

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 195

Va'era | The Power, Beauty, and Glory of the Torah



MESILOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son
Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita

...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Parshat Va'era

Emotional Eating

Another workday at the factory had ended. Yossi got into his car and drove to the nearest synagogue for the Mincha prayer. To his delight, he managed to arrive early for a change, half an hour before the prayer would begin. He sat down, opened a volume of the Talmud, and began to study.

A few moments later, a man entered the synagogue with a stern look on his face and a tense demeanor and sat next to Yossi. He pulled out a chocolate bar from his pocket, opened it with a quivering hand, and began to devour it. In just a few short moments, all that was left was the silver tinfoil wrapper.

Feeling uneasy with his poor manners, the man turned to Yossi and explained: "I'm extremely on edge. I just got a call from the bank that informed me that if I don't deposit a large sum of money in the next few days, they won't process the many checks that I gave to vendors."

The man finished speaking, stood up, and went on his way.

Yossi began to shift uneasily in his seat: "I don't understand his explanation. He told me that the bank gave him a call, and his reaction was to eat chocolate?"

What's the connection?"

The Mincha prayer began, and in the blessing of "*You graciously endow man with wisdom,*" he suddenly remembered that he had once learned about "emotional eating;" there are people who, when they feel an inner emptiness, try to quell it by consuming food.

The prayer ended, and the question still lingered: Does it really help? Can emotional eating fill the void in a person's heart?

These thoughts that Yossi struggled to understand led to the ideas and insights that we shall discuss this week.

The Allure of Buckingham Palace

Shiloh leaned on the elaborate iron-wrought fence and gazed at the smog that enveloped the city of London.

He couldn't explain how he eventually agreed to come here. The fact remained the same—he now stood at the foot of Buckingham Palace in London, waiting to see the soldiers guarding the palace and the *'Changing of the Guard'* ceremony.

The faint sound of drumming began to echo in the distance, accompanied by numerous wind instruments. The sounds grew closer, along with a large number of soldiers dressed in finery who suddenly appeared.

Shiloh's thoughts carried him back to the events of the previous week:

Everyone in the moshav knew that Shiloh's heart burned with love and appreciation for the Holy Land of Israel. At every opportunity, he spoke about how every Jew must aspire to live in the Holy Land and receive from its holiness, and

therefore, it was simple and clear to all that there was no chance Shiloh would leave the Holy Land, not even for a moment.

But often, plans go one way and reality another. Shiloh's twin brother, Yinon, is similar to him in nearly every way except for his approach to the Land of Israel. He, too, loves the Land of Israel with all his heart, but in his opinion, one needn't avoid leaving the Holy Land. "If there's a justified reason to go, why not?"

The debate between them continued until the day came when Yinon, his twin brother, received a matchmaking proposal from the city of Manchester. After a few meetings, he decided to get married there, in the city of the bride.

Shiloh firmly announced, "I'm not going to the wedding outside of the Holy Land." But after going through a persuasion process, he conceded and traveled to attend the wedding.

Parshat Va'era - The Allure of Buckingham Palace

After the wedding had concluded, his father approached him and asked him to stay for the Sheva Brachot, and to everyone's surprise, Shiloh agreed.

In the evening, he would participate in the Sheva Brachot festivities, but during the day, he ventured out on a tour of the city of London and arrived at Buckingham Palace.

Shiloh snapped out of his thoughts and returned to reality. The Changing of the Guard ceremony had ended, and Shiloh returned to participate in the last Sheva Brachot meal.

Two days later, he had finally returned to the Holy Land when he received a call from Yinon, who asked him teasingly, "So Shiloh, was it that terrible after all to depart the Land of Israel?"¹

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~

1. In this context, we share the following story ('Besod Avadecha', volume 2, page 81):

In the early years of the 5590s (1830s), Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avritch yearned intensely to ascend to the Land of Israel. From his youth under Rabbi Menachem Nachum of Chernobyl, this longing burned within him, and he often expressed it in his Torah commentary "Bat Ayin."

Despite his deep desire, various obstacles prevented him from fulfilling his dream. In 5585 (1825), after serving 40 years as Avritch's rabbi, he resolved to overcome all delays, left his position, and began his journey. However, ultimately he spent the next five years in Zhitomir as head of the rabbinical court due to unforeseen delays.

