

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
**WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES**  
*Parshas Va'eira*  
 January 7, 2005

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita***

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

The Yad Avraham is a Torah learning institute located in midtown Manhattan. Classes are offered every day during the week starting at 5:50am and throughout the day. Classes in Chumash, Halacha, Hashkofa, Gemara, and general topics are well attended by businessmen, professionals, and students. The Yad Avraham invites you to participate in our extensive offerings of classes and events.

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## Parshas Va'eira

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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### 1. Miriam's Concern for Her Brother

The Torah tells us that because of the decree that was given to kill all Jewish newborn males, Moshe's mother took her newborn son and placed him in the reeds at the bank of the river. The Torah states, "**His sister (Miriam) stood at a distance to know what would be done with him (Moshe).**"

The Torah tells us that after the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, "**Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron led the women in song.**" Rashi cites the Midrash, which asks, "Since Miriam was the sister of both Aaron and Moshe why is she only identified as 'the sister of Aaron?'" The Gemara answers, "Miriam began to prophesize before the birth of Moshe. She had prophesized, 'My mother will give birth to the Redeemer of Israel.'"

The Midrash continues, "When Moshe was born, the house was illuminated with light, indicating that he was destined to be the Redeemer. Amram (Miriam's father) kissed Miriam on her forehead and said, 'My daughter your prophecy has come to fruition.' When Moshe was placed into the Nile to escape the decree of Pharaoh, Amram tapped Miriam on the head and said, 'What will become of your prophecy?' Thus, Miriam stood and waited by the river to see what was going to happen to her brother Moshe. In the context of existence, G'd deals with individuals on the basis of 'measure for measure' – for negative (punishment) or positive (reward). Because Miriam waited for a moment to see what would happen with her brother Moshe, she merited great reward."

The Torah tells us in the Portion of *Beha'loscha*, that Miriam became a leper because she had spoken critically (*Loshon Hara*) of her brother Moshe. As a result of her condition, she had to be sent out of the camp of Israel for a period of seven days until she recovered. The Midrash tells us that in the merit of her waiting to see what would happen to Moshe when he was put into the Nile (although it was only for a moment), the entire camp of

Israel (millions of people), the Clouds of Glory, the Shechina (the Divine Presence), and the Holy Ark waited for seven days for Miriam to recover. The Midrash explains this is an example of "measure for measure" – since she waited to see what would happen to her brother Moshe, the camp did not travel until she recovered from her leprosy. What was the unique dimension of accomplishment of Miriam's waiting that it should merit the entire Jewish people and the Shechina to wait for her recovery?

The value of an experience or an action, in the Eyes of G'd, is evaluated based on the way the individual internalizes the action or experience. Rambam writes in *Hilchos Taanis* (Laws of Fasting) that if Jews are suffering and one does not pray on their behalf, it is considered cruelty. If one truly felt his fellow's pain or need, he would respond and beseech Hashem to alleviate the plight of his fellow as if it were his own.

Miriam's concern for her brother Moshe was not merely sisterly concern for a sibling's survival. When Miriam stood in anticipation to see what was going to happen, her concern was focused on - if Moshe was going to survive and be the Redeemer of Israel (as per her prophecy) or was he to perish – thus eliminating the possibility for redemption. If Moshe did not survive, the Jewish people would not be redeemed and consequently there would be no Sinai event. The Torah would not be given to the Jewish people and the purpose of existence would not come to fruition. Miriam internalized G'd's pain and the pain of the Jewish people. Miriam's waiting was for the glory of G'd. Therefore, she merited that the entire Jewish people, the Shechina, and the Holy Ark should wait for her to recover – measure for measure. This revealed the special dimension of Miriam's feelings.

Two individuals could outwardly perform the same act. However, the value and consequence of each of their actions will be determined by the purity, sincerity, and intent of the individual.

