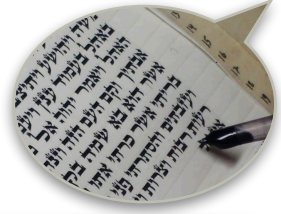




The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Shemot

Parshat Vaera

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Pleading for Miracles

By Lauren Ganz

Parshat Vaera marks the beginning of the nationalistically defining tale of Bnei Yisrael's redemption from slavery in Egypt. Literally, the word *vaera* means *and I appeared*. This parsha details the first time Hashem miraculously and openly reveals Himself through the first seven plagues inflicted on the Egyptians. As *Vaera* concludes, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and does not submit to the release of the Jewish people.

The parsha opens mid-conversation between Hashem and Moshe, with Hashem saying:

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹקִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ה'

God (Elokim) spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am God (YHVH).'

(Exodus 6:2)

On initial reading, this phrasing seems redundant. The pasuk first uses the words *vayedabeir Elokim* and then shifts to *vayomer Hashem*. Why does the pasuk say God both *spoke* and *said* and why does the name of God shift from *Elokim* to *Hashem*?

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At various points in Tanach, our Sages explain that the specific words used in this double phrasing express different tones and qualities. *Vayedabeir Elokim* is used to convey strong language and *midat hadin*, or instances of *God's judgment*. Contrastingly, *vayomer Hashem* signifies softer language and times when God demonstrates *midat harachamim*, compassion.

To truly understand the distinction in these words and why God is expressing both condemnation and mercy towards Moshe at this moment, we must go back and look at the full conversation between Hashem and Moshe.

וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָמָּה הִרְעֵיתָה לְעַמִּי הַזֶּה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי

So Moses returned to Hashem and said, "O Lord! Why have You harmed this people? Why have You sent me? (Exodus 5:22)

At the end of Parshat Shemot, Moshe brazenly charges Hashem with worsening the plight of the Israelites in Egypt. He questions why he was sent to Pharaoh to advocate for freedom if it only would bring down a harsher sentence of slavery with a heavier workload. At face value, it seems like Moshe

is questioning why God did this.

The Noam Elimelech explains that God thus begins his response to Moshe from a place of discipline. *vayedabeir Elokim* invokes tough language, as if Hashem is saying to Moshe, “how dare you question My capabilities and My motives towards the Jewish people?” Moshe’s seeming challenge of the Almighty’s power and intentions needed to be met with a harsh response.

But then the language softens and Hashem reveals His compassion — *vayomer Hashem*. Hashem recognizes that Moshe is not coming from a place of doubt or protest, but rather Moshe is pleading on behalf of the nation’s added suffering. Noam Elimelech suggests that when Moshe questions Hashem לָמָּה הִרְעֵתָהּ לָעַם הַזֶּה, he is motivated by an overwhelming sense of Ahavat Yisrael, *love of a fellow Jew*. Moshe is not disillusioned, but rather he is distraught over witnessing the added burden, and is crying out to Hashem to show empathy.

וְגַם הִקְמַתִי אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם לָתֵת לָהֶם אֶת-אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר-גָּרוּ בָּהּ. וְגַם
אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת-נִאֲקָתָהּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבִדִּים אֹתָם וְאָזְכֹּר אֶת-בְּרִיתִי.

*And also, I established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan,
the land of their sojournings in which they sojourned. And also, I heard the
moans of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians are holding in bondage,
and I remembered My covenant. (Exodus 6:4-5)*

This week’s parsha continues with Hashem reasserting His intent to fulfill His covenant of redemption and deliver the Jewish people to Israel. He has heard Moshe’s cries and promises to fully reveal himself through miraculous means to end the turmoil of slavery. He is responding to Moshe’s pleas for compassion when He invokes *vayomer Hashem*.

Like Moshe, we now find ourselves calling out to Hashem asking לָמָּה הִרְעֵתָהּ לָעַם הַזֶּה. Why has the plight of our nation worsened and why is our brethren suffering? We daven and beg Hashem to respond to us with *midat harachamin*, respite from the added pain our nation is facing in Israel and around the world. We do not doubt Hashem’s omnipotent power or plan for Am Yisrael, as the lesson of *vayomer Hashem* teaches us that steadfast Ahavat Yisrael in our prayers can bring about salvation and timely miracles.

Lauren and Isaac moved to the community with their children Harrison (7) and Charlie (5) in August 2020. Lauren is thrilled to be writing the Collective Conversation in honor of Isaac’s 24th Bar Mitzvah anniversary, originally celebrated as the first Y2K bar mitzvah at YIS! Additionally, this dvar Torah is in the merit of the safety of IDF chayal Binyamin Henoah Ben Reizel.

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