



# Parshas Vaera

For the week ending 26 Teves 5758  
23 & 24 January 1998

## Overview

**H**ashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt; however, the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem then commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy the miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to refuse Moshe's request. However, after the plague of lice even Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave Egypt, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses to let them go.

## Insights

### CUTTING OFF YOUR NOSE

**“The necromancers did the same by means of their incantations; so Pharaoh’s heart was strong and he did not heed them...” (7:22)**

What would you do if someone came along and turned the rivers into blood? You'd try to turn the river back to normal. What would you do if someone made all the frogs come up out of the river? You'd try to get rid of them.

But Pharaoh didn't seek to get rid of the plagues, rather he had his magicians duplicate them. This may have been very impressive and certainly boosted his self-confidence, but he was really shooting himself in the foot.

Wouldn't it have been better to get the magicians to get rid of the blood and the frogs? That would have been just as impressive and much more useful.

This is the way of evil. It doesn't matter if I lose — just as long as the other person doesn't win.

### HE WHO MAKES PEACE

**“This time I have sinned; Hashem is the Righteous One, and I and my people are the wicked ones.” (9:27)**

It took seven plagues for Pharaoh to admit that he had sinned. Only after the plague of hail, Pharaoh said "This time I have sinned." Why didn't he admit his guilt up till this point?

Pharaoh's cosmology was that of warring deities. Each god was supposed to control a different aspect of nature. There was a sun god, a moon god, a god of the Nile. Pharaoh's world was a world where the elements were constantly at war. The Nile god had to be placated so that the river would swell and overflow its banks, for the fertility of the Nile plain depended on this. The sun god had to be importuned so that it would not burn the crops. But no god could combine the elements together, for each was a separate power.

In the plague of hail, the hail that rained down on Egypt was no ordinary hail. Inside each freezing hailstone was a small furnace of fire. Fire and Water united. The unification of opposites.

When Pharaoh saw this plague he realized that there was a God in whom all the disparate facets of existence were united. And thus he realized that "This time I have sinned."

When we say "He who makes peace in his exalted realms..." we refer to the upper worlds in which there is an angel of fire and an angel of ice. Hashem is able to make peace between them. And thus "He will make peace for us and all Israel."

### POWER FROM THE PEOPLE

**“Moshe spoke before Hashem saying — Behold, the Children of Israel have not listened to me, so how should Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips.” (6:12)**

The power of a spiritual leader flows from the people.

In every generation Hashem promises there will be spiritual leaders, the great Torah sages, who will be given the ability to advise and direct the nation.

However, when the Jewish People refuse to listen to these spiritual giants, and instead follow politicians who have no more insight than the rest of us, then our spiritual leaders become powerless to influence or to help the people.

Thus, if the Children of Israel had listened to Moshe, his lips would have been opened and his words would have affected even Pharaoh, but since the Children of Israel did not listen — Moshe's "lips were sealed."

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## THE REAL THING

### **"...And the staff of Aaron swallowed their staffs..." (7:12)**

You can't fake the Real Thing.

When Aaron's staff swallowed the staffs of the Egyptian sorcerers in front of the king, it became clear who was authentic and who was not.

Jewish history has been plagued by other movements purporting to be the Real Judaism.

Some break away from normative Judaism and change their name, and some try to usurp the authority of the Torah sages and call their beliefs "Judaism."

During the Ottoman Empire, the Karaites attempted to gain recognition for themselves as the authentic Jews. They approached the Sultan, wanting to be recognized as the legitimate "People of Israel." They claimed that the other Jewish People should be disenfranchised as being fakes. The Sultan summoned both a rabbi and a representative of the Karaites to appear in front of him at the royal palace. After hearing both their cases, he would decide who was the authentic "People of the Book."

Of course, as was the custom of the East, both the Karaite and the rabbi were required to remove their shoes before appearing in front of the Sultan. The Karaite removed his shoes and left them by the entrance to the throne room. The rabbi also removed his shoes, but then he picked them up and carried them with him into the audience with the Sultan.