## 2. Moshe Understood His Own Shortcoming

The Torah describes in detail the dialogue that took place between G'd and Moshe at the burning bush. G'd had told Moshe that he was chosen to be the Redeemer of Israel. Moshe continuously tried to extricate himself from this task for many reasons. G'd responded to every one of his issues/reasons, thus, finalizing the fact that Moshe would be the Redeemer. One of Moshe's retorts to G'd was, **"Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech."** Then G'd said to him, **"Who makes a mouth for man, or who makes one dumb or deaf...Is it not I, Hashem? So now go! I shall be with your mouth and teach you what you should say."**

In the Portion of Va'eira, the Torah tells us that Moshe had gone to the Jewish people and informed them that G'd would redeem them from their bondage and take them to the Land that He had promised their forefathers. However, the Jewish people rejected his words, as the Torah states, **"They did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of spirit and hard work."** The Torah then states, **"G'd spoke to Moshe saying, 'Come speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, that he send the Children of Israel from his land.' Moshe spoke before G'd saying, 'Behold, the Children of Israel have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips (speech impediment)!'"** Moshe could have simply said that since the Jewish people did not heed his words (when it was in their best interest to be receptive), how is it possible that Pharaoh would listen to him (when it was to his detriment). Moshe concludes his statement to G'd with **"I have sealed lips (speech impediment)."** Seemingly, Moshe's abilities regarding his speech impediment should not be an issue because it was already addressed by G'd at the time of their dialogue at the burning bush.

What was the basis for Moshe's initial concern that his speech impediment would interfere with being the Redeemer? He understood that G'd is the One who gives the ability to speak. If this is so, then why was Moshe initially concerned about disqualifying himself because of his speech impediment? Until the time of the exodus, G'd's interaction with existence was concealed within nature through hidden miracles. G'd did not perform revealed miracles until this point in time because if His presence were to become obvious it would have interfered with man's free choice. If one were to undeniably see the

Hand of G'd, one would be compelled to do His Will. Moshe understood that if he were to suddenly be rehabilitated from his speech impediment and become able to communicate his mission to the Jewish people and Pharaoh, it would be a revealed miracle. G'd's response to Moshe was that his concern had no basis because now the era of revealed miracles was to begin. Despite G'd's response, Moshe remained obstinate about not being qualified/worthy of being the Redeemer. Ultimately, Moshe acquiesced to G'd's dictate and Aaron, his brother, was chosen to be his spokesman.

The Torah states, **"The wrath of Hashem burned against Moshe and He said, 'Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that he will surely speak.'"** The Midrash tells us that a consequence of G'd's wrath was that Moshe, who initially was meant to be the Kohen, (priest) would no longer assume that special role for the Jewish people. Rather, Aaron, his brother, who was initially meant to be a Levy, would assume the position of Kohen. After the incident of the burning bush, Moshe retained his speech impediment because of his spiritual deficiency, which was an outgrowth of his obstinacy.

When Moshe once again mentioned to G'd his speech impediment after being rejected by the Jewish people (in the Portion of Va'eira), it was not similar to his reference to his handicap at the burning bush. At this time, Moshe was saying that since he did not succeed in communicating G'd's word to the Jewish people and convincing them, he would definitely not succeed with Pharaoh because of his speech impediment. Meaning, the only reason he was not rehabilitated from his speech impediment was because of his obstinacy at the burning bush – indicating that he was spiritually deficient. If he were sufficiently worthy, he would have been an effective communicator through his brother Aaron. Thus, unlike the incident at the burning bush, Moshe's mention of his handicap was unrelated to performing a revealed miracle – as explained earlier.

The Gemara states, **"One who fears heaven, his words will be heard."** Meaning, regardless of one's oratory skills, his ability to impact on others stems from his dimension of person, which is G'd-fearing. Because he has a spiritual worthiness, his words are able to penetrate the hearts of those to whom he speaks. Therefore, Moshe felt that he would be an ineffective communicator to Pharaoh because of his own spiritual deficiency that was indicated through his physical impediment.