During this time, a 'shadar' (rabbinical emissary) from Safed arrived to collect funds for the impoverished Jewish community in

Israel. Rabbi Avraham Dov eagerly hosted him, absorbing his eloquent praises of the Holy Land and constantly inquiring about its virtues. The 'shadar', inspired himself and spurred on by the rabbi's enthusiasm, shared lofty ideas, blurring distinctions between the experiences of the great tzaddikim and the everyday experiences there of the common people.

He vividly described the holy sites of Israel, claiming that at the Western Wall one could hear the Divine Presence lamenting, and on another occasion, he exclaimed, "Even the stones of the Land of Israel shine and sparkle like diamonds." Astonished, Rabbi Avraham Dov asked, "Truly?" The 'shadar' affirmed, "Yes, very much literally so!"

This spurred Rabbi Avraham Dov to prepare immediately for his journey, and within half a year, he had set sail from Odessa.

Parshat Va'era - The Allure of Buckingham Palace

Shiloh responded sharply, "Yes, in fact, it was terrible. I toured around the area and saw

the degrading materialism that consumes the people who live there.

~~~~~*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*~~~~~

Upon arrival, he kissed the ground with profound joy, profusely thanking the 'shadar' who had inspired him.

He settled in Safed, where he ascended spiritually and was recognized as a leader among its sages. However, the 'shadar's' words remained with him, and he sought to attain the extraordinary spiritual experiences that he had described.

He had visited many holy sites and confirmed many of the 'shadar's' accounts; he had prayed with deep and great intention until indeed he heard the Divine Presence at the Western Wall calling out and lamenting and the same elsewhere.

Yet, one thing still troubled him: he had not seen the stones which shone like diamonds, despite his diligent search. This sorrow weighed upon him, although he confided this to no one.

One day, he happened to encounter the 'shadar' in Safed and hoped to relieve his distress.

The 'shadar' asked with satisfaction, "Did I not advise you well to ascend to our holy land?"

Rabbi Avraham Dov replied, "Indeed very right you were; I will forever owe you a great debt of gratitude. However, you told me once that the stones of the Holy Land

shine like diamonds. Why have I not seen this anywhere, despite my best attempts?"

Embarrassed, the 'shadar' stammered, "Perhaps one must be worthy enough to merit to see that."

Deeply affected, Rabbi Avraham Dov saw this as divine reproof, believing the 'shadar's' words were meant to awaken him spiritually, and he secluded himself at home for many days in repentance and prayer, to the surprise and concern of the community who were puzzled by his sudden withdrawal.

After several weeks, he emerged radiant and arranged a feast for his associates and disciples. During the meal, his joy and wisdom were evident, although he did not reveal the cause. At the attendees' urging, his devoted disciple Rabbi Fishel Bernstein inquired from him an insight into his seclusion.

Rabbi Avraham Dov recounted the story of the shining stones and the 'shadar's' words.

He explained, "Realizing Heaven sent me a message through the 'shadar', I secluded myself in repentance and prayer. I did not emerge until I personally witnessed the stones of the Holy Land shining like diamonds. This feast is my thanksgiving to the Creator for allowing me to reach this lofty moment and spiritual attainment."

**Parshat Va'era - No Room for Jealousy**

“When I arrived at the royal palace and the alluring sights and captivating sounds struck my consciousness, a vain jealousy arose within me, and I have since been grappling with doubt; ‘Why am I not living an opulent life like that? Why do they have so

many worldly pleasures and happiness, and I don't?’

“And since then,” Shiloh continued, “I've been struggling with myself to continue my daily routine as usual.”

Silence settled on the other end of the line.

**No Room for Jealousy**

"You're my twin brother," Yinon began, "and I always feel and understand what you're going through.

"But this time, I can't comprehend: What was so uniquely special there, in London and its surroundings, that made you jealous?"

Shiloh poured out his heart:

“When I stood before the palace and saw the wealth and honor radiating from the royal atmosphere, and when I saw the profound seriousness reflected upon the soldiers' faces and the admiration gleaming in

the spectators' eyes, I suddenly felt that my existence was insignificant.

“If such great powers exist in the world, who would care about me? Who would want to pay attention to me? And a feeling of suffocation climbed up my throat.

“Since that foggy morning, the thought hasn't left my mind: ‘Maybe if I become rich and famous, I will have importance in the world. Maybe if I become wealthy and influential like the Rothschilds, people will look at me with admiration like they do at the Queen of England.’”<sup>2</sup>

