



Parshas Va'era

December 31, 2021

## A Taste of Torah Powerless!

by Rabbi Yisroel Kellner

Moshe, after being commanded by Hashem to once again tell Pharaoh to set the Jewish People free, responds (Va'era 6:12), "Behold, Bnai Yisrael have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips."

Moshe had already brought up the issue of his inability to speak properly in last week's parsha when ordered by Hashem to speak to the Jewish People, but now Moshe is focusing on the problem in the context of speaking to Pharaoh. The Ran (Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven of Gerona; 1320-1376) asks, that the Talmud (Nedarim 38a) lists a number of qualities a person must possess in order to become a prophet, such as wealth, strength and humility. The Ran explains that these qualities are necessary so that people of all types will accept the person as a messenger of Hashem. That being the case, wonders the Ran, why didn't Hashem correct Moshe's speech defect, which would allow Moshe to positively influence people through speaking with them?

The Ran answers that Hashem wanted to avoid a claim that the Jewish Nation was able to leave Egypt because of a very persuasive individual who convinced Pharaoh and the Egyptians to let the Jewish People go free. Hashem therefore left Moshe's speech impediment uncured so that people would then attribute the salvation of the Jewish Nation to Hashem only. It wouldn't make sense that Moshe, possessing a terrible speech defect, was able to use his oratorical skills to attain freedom for the Jewish People.

Living a life in this world means that we constantly need the services of other people or entities, such as a job, doctor, store owner, government and so on. There is a tendency to think that our success in getting what we need is dependent on these people or things, and so we put our faith in them. This is especially true when the people and things we require seem very real and powerful, be it a top doctor,

successful employer, powerful politician or the like.

This, teaches the Ran, is a mistake. It may look like people and entities are running our lives, and they may give the appearance of being powerful, but, in reality, it is far from the truth. Rather, they are all powerless puppets carrying out Hashem's plan. All the prestige and abilities they possess are nothing more than tools granted to them by Hashem to be messengers in His plan, and Hashem is merely acting through them. Therefore, we should not place our faith in any person or entity, no matter how great its credibility or position, but rather only in Hashem, for it is He alone who is in charge of everything that occurs.

We find this idea with Dovid Hamelech (King David), as well. In Tehillim (Psalms 116:10-11; see Rashi's commentary there), Dovid describes that when he was forced to flee from his rebellious son Avshalom and his forces as they sought to depose and murder him, he observed that everyone seemed to be turning against him. This mentality went so far that Dovid was led to believe, thanks to a libelous report, that one of his supporters had betrayed him.

This verse reflects how Dovid, as he fled from Avshalom, came to the realization that one cannot rely on anyone or anything in this world. Until that point, Dovid perhaps placed faith in close friends or family members, but he now realized this was not the case. Dovid concluded that he must put all his faith and trust in Hashem Himself. This is expressed elsewhere in Tehillim (55:25); while again discussing this very difficult time of Avshalom's rebellion, Dovid proclaims, "Cast your burden upon Hashem, and He will sustain you." The Orchos Tzadikim (a widely-studied medieval *mussar* [ethical] work of uncertain authorship) in the section titled *The Gate of Joy* (Chapter 9) sees this verse as a great expression of *bitachon*, trusting in Hashem completely.

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### Stories for the Soul

#### The Squeeze is On

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein (1895-1974) was once in a taxi in Jerusalem. The driver, a secular Israeli who had served in the army years earlier, related the following story to the distinguished rabbi:

After he had completed his army duty, he had joined a group of soldiers on a safari trip to South America. One day, the group suddenly heard a blood-curdling scream from one of the members of the group. To their horror, they saw that a boa-constrictor had wrapped itself around their friend and was slowly squeezing the life out of him. The group began throwing rocks and sticks at the snake, but to no avail. With his last remaining breath, the man yelled, "Shema Yisrael!" As soon as he said those words, the snake inexplicably loosened its grip and slithered away. As a result of the miraculous event, the man joined a yeshiva and became completely observant.

After listening to the driver's incredible story, Rabbi Levenstein asked him, "What about you? After seeing such a miracle, why didn't you become observant?" The driver looked at the rabbi incredulously and replied, "Why should I have become religious? The snake wasn't wrapped around me!"

In this week's parsha, Pharaoh goes to great lengths to avoid acknowledging that there was a G-d Who was more powerful than he and his deities. His behavior ought to serve as a lesson for the rest of us not to ignore Divine messages.

