

# INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yitzchak ben Moshe.  
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

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 *possuk* 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 take precedence.

Furthermore, none of the Jews had any slaves at this point nor could the law even be observed until they settled in their homeland of Eretz Yisroel! Why charge them with a *mitzvah* that cannot be fulfilled at that time and why give it the importance of being the first *mitzvah* they are 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 abusive 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 measure 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



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scandals about them emerge. These "crusades" are merely a coping mechanism for their unresolved issues.

This is exactly what Hashem is telling Bnei Yisroel. He is saying, you have been slaves now in Egypt for close to two hundred years. You need to emotionally deal with the fact that you 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. But this is why you must observe the *mitzvah* of freeing slaves. The ability to no longer need slaves of your own is the ultimate proof that you have internalized your freedom and are in a healthy emotional place. At that point, you will be truly free.

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# It's All About Me

***These are the heads of their fathers' houses; The sons of Reuven the firstborn of Yisroel; Hanoach, 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 during the speeches at a *simcha*, 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. This means that all they did in their lives, their sacrifices, their own accomplishments, etc. are 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, God 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.

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