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

2. As an aside:

Even when people admire the wealthy, they admire their money and not the person

themselves. Therefore, when such a person loses their wealth and becomes impoverished, people have no reason to

## Parshat Va'era - No Room for Jealousy

Shiloh confessed, "I've been wandering around since, not knowing what I want from myself and what I need to do with my life. Do you still wonder why I say that the outcome of traveling abroad was a colossal disaster?"

Yinon, who had been listening silently until now, began to speak and expressed himself quite sharply: "Shiloh! What's happening with you? You've forgotten an explicit Mishnah!"

### *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

admire them. Moreover, they don't consider them worth anything at all anymore.

As such, how can a person enjoy the feeling of admiration when he knows that it's not directed at him at all?

Regarding this, we will share the following tale ('Ish Tzaddik Haya', page 44):

Rabbi Aryeh Levin was known for the immense love for fellow Jews that pulsed within him - an eternal flame of burning, true love for every Jewish person.

Once, his wife, Chana, said to him: "Aryeh, I must confess that I am jealous of a certain neighbor."

Rabbi Aryeh was astonished: Why was his wife, who had never before exhibited feelings of jealousy, envious of their neighbor? And what was the identity of this neighbor?

It turned out that there was a wealthy man in Jerusalem, a man of great stature. However, with time, he lost all of his wealth. Creditors seized all his property, and he was forced to move to the poor and humble neighborhood

of 'Mishkenot', next door to Rabbi Aryeh, a neighborhood where the toilets were located in the courtyards of the houses.

Every evening, the neighbors noticed his wife going out to the street adorned and dressed in fine clothes. People were surprised at the sight and began to gossip and rumors spread about her.

But when the rebbetzin spoke with her next door neighbor, the matter became clear.

She explained as follows: "My husband returns home every evening from his work - with a heavy heart. To support the family, the formerly wealthy man has to work as a day laborer on building scaffolds. He, who owned many assets, is now forced to work as a simple laborer.

When I saw how low his spirits were, I decided to beautify myself and wait for him at the end of his workday on the corner of nearby Agripas Street, to greet him with a smile and a happy face - to uplift his spirit."

Rebbetzin Chana turned to her husband Rabbi Aryeh: "I envy that woman, for I have not reached her lofty level."



**Parshat Va'era - Bread and Salt - A Royal Table ?**

"Which Mishnah?" Shiloh wondered aloud.

"The Mishnah says (Avot 6:5): *"Do not desire the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs, and your Employer is faithful to pay you the reward of your labor."*

The Machzor Vitri explains this Mishnah:

*"Do not desire" - if they entice you to act as they do and offer you authority, do not listen or agree. Do not compete or be jealous of them. Do not question the words of the Torah because you see them succeeding. Because your "table"*

*in the World to Come is greater than their table is in this world.*

*"And your crown is greater than theirs" - even in this world. For there are three crowns, and the crown of a good name surpasses them all."*

"You hear, Shiloh, the words of the Mishnah? Even now, in the current life in this world, the life of a Jew who studies Torah and observes commandments is much more satisfying and immense even than the life of an all-powerful king. Moreover, this happiness that is revealed in one's heart is a true and complete happiness."

**Bread and Salt - A Royal Table ?**

Once again, the phone line fell silent.

"Shiloh, why are you silent?" Yinon asked.

"Let me explain.

When you read the words of the Mishnah, a question about them arose in my mind, and momentarily, I was absorbed in it and forgot that I was on the phone with you," Shiloh apologized.

"Well then, what's the question?"

"You see, in this Mishnah, we learn that Torah scholars should not desire the table of kings because their own table is much greater.

However, the previous Mishnah says (Avot 6:4), *'This is the way of the Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in a small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of hardship, and toil in the Torah.'*

Now, if one endures a life of hardship to attain Torah greatness and has no more than "*bread with salt*" on the table, how can we say that the table of Torah scholars is greater than that of kings ?"

"That's an excellent question. But the answer is quite simple: You read the Mishnah with incorrect intonation and misconstrued the text."