When the Sultan looked down from his throne, he was struck by the somewhat strange sight of the rabbi holding a pair of shoes, and he demanded an explanation.

"Your Majesty," began the rabbi, "as you know, when the Holy One, may His Name be blessed, appeared to our teacher Moses, peace be upon him, at the site of the burning bush, G-d told Moses "Take off your shoes from your feet!"

"We have a tradition," the rabbi continued, "that while Moses was speaking to the Holy One, a Karaite came and stole his shoes! So, now, whenever we are in the company of Karaites, we make sure to hold on to our shoes!"

The Karaite turned to the rabbi and blustered:

"That's nonsense! Everyone knows that at the time of Moses, there *were* no Karaites!"

The rabbi allowed time for the Karaite's words to sink in and then quietly added: "Your Majesty, need more be said?" You can't fake the Real Thing.

## **Haftorah: Yechezkel** **28:25-26; 29:1-21**

Just as the Parsha describes the downfall of Egypt in the times of Moshe, so too the Haftorah details the demise of a latter-day Egypt in the time of the Prophet Yechezkel.

Like the Pharaoh of Biblical times, the Pharaoh in the Haftorah also proclaimed himself a god who created the Nile.

However, Egypt will be conquered by Nevuchadnetzar, king of Babylon, and when both of these empires will lie in ruins, Israel will emerge unscathed to be reunited with Hashem.

### **THE BUTLER DID IT!**

#### **"Behold I am over you, Pharaoh!" (29:3)**

There once was a butler of a large mansion who decided one day to impersonate his master. A guest was due to arrive who had never met the real master. The butler bedecked himself in his master's finest clothes and greeted the guest in a fake aristocratic manner, ostentatiously showing-off the enormous mansion, its priceless art collection, and the acres of sumptuous gardens. The butler was having a grand time lordling it up until the real master appeared on the scene and roundly put the butler in his place. Similarly, Pharaoh did not stint from self-aggrandizement, conducting himself as supreme overlord, answerable to none. He even made himself into a god and proclaimed "I did not know Hashem." Therefore Hashem reminds Pharaoh "**Behold I am over you, Pharaoh!**" — "Know that I rule over you, and you are in My hands to do with as I see fit. You are no more than a usurping butler!"

Sources:

*He Who Makes Peace* - Rabbi Slesinger as heard from Rabbi

Moshe Zauderer

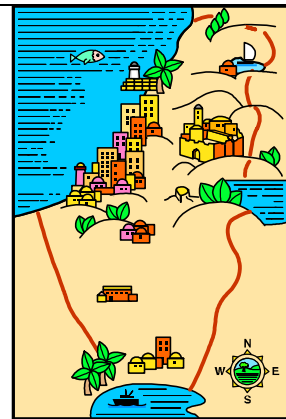
*Power From The People* - Sfas Emes

*The Real Thing* - heard from Rabbi Zev Leff

*The Butler Did It!* - Kochav M'Yaakov

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



### LAND OF MILK AND HONEY

When he once visited Bnei Brak the Talmudic Sage Rami bar Yechezkel saw goats eating beneath a fig tree. Honey oozed from the ripe figs, milk dripped from the goats, and the two combined into one flowing stream. This is the meaning, he exclaimed, of "a land flowing with milk and honey!"

Maharsha points out that the surface understanding of this tribute to *Eretz Yisrael* (*Shmos* 3:8; 13:5) is that it is a graphic description of the extraordinary bounty overflowing with wholesome and tasty natural resources. But then the Torah should have written "flowing with milk and flowing with honey." By using the term "flowing" only once it signaled that these two elements combined into a single flow. This became demonstratively clear to the sage when he saw how they actually blended.

Perhaps the significance of his discovery is that not only is *Eretz Yisrael* blessed with wholesome and tasty natural resources, but that these two seemingly disparate dimensions of food are naturally and perfectly blended for the health and enjoyment of the inhabitants of the land "flowing with milk and honey."

*Kesuvos* 111b

### Parshas Vaera

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