

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS  
VA'EIRA

# בשבת

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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

## BLIND TO THEIR FATE

The bulk of the ten *Makkos* appear in *Parshas Va'era*, with ברד, hail, being the last to appear in this *parshah*. Before bringing this plague, Moshe warned the Egyptian people to bring their livestock inside their houses, as the hail would not strike the structures, only the people and animals that are caught outside.

The Torah then tells us that indeed, some people brought their animals indoors, but others chose to ignore the warning, and paid the price.<sup>1</sup>

Reb Yaakov Kanievsky<sup>2</sup> (1899–1985) asks what appears to be an obvious question. What were the people thinking? Why would anyone leave anything outside, didn't they know what would happen to them? This wasn't the first time Moshe 'predicted' the coming plague, this is the seventh; even if Moshe was wrong, what did they lose by putting their animals inside their homes?

He answers that this is a classic example of a person allowing their logic, their reason, and even their sanity to be hijacked by their emotions. The Egyptians who chose to leave their animals outside were those who could not allow for the idea that perhaps Moshe is correct, and perhaps the Jewish nation should be allowed to leave *Mitzrayim*. Had they brought their animals inside, it would have created a breach in the armor of their arguments, as they would have been admitting the slight possibility that they were wrong. And since they didn't want to admit even the possibility of their error, they left their animals outside, and lost everything.

When looking through the lens of history, it is easy for us to laugh at the Egyptian citizenry. However, we would be remiss if we neglected to recognize that we go through this exact process on a consistent basis. How often do we convince ourselves of the righteousness of our actions, when, deep down, we are really acting in our own self-interests?

This can occur between friends, between us and Hashem, or even between us and ourselves! When we are aware of how easy it is for us to build convincing skyscrapers founded on the quicksand of emotional fallacies, we will be better equipped to fix our thought process, and align our thoughts with those of Hashem.

<sup>1</sup> Shemos 9:19-25

<sup>2</sup> *Birchas Peretz* on *Va'eira*

**How often do we convince ourselves of the righteousness of our actions, when, deep down, we are really acting in our own self-interests?**

### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

How can we reach deep into our soul and figure out our true motivations, and fix them, if need be?

The *Mesillas Yesharim*<sup>1</sup> explains how to make a proper accounting. We do this by first writing down what it is that an *eved Hashem* should be doing. Then we compare that to our own lives, and see where we can improve.

Not only can this process help us cut out activity that is unbecoming of an *eved Hashem*, but it can help us refine those actions that are indeed proper.

How so? When we compare our positive actions, our learning Torah, *davening*, helping others, and so on, to the way that it should be, we can find ways to improve those actions themselves.

It is important to note, this is supposed to be an uplifting process. If one finds that this is daunting, difficult, and leading to feelings of hopelessness, it's not being done correctly! Keep your eye on the goal — we are not working towards perfection, we are working towards being better.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 3

<sup>2</sup> See story in *Beshivticha*, *Parshas Va'yechi*

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**I accept upon myself, bli neder, to: 1. Delve into a classic Mussar sefer, such as Shaarei Teshuva, or Mesillas Yesharim, for at least a short while, every day. 2. Conduct a daily Cheshbon HaNefesh.** - Personal commitments of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky zt"l, written in 1934, *Sefer Achiezer Kovetz Igros, Netzach publishers, 1970.*

## 2ND RATE AND GREAT

Shimmy Schwed\* was a star student since his early years in elementary school, and his intellect and drive for knowledge stayed with him when he went to high school.

Yet, now at 15 years old, he seems to have totally changed. Gone are the days when he was first to raise his hand to answer a question, or when he was asking his father if he had time to learn in the evening. His grades weren't terrible, but they were certainly not as stellar as they used to be.

After a couple of months of this, when Shimmy's father realized this was not simply a phase, Mr. Schwed found a quiet moment with Shimmy.

"Shimmy, I have to ask, is something going on? *Boruch Hashem*, you're still doing well at school, but it seems that the spark is missing. Is everything ok? Anything you'd like to talk about?"

Shimmy shrugged. "Not really. I don't know — I know what you mean, I guess I'm just not that into learning that much."

Mr. Schwed was a very intelligent man, but moreover, after years of learning *mussar* in *yeshiva*, he had a good grasp of how the human psyche works. "Shimmy, really? You've been entering learning contests since you were seven. I've seen the light in your eyes when you ask a good question, and even more so when you give a good answer. Please, Shimmy, we're here to help. If there's something going on, please understand that we are always here to listen.

"If you're really unsure as to what changed, maybe focus on the thoughts and feelings you have when you think about learning, or about answering questions in class. How do those things make you feel?"

Shimmy was silent. After a minute or two of thought, Shimmy looked up at his father. "Tatty, they make me feel hopeless! Like, I'll never be good enough."

Mr. Schwed was shocked. Where was this coming from? But before he could open his mouth, Shimmy continued. "I didn't realize until you asked, but it all started when Daniel Klein, the new kid, joined the school. I used to be on top, everyone knew that if you had a question, Shimmy Schwed had the answer. But Daniel is even smarter! He's the best kid in the whole school! And once I realized that, I figured there's no point in trying."

Mr. Schwed nodded in sympathy. "I understand. It's actually not so uncommon; unfortunately, people compare themselves to others all the time. I'm glad you were able to reach deep down and understand what was really driving you. Either way, Shimmy, now that we know what's going through your mind, we have what to work with. Let's see if we can come up with some strategies to help you out, what do you say?"

Despite himself, Shimmy smiled. "Sure thing, I'm in!"

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

**"Now that we know what's going through your mind, we have what to work with."**

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Even a small amount of jealousy in the recesses of one's heart can cause one to think the most terrible things about those around him.<sup>1</sup>
- Even a prophet can be misled by their personal feelings, and construct cogent arguments that are truly against Hashem's will!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Shabbos* 10b

<sup>2</sup> *Ohr Chodesh* by the Maharal of Prague, on *Esther* 4:13-14