"Intonation? Since when do I even know how to sing? All those who know me know that I have no musical talent whatsoever."

"Calm down Shiloh, let me explain:

You read the words '*Eat bread with salt*' in a tone that evokes pity, which is why you had difficulty with the following Mishnah, which describes the bliss of a life of Torah.

But if you read these words in the correct tone, with a tone of pride and joy, you'll understand that the next Mishnah describes precisely the happy result of the command to '*Eat bread with salt*.'"<sup>3</sup>

We'd best understand this by way of the introduction that follows.

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### ...*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*...

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3. In 'Ohel Moshe' (Bamidbar, page 101) the following is written:

The Sfas Emes of Ger, of blessed memory, once studied Tractate Avot with his sons and when they reached the above Mishnah:

"Such is the way of the Torah: bread with salt you shall eat, water in measured quantities you shall drink, on the ground you shall sleep, a life of hardship you shall live, and in the Torah you shall toil. If you do this, you are fortunate and it is good for you. Fortunate you are in this world, and it is good for you in the World to Come."

One of them, bewildered by this Mishnah, asked, "Father, how is it possible to say

that 'if you do this, fortunate are you in this world,' since in human terms, one who lives a life of deprivation is far from being happy in 'this world'?"

The Sfas Emes answered them, saying that this is why the Mishnah specifically states: "If you do this, fortunate are you in this world," meaning that it is impossible to comprehend the spiritual pleasure of such a life, unless someone does this himself. Only one who lives in this manner will experience true happiness, and will understand the true meaning of this dictum of our righteous sages.

Indeed, a sense of enjoyment and pleasure can undoubtedly be derived from the

## Consequences of the Primordial Sin

In six days, G-d created the world, and on the sixth day, He created man; his body taken from the earth, and his soul from the heavenly realms.

Adam's soul was something immense and profound, well beyond our ability to describe. Adam had no evil inclination at all. His body too— although formed from the earth—was utterly pure and clean: clean from any forbidden desire and pure from any bad traits. Our sages say (Bava Batra 58a) that his physical body was so holy that even his heels shone purely as bright as two orbs of the sun.

After creating him, G-d placed him in the Garden of Eden and said to him: "Adam, you see all the delightful vegetation around you; know that you may eat from all of it, as much as you want and whenever you want, except for one tree—the Tree of Knowledge."

Since G-d forbade it, his body naturally distanced itself from

the tree, and not even the slightest thought of eating from it crossed his mind.

Eons could have passed, and Adam would not have approached the tree if not for the serpent who stood on the sidelines, waiting to strike.

Ultimately, he succeeded in causing man to sin, and from that moment on, the serpent's impurity penetrated mankind, creating within the body lust and desire for all things physical.

Since the serpent injected his impurity everywhere, the body became dense and coarse, blocking any divine vision.

Moreover, due to the serpent's impurity, the physical body became brazen, and in its great audacity, it did not even allow the soul to "express itself."

The illumination of the soul thus slowly faded away almost entirely.

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*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

many worldly pleasures; however, true happiness and authentic pleasure are

found solely among those who study Torah - nowhere else!

## The Great Serpent—Pharaoh

Gradually, humanity became corrupt, and the world deteriorated. Many sins, transgressions, and horrifying crimes were committed by mankind, and yet, the serpent's role had not ended.

Two thousand years later, the serpent reappeared, this time incarnated within Pharaoh.<sup>4</sup>

As it says: *"Speak and say: Thus says the L-rd, G-d: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great serpent that lies in the midst of his rivers, who has said, 'My river is my own, and I have made myself'"* (Ezekiel 29:3).

Given the spiritual influence that he embodied, Pharaoh's power was immense and strong, and his

primary strength was expressed in the terrible desire for immortality.<sup>5</sup>

Upon ascending to power in Egypt, he spread his impurity further throughout the entire country and, by extension, the entire globe.

As Rabbi Yosef Chaim writes ('Aderet Eliyahu,' Miketz): *"Pharaoh is the root of Egypt's impurity, and all others branch out from him."*

