemos Rabbah* 8:3).

7. The Zohar adds that the forty-two letter name was in a variety of different colors (*Zohar Soncino* edition, *Bereishis*, section one, page 9a).



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