## Kollel Happenings

### DON'T QUIT YOUR DAY JOB AT JANUARY 12 T4T

Join Jonathan Fleisher, Esq., Principal at Law Offices of Jonathan Fleisher, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they work through the issues of quitting a job at Torah for Tycoons. Class on Zoom on January 12th at 7:30 pm. For more info, visit [denverkollel.org](http://denverkollel.org) or email [info@denverkollel.org](mailto:info@denverkollel.org).

### M.B. GLASSMAN DIVISION GOLD SENIOR LUNCH & LEARN MONDAYS AT EDOS

The GOLD Lunch & Learn for seniors is back at EDOS, 198 S. Holly St., on most Mondays at 12 noon. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Class is available on Zoom, as well. For info, to confirm there is a class or for Zoom link info, email [rmf@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmf@denverkollel.org).

### TALMUDO BIYADO GEMARA CLUB FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS

Learn, review, and acquire a masechta! Boys in grades 6-8 are invited to join Rabbi Chaim Gross at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center/Ohel Yissochor weeknights Mon.-Thu. from 8-8:30 pm for a Gemara shiur followed by review. Contact Rabbi Nesanel Kipper at [rnk@denverkollel.org](mailto:rnk@denverkollel.org) for further details.

## Halacha Riddles

**Last week's question:** How is it possible for one person to be part of a *mezuman* multiple times during the course of a single meal?

**Answer:** The halacha is that a person may respond to a *mezuman* and, after listening to the leader recite the first blessing, he may continue eating. If two other people then joined this individual who continued eating and ate with him, they would create a new group for *mezuman*. This could, in theory, occur again and again, even with

the same person, so long as he continues eating with new pairs (Mishna Berura 200:9).

**This week's question:** Two separate groups of three men ate their meals and were going to have a *mezuman*, but one of the members of each group erroneously recited the *bracha acharona* (after blessing) early. One group can still have a *mezuman*, while the other cannot – how can this be? (No additional people joined.)

## Lives of Our Torah Leaders

### Rabbi Meir Shapiro - Part XXXII

Students generally left home to attend the yeshiva, living in dormitories. However, the vast majority of these yeshivos were always strapped for funding, the students barely had enough to eat and usually lived in impoverished conditions.

In the Chassidic world of Poland, such yeshivos did not really exist. There were yeshivos in major Polish cities that attracted students, but the campus-type life of the Lithuanian yeshiva world did not really exist.

## A Taste of Torah

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This idea was made clear in recent times, as well, where power, money and influence proved futile and only faith in G-d prevailed. Reb Shalom Mordechai Rubashkin was found guilty of relatively minor charges, but was inexplicably sentenced by a federal judge to 27 years in prison, an unheard-of punishment for the charges he was found guilty of. Across the country, hundreds of powerful politicians, lawyers, judges, former attorney generals, senior Department of Justice officials, criminal law scholars and professors, as well as prestigious groups including the Washington Legal Foundation, the Justice Fellowship and the Association of Professional Responsibility Lawyers wrote letters or even travelled across the country and advocated against this lengthy, unethical sentence. However, all this power and professionalism ended in failure, as the numerous appeals and other efforts did not change the ruling and the full sentence remained. Early on, Reb Shalom Mordechai realized that Hashem was the only One who could truly help him, and he lived by this principle. Even though he was obligated to put in all necessary efforts, do anything he could and

exhaust any legal option available, he never took his mind off of the real Source of his salvation, and he worked continuously on building his relationship with Hashem.

There are numerous stories of Reb Shalom Mordechai's determination to maintain as much observance of mitzvos and religious connection as possible, even in the face of much adversity.

In the end, after eight years in prison, the court rejected his last resort in the fight for his freedom. Even his lawyers could not bear relaying the news to him on the phone and instead sent him a letter. However, Reb Shalom Mordechai did not despair upon receiving the news. On the contrary, he strengthened his faith in the real Power, Hashem Himself. A few days later, his trust in Hashem was rewarded and he was set free, as then-President Trump pardoned Reb Shalom Mordechai during the miraculous holiday of Chanukah.

We must invest great effort and strength to have faith in Hashem, Who is the real source of power, and not spend futile energy placing our faith in powerless puppets who are simply carrying out His will.

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