His impurity increased and was further delegated to the three ministers he appointed: the Chief Baker, the Chief Cupbearer, and the Chief Butcher. They caused all of the Egyptians to succumb to the desires of eating and drinking and the impurity of idle chatter, which they represented.<sup>6</sup>

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...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

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**4. Rabbi** Chaim Yosef David Azulai (the Chida), wrote the following ('Otzar Pirushei Aggada shel Pesach):

The Siftei Kohen wrote: "Pharaoh" (פרעה) has a numerical value ('gematria') of 355, and if we add the value of three, for the three words "Pharaoh, Egypt's king" (פרעה מלך מצרים), it equals 358, which is the numerical value and gematria of "snake" (נחש).

Therefore, he is mentioned in the Prophets as "Pharaoh Hophra" (Jeremiah 44:30) - the word "Hophra" (חפרע) having the exact gematria of "snake" (נחש), as if it had been written "Pharaoh the snake".

**5.** See 'Aderet Eliyahu' ('Moed Katan' 18a) by the great kabbalist Rabbi Emanuel Chai Riki.

**6.** Likutei Moharan (First Part, Teaching 163).

**Parshat Va'era - Gradual Enslavement in Egypt**

Thus, he spread so much impurity that the Egyptians' impurity and coarseness reached its peak, and the Egyptians broke their own records in the depths of impurity that they reached.

As stated in Tanna Devei Elyahu Rabbah (Chapter 7):

*“At that time (when Israel descended to Egypt), the Egyptians ruled from one end of the world to the other. They were steeped in many sins, and there was no nation as immersed in vile and unworthy matters and suspected of sorcery, immorality, and all evil deeds, aside for the Egyptians alone.”*

**Gradual Enslavement in Egypt**

In the year 2238 to creation, Jacob and his sons descended to Egypt. Upon their arrival, they established houses of Torah study.

These study halls created a spiritual refuge and sanctuary that surrounded them, preventing the forces of impurity from robbing them of their holiness.

As long as Jacob and his sons lived, they succeeded in drawing down a great spiritual light—the pure and divine Infinite Light—into the lowly land of Egypt through their Torah study and divine service.

By the power of this light, they were spiritually protected and could continue their divine service, bringing joy and delight to

G-d through their Torah and good deeds. This caused the Infinite Light to be revealed with an even greater intensity, connecting and unifying them to the loftiest levels.

Many years passed, and throughout those years, Jacob and his sons passed away, except for Levi. At this time, Jacob's descendants sustained themselves spiritually through the last of the giants—Levi.

Then, on a clear day, it happened. Groups of Jews stood throughout the Jewish quarter, wiping away tears—Levi had passed away; their last protector was gone.

After Levi's death, the spiritual refuge dissipated, allowing the

**Parshat Va'era - Speechless From Bitter Slavery**

forces of impurity to draw sustenance from the Jewish people's spiritual bounty.

Slowly but surely, Egyptian impurity began to penetrate and seep into the hearts of the Jewish people. Sparks of heresy and questions about G-d's seemingly harsh governance began to emerge. The path to the depths of spiritual defilement and degradation was short and incoming.

**Speechless From Bitter Slavery**

The serpent's impurity intensified upon Israel to such an extent that they even lost their power of persuasive speech.

As Rabbi Yechezkel Shraga of Stropkov writes:<sup>7</sup>

“In the Egyptian exile, the mouths of Israel were sealed shut, and therefore, even the greatest sages did not have the ability to influence the kings of the land to release them.

Typically, when an oppressed nation rises against its oppressors,

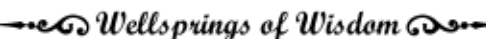
As the Holy Zohar testifies: *“When the Jewish people were in Egypt, they became impure and defiled themselves with all kinds of impurities until they dwelt under the dominion of forty-nine levels of impurity.”*

The Jewish people had descended from level to level until they had lost their "human image" completely and became slaves, quite literally.

it's through the power of speech that it motivates its oppressed people:

"How long shall we remain enslaved? Why should we be enslaved to serve others? Let us plead with our oppressors to free us, and if they refuse willingly, we shall gather and rise against them, wage war, etc." Thus, it's possible that, at some point, the oppressed might overpower their oppressors.

But in Egypt, it wasn't so. The Egyptians cunningly sealed Israel's mouths through sorcery and



7. 'Divrei Yechezkel Shraga', third volume ('Torah and Festivals' - page 385).

Parshat Va'era - Speechless From Bitter Slavery