### 3. The Extent of the Agency of Moshe and Aaron

The Torah states, **“This was Aaron and Moshe to whom Hashem said, ‘Take the Children of Israel out of Egypt ... this was Moshe and Aaron.’** The Torah could have simply stated, **“...They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt.”** Why does the verse conclude with, **“...This was Moshe and Aaron”?**

Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The conclusion of the verse **‘This was Moshe and Aaron’** communicates that Moshe and Aaron were involved with their agency and their special level of righteousness from the beginning to the end.” It is understandable that the Torah must tell us that despite their level of power and influence, Moshe and Aaron maintained their level of righteousness. However, what is the meaning of “they were continuously involved with their agency from beginning to end?”

The Torah tells us that the *meraglim* (spies) who had set out to scout the Land initially were *tzaddikim* (righteous). However when they embarked on their mission, they became *rishaim* (evil) and ultimately forfeited their share in the world to come. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks- if the spies were all initially righteous when they were chosen by G'd, what caused them to become corrupted?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh answers with a profound principle explaining the concept of agency. When one is chosen as an agent to represent another, he is impacted and affected by the mindset of the one that he represents. (Within a halachic (Jewish law) context, the agent is the equivalent of the one whom he is representing.) Thus, since the Jewish people were lacking in faith, suspected that the Land of Canaan was impregnable, and could not be conquered, the spies were impacted by their negative intent. The shortcomings of the Jewish people influenced the mindset of these special people. Although the spies did have free choice (until the very end), their mission became more tenuous because of those who they represented. We learn from this that an agent's functionability on many levels is directly linked to the intent of the one who he represents.

The Torah uses the singular rather than the plural regarding the building of the Mishkan. This indicates that the commandment was to Moshe himself. However the actual building of the Mishkan was executed by the Jewish

people. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh asks - if in fact the building of the Mishkan was executed by the Jewish people, then why was the commandment directed to Moshe and delegated to the Jewish people? He answers that G'd wanted the Jewish people to be the agents of Moshe regarding every aspect of the building of the Mishkan so that Moshe himself should be the full beneficiary of their accomplishments. This is based on the principle that when one delegates something through an agent, it is the equivalent of bringing about the intended result himself. However, according to the explanation offered by Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh, regarding the princes (spies) who were affected negatively by the intent of those who they represented, we are able to apply that same principle in a positive context – the positive mindset and intent of the agent is affected by the one whom he represents.

The Mishkan, which was the dwelling place of the Shechina (Divine Presence), needed to be infused with the most pure and advanced level of intent. Therefore by giving Moshe the responsibility for building it and by having the Jewish people acting as his agents, G'd created a setting in which this advanced level of intent would come about.

Regarding the service of the Kohen in the Bais HaMikdash (Temple), the Gemara poses a question – “When the Kohen officiates in the context of bringing a sacrifice, is he classified as ‘G'd's agent’ or the agent of the one who is bringing the sacrifice on his own behalf?” If one's involvement and objective in his mitzvah activity is for the sake of G'd then he is classified as “G'd's agent.” Thus, being impacted by the Omnipotent Being – G'd Himself. If the objective of our own existence is to fulfill the Will of G'd then all of our endeavors, whatever they may be, take on that special level. However if one's intent in his mitzvah involvement is to accommodate his own needs/agenda then the value of the mitzvah will be limited and deficient.

Chazal explain that Moshe and Aaron were continuously involved in carrying out the agency of G'd as well as maintaining their righteousness. The Torah is attesting to the fact that there was not a moment during the ten-month interaction with Pharaoh of self-interest. As a result of their selfless dedication to act on behalf of G'd as His agents, they were able to bring about results that impacted beyond revealed miracles. They as individuals drew upon the infinite and transcended all barriers because Moshe and Aaron were the agents of G'd.

#### ***4. The Ripple Effect of Hardening the Heart of Pharaoh***

The Torah states, “**Hashem said to Moshe, “...I shall harden the heart of Pharaoh so that I may multiply My signs and My wonders upon Egypt...Pharaoh will not heed you, and I shall put My hand upon Egypt.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that G’d hardened the heart of Pharaoh in order to bring about a situation in which He could increase the miracles and wonders to bring about the redemption.