immorality, causing them to sin and then also subduing them without the ability to speak to one another; they could only sigh and cry out in pain.

What is written: "*A soft answer turns away wrath*" (Proverbs 15:1) refers to the wise person who can open his mouth and speak and win over hearts and minds, but when his mouth is sealed shut,

there's no longer any distinction between the wise and the foolish.<sup>8</sup>

Given that the enslavement was so severe, they had no chance of redeeming themselves, and they had no redeeming qualities or ability to bring about salvation.

Therefore, G-d sent them Moses to extricate them from their predicament.

...*~* Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*...

**8.** In this connection, we bring a story that illustrates the power of the words of the wise and righteous ('Mofet LeShabbat', Vayikra - page 217):

The philanthropist, Menashe Zvida from Baghdad, was a great benefactor and distributed much of his wealth for charitable and benevolent causes.

In addition, he sent large sums of money for the poor of the Land of Israel, and his good name reached great distances.

His father, Yechezkel Zvida, built the synagogue 'Beit Yaakov - Hurvat Rabbi Yehuda HaChasid' in the Old City of Jerusalem, as inscribed on the memorial stone of the synagogue.

Menashe, following his father's footsteps, provided the needs of all of the sages of the rabbinical study hall 'Midrash Beit Zilcha' at his own expense, and even arranged respectable marriages for them and supported them and their families.

One Sunday morning, Chacham Moshe ben Ezra, who was a student of Rabbi Abdallah Somech and a close friend of the Ben Ish Chai, entered the study hall, but did not find the sages there.

Chacham Moshe was greatly surprised and wondered where they had gone.

He donned his coat and left the outer gates of the study hall, and beheld the sages of the study hall arriving together from a distance.

He went out to meet them and asked: "Where were you? Perhaps a disaster befell upon an important individual of the community, and you went out to participate in the funeral?" He knew that only in such cases would the study hall be entirely emptied of its scholars.

"Heaven forbid, all is well," the sages replied. "We are now returning from the house of the philanthropist Menashe Zabida, since one of the diligent scholars of

## Parshat Va'era - Speechless From Bitter Slavery

our study hall needs to get engaged, and the bride lacks five hundred coins for a dowry.

We went to ask the philanthropist to donate this amount, but he refused. The sage in question, earns a side income from the sale of mezuzot, tefillin, tzitzit, prayer books, and the like, and the philanthropist has stipulated with the scholars of the study hall that they not engage in any commercial matter and instead be devoted solely to Torah study. He has declared that he will not support him with even one penny," they concluded regretfully.

"Why didn't you invite me and include me in this great mitzvah of assisting a bride?" asked Chacham Moshe.

In fact, Chacham Moshe was a schoolteacher who conducted himself with great simplicity. He did not agree to wear the rabbinic garb, as he did not consider himself especially worthy, and thus, it could be clearly understood why he hadn't been invited.

Chacham Moshe's words brought a lighthearted smile to the faces of the sages, and they said to him: "If you seek this mitzvah so greatly, why don't you go out yourself to the philanthropist and persuade him to give the requested amount, and thus, 'earn' the entire mitzvah for yourself."

Chacham Moshe accepted their suggestion wholeheartedly and made his way alone to the philanthropist's house.

The philanthropist Menashe had many Bedouin workers and servants. They tended his tens of thousands of sheep and cattle, and they would sow and harvest his many fields, and in return, they would receive a portion of the proceeds.

Wealthy Bedouins and well-known sheikhs would often visit his house, and that day as well, when Chacham Moshe entered the philanthropist's house, he saw respected and wealthy Bedouins sitting before him Eastern style on mats spread on the ground and eating rice from large bowls.

Chacham Moshe entered and sat in a corner waiting to have a word with the philanthropist. Menashe soon approached him and asked what his request was. "I have an important matter to discuss with you, dear Menashe," answered Chacham Moshe confidently.

"But before we discuss the matter, would you agree that I remove these Bedouins from here?" he said.

The philanthropist laughed at the words of the sincere scholar who stood before him and said jokingly: "If you think you can remove them - go right ahead."

Chacham Moshe opened his mouth and began to sing with great intention and yearning Psalm 121: "I lift my eyes to the mountains, from where will my help come," and before he even finished reciting the Psalm, all the Bedouins jumped from their places in great awe, and each grabbed their shoes in hand, and fled in panic for their lives without wishing farewell in the customary fashion, and all the philanthropist's efforts to stop them from leaving were in vain.

He was amazed by what his eyes had just beheld, and turning to Chacham Moshe ben Ezra, he asked: "What did you do to them?"

"I removed them, Menashe, according to your request," replied the sage.



## The Essence of Moses—The Light of Unity

In a lecture given by my father, Rabbi Yoram Michael Abergel, of blessed memory, he mentioned the following idea:<sup>9</sup>

Every Jew uses the term 'Moshe Rabbeinu,' and that's how we commonly refer to him. But in the Holy Zohar, Moses is called "*The Faithful Shepherd.*"

The reason is that Moses is the eternal symbol of the true leader of Israel, who gave everything he had—sacrificing his very soul and flesh—for the sake of the Jewish people.

This unique quality was evident in him from birth, and therefore, it is written: "*She saw that he was good*"

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### *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

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The philanthropist looked at the sincere teacher with reverence and asked: "Being that you are a truly holy man, please tell me what your request is, and it shall be done."

"I have come for a great mitzvah. My request is that you help the Torah scholar who is about to marry, and who requires five hundred coins."

The philanthropist went to his treasury room and brought out two thousand coins, tied them up in a silk handkerchief, and handed them to Chacham Moshe, adding: "seeing you holiness and great powers, I cannot send you away empty-handed; you shall receive twofold times double the amount you requested."

Chacham Moshe took the bundle of money and went to the study hall to the sages, who could not believe that he had succeeded in influencing the philanthropist. He appeared in the study

hall with the usual serenity on his face, pulled the bundle from his satchel, and placed it before them.

The sages widened their eyes in amazement, but Chacham Moshe returned to his studies and didn't understand what the big fuss was about.

Months passed, and those same respected Bedouins appeared again at Menashe the philanthropist's house. Upon entering his gates, they cast suspicious glances all around and asked: "Is the angel who drove us away a few months ago still around here?"

When the philanthropist further questioned them, they replied: "As soon as that angel of G-d opened his mouth and recited those verses, dozens of fiery angels appeared before us, girded with fiery swords, and they chased us until we crossed the Tigris River and returned to our dwelling places."

9. 'Imrei Noam' ('Festivals' - Sukkot, Discourse 6).

**Parshat Va'era - The Essence of Moses—The Light of Unity**

(Exodus 2:2); as our sages explain<sup>10</sup> that when Moses was born, the entire house filled with light, and the "good" that his mother saw was an illuminating spiritual light.

Thus, "good" and "light" are one and the same.

To further explain:

When Moses was born, it's said about him: "*She saw that he was good,*" and the very word "good" (טוב) encapsulates Moses' essence: The first (and primary) letter of the word "טוב" is "ט" (tet).

If we spell out the letter "ט" in full—"ט"י"ת"—the numerical value is 419, which is the same as the word "אחדות" (unity).

Thus, the loftiest light and goodness of the world is the attribute of unity, upon which the world's very existence depends. This also demonstrates that the

trait of unity and love for Israel was ingrained in Moses' very essence.

The Midrash<sup>11</sup> describes the love of his fellow Jew that burned in Moses' heart to the point that he was willing to sacrifice his life:

From childhood, Moses grew up in Pharaoh's palace in royal surroundings and was trained to be worthy of the title "prince of Egypt." The best scholars taught and revealed to him the vast secrets of Egyptian wisdom.

Years passed, and when Moses reached the age of twenty, he went out to seek his brothers and saw them laboring hard, bent over, weak, and sick. He also noticed that the greatest insult in Egypt was to be labeled a "Hebrew."

Given this, anyone else in place of Moses, who had been raised in a royal palace with kingly honor

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**10.** The sages (Sotah 12a.) explain this through comparing the verses: Here it says "good" ("she saw that he was good"), and in the fourth verse of Genesis it says "G-d saw the light, that it was good" (Genesis 1:4).

From this, they learned that the "good" mentioned regarding Moses refers to this - lofty and otherworldly  
- light.

**11.** Shemot Rabbah 1:27.

and a lofty status, would have disregarded and skipped over his poor brethren, who were in the lowest of situations.