Egypt was not only the “breadbasket” of the world, it was the height of civilization. As a global power, the Egyptian culture/civilization influenced all existence. The plagues brought upon Egypt served a dual purpose. Firstly, they were intended to be a punishment for the Egyptians and secondly, so that as a result of witnessing these revealed miracles, the Egyptians should come to the realization “that I am G’d.” They would become monotheists by understanding that there is nothing in existence that occurs without G’d’s direct involvement.

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk z’l explains that G’d hardened the heart of Pharaoh in order to create a setting in which the world would come to the realization that G’d is the Omnipotent Being. Since Egypt was a global power with far-reaching influence, when they were to be affected by the miracles/plagues then their newfound belief would have a ripple effect throughout the world.

It is interesting to note that the reason the Egyptians chose to kill the newborn Jewish males by drowning them in the Nile was that they believed that G’d could not destroy them through water. Since G’d metes out justice measure for measure, the means through which the Egyptians would be punished. However G’d had made a covenant with existence after the Great Flood that He would never again destroy the world through water, the Egyptians believed that G’d had no recourse against them. Why would the Egyptians believe that they were immune to retribution through water? The covenant that was made by G’d was that He would not destroy the world through water. Egypt was not the entire world. Since G’d in fact did not destroy Egypt through water because of the covenant that He had made with existence, it is evident that Egypt was considered the equivalent of the entire world. This demonstrates further that if G’d impacted upon Egypt it would ultimately affect all existence. It is true that the Egyptian army was destroyed through water/the Sea, but in that circumstance G’d did not bring the water

upon them, but rather, they were lured to the water and thus destroyed.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah presents a principle, “Whoever afflicts the Jewish people will become a leader/great.” We find throughout history that whoever afflicted the Jewish people rose to a position of dominance. For example, Haman was a minister in the court of Achashverosh; however, after he had suggested that every Jewish man, woman, and child should be killed he was promoted to a position of greatness (only second to the emperor himself). Many great civilizations such as the Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and Romans ruled the world and persecuted the Jewish people. How do we understand this principle?

Reb Yonasan Eibschitz z’l explains why G’d elevates the nations that afflict the Jewish people. As the Master of the Universe, G’d is interested in interacting with existence in a manner that will have the greatest level of impact/impression and so the world should come to the realization that He is the Omnipotent Being. Thus, in order to bring this about, He first elevates the person or nation to a level of prominence and power only to ultimately destroy them. These individuals or nations are seen by the world as invincible and only then does G’d destroy them to demonstrate His power.

The nations of the world afflict and persecute the Jewish people because they are opposed to what they represent. They are opposed to their spirituality, which is directly linked to G’d’s Omnipotence. Despite the fact that the Jewish people are so few in number, they ultimately prevail over their mighty oppressors. The Egyptian, Greek, Persian, and Roman empires no longer exist, yet the Jewish people survive and thrive. It is because G’d wants the nations of the world to realize that it is only because the Jewish people are G’d’s people that they are able to overcome impossible odds.

#### ***5. Moshe the Man of G’d***

The Torah tells us at the conclusion of the Portion of Shemos that although Pharaoh had withdrawn the straw subsidy that was needed to make bricks, he demanded the same quota. This came after Moshe and Aaron’s request to allow the Jewish people to leave Egypt. The labor of the Jewish people intensified and became more arduous as a result. Moshe beseeched G’d, “**My Lord, why have You done bad to this people? Why have You sent me?**”

The Portion of Va'eira begins, "**V'yidaber Elokim - G'd spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Hashem (Y'K'V'K)..."**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain, the Portion begins with the appellation of "*Elokim*" which connotes the Attribute of Justice. Additionally the term "*v'yidaber- spoke*" is used rather than "*vayomer-said*" to indicate a more formal manner of speech. G'd was communicating to Moshe in the most formal and judging manner because he had inappropriately questioned G'd. Because Moshe had questioned G'd's ways, he was punished by not being allowed to participate or witness the entering into the Land.

The Midrash explains the verse "**V'yadaber Elokim - G'd spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am Hashem (Y'K'V'K)..."**" that initially because of his question/failing, Moshe was meant to be punished through the Attribute of Justice – *Elokim*. However, the Attribute of Mercy (Hashem/YKVK) intervened on his behalf.

Although one may deserve punishment for his failings, the Attribute of Mercy does not allow it to take place in order to allow the individual to do teshuvah (repentance). The concept of *teshuvah*- one's ability to rehabilitate himself without punishment- is contrary to the Attribute of Justice.

Chazal tell us that *teshuvah* was created many generations before existence. The Torah states, "**Bereishis bara Elokim....In the beginning G'd created...**" Chazal tell us based on this verse that creation came about through the Attribute of Justice. Meaning, G'd's initial intent for existence was that it should be within a precise and defined order and limitation. The world was intended to exist within a rational context. Teshuvah, on the other hand, within the context of existence (which is defined) is not a rational concept. If one sins, it is logical that he is deserving of punishment. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that if a non-jew should violate any one of the Noachide Laws, even inadvertently, it is punishable by death. Teshuvah, as it pertains to spiritual rehabilitation, has no relevance to the non-Jew.

The Jewish people are G'd's people. Their essence is spiritual unlike the non-Jew whose essence is his physicality. Since the essence of the Jew is spiritual, which is not bound by limitation, teshuvah has relevance to him. It is only within the context of finite that teshuvah, which is an irrational concept, has no relevance. Thus, the non-Jew whose essence is his physicality cannot be rehabilitated through teshuvah.

Sforno explains (at the beginning of the Portion of Bereishis) the concept of "Elokim." The expression "Kail" means "a power." For example, an angel is referred to as "Kail." "Elokim" is the plural form of "Kail." Meaning, as the Shulchan Aruch explains, "Elokim" denotes "*Baal kochos kulam-* almighty." An angel's power is singular for what he was created. "Elokim" is the plural all-powerful, meaning that all the powers within existence are contained within G'd. Thus, the Attribute of "Elokim" in essence relates to limitation. It represents all the power of G'd that has relevance to the finite - which is the world.

The Midrash tells us that when Pharaoh was told that "**Hashem (YKVK), the G'd of Israel, has sent me upon you,**" he responded, "**I do not know Hashem (YKVK).**" Pharaoh and the Egyptians believed that all existence is limited to and governed by the Zodiac, which means that nothing exists outside of the physical. He could not accept or fathom the reality of "YKVK" - an infinite and Omnipotent Being that transcends and is not bound by limitation/ the physical.

Moshe, within a human context, was the unlimited person. He was the most humble person ever to walk the face of the earth. He expressed his humility by saying, "What are we?" Meaning, "I am nothing." Thus, he was a person who could not be quantified, since he was "nothing." Therefore, he was the conduit through which the Torah was transmitted. The Torah being infinite needed to be transmitted through an individual who had no relevance to the finite (could not be quantified). Moshe is identified as the "*amud ha'Torah - the pillar of Torah.*" However, initially when G'd addressed Moshe with the appellation "Elokim" it was before the Sinai event –before Moshe was at that special level.

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| 6:00- 6:15 am  | Mishna                         |
| 6:15- 6:30 am  | Mishna Berurah                 |
| 6:30- 7:25 am  | Halacha                        |
| 6:30 -6:45 am  | Mussar                         |
| 6:45 -7:25 am  | Talmud—Tractate Shabbos        |
| 7:25 - 8:20 am | Davening Followed by Breakfast |
| 8:20 - 8:45 am | Mishna                         |
| 9:00 -10:00 am | Daf Yomi                       |
| <br>           |                                |
| 2:00 pm        | Mincha                         |

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***Monday***

- 11:15 – 12:15pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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- 12:30 – 1:30pm **Talmud: Avodah Zorah**  
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***Tuesday***

- 12:15 - 1:15pm **Torah Insight Based on the Parsha**  
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- 1:30 – 2:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
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***Wednesday***

- 11:30 – 12:30 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
Location: Sunrise Capital 641 Lexington (25<sup>th</sup> FL.)  
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- 1:00—2:00 pm **Derech Hashem**  
Location: Yad Avraham

***Thursday***

- 10:30 –11:30am **Tehilim with Malbim**  
Location: Yad Avraham
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm **Talmud: Sanhedrin**  
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