But Moses, whose heart burned with a tremendous and blazing fire of genuine love for his people, could not ignore what he witnessed. He stopped, observed, contemplated, and understood the horror that was transpiring. He began to weep tears, salty tears of pain and affliction, and he resolved to help them, lifting the heavy loads that the weakest among them were forced to carry, treating the wounds caused by the hard labor, washing their eyes from the lime that the wind blew about, and personally burying those who died from weakness and hard labor. All the while, he spoke to his brothers gently, comforting and encouraging them.

As Moses continued to wander around the construction sites, suddenly, to his horror, he heard terrible screams and groans. Moses ran toward the source of the sound, and before his eyes, he saw an Egyptian

man brutally beating a Hebrew man.

Moses was shocked to see such cruelty meted out without any shame and lacking the smallest hint of mercy. He decided to give the Egyptian a "lesson," and after striking the Egyptian taskmaster, Moses dragged the Egyptian's body and threw it into an open pit nearby.

The next day, Moses went out again to the work sites, and before him, he saw two Jews—Datan and Aviram—quarreling. Moses was appalled: *"He said to the wicked one, 'Why do you strike your fellow?'"* (Exodus 2:13).

Datan and Aviram turned their heads and replied scornfully: "Great, we've got a new "supervisor." Don't you worry; we'll repay you for your insolence. We will go to Pharaoh and inform him that there's someone here who's 'sensitive' to the plight of the Jews. We're sure he'll be happy to hear."

They went and told Pharaoh, who ordered Moses to be killed. Despite their wicked efforts, they failed, and Moses fled and escaped to Midian.

## The Power to Ignite the Jewish Spark

Moses managed to escape the mighty hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and from that point until the age of eighty, the Torah does not detail what happened to him, except for the fact that he was a shepherd for the flock of his father-in-law Jethro in the wilderness, as it says: *"Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian"* (Exodus 3:1).

At the age of eighty, G-d appeared to him and requested: *"And now, go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the nation of Israel, out of Egypt."* (Exodus 3:10).

Moses excused himself, saying: *"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the nation of Israel out of Egypt?"* (Exodus 3:11).

"Master of the Universe; Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has succeeded in spreading the wicked serpent's impurity throughout the entire land of Egypt, thus turning

the Jewish people into slaves. How will I succeed in rescuing them, Master of the Universe, from their terrible impurity?

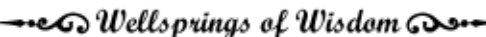
G-d answered him: Don't worry. *"I will be with you"* (Exodus 3:12).

Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, the Ohr HaChaim, posed the question thus:<sup>12</sup>

"We must understand what answer did the Al-mighty give by saying 'I will be with you,' surely Moses knew that he was coming with G-d's power; he merely argued that due to his own insignificance, he wouldn't be entitled?"

Rather, the intent of the verse is as follows: G-d came to respond to his initial concern:

"Regarding what you said: 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh,' know that there I will be with you (with the divine name of אלהים), and from now on, your greatness surpasses



12. In his commentary on this verse.

**Parshat Va'era - Judging Favorably and Identifying the Jewish Spark**

his greatness, your crown is greater than his crown, and your fear will be upon him just as his fear is upon you, and he should seem in your eyes as entirely insignificant.

All of Pharaoh's spiritual power derives from the serpent's impurity, which has no real substance. A single spark of divine power is enough, and the impurity will dissolve on its own.

And you, Moses, have the power to ignite this spark.

In other words:

All the power that Pharaoh had was only because the nation of Israel had not tasted G-d's divine light, and they, therefore, followed Pharaoh's wicked ways.

But once they would be fortunate to taste from the light of the Torah and its commandments, they would themselves despise Pharaoh and forsake his ways, leaving him entirely bereft of any power over them at all.

**Judging Favorably and Identifying the Jewish Spark**

G-d continued and told Moses that before he would embark on the mission of redemption, he would have to learn one more lesson:

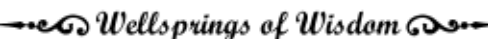
*"The L-rd said to him, 'What is that in your hand?' He said, 'A staff.'" (Exodus 4:2).*

*"And He said, 'Throw it on the ground.' So he threw it on the ground, and it became a snake, and Moses fled from it." (Exodus 4:3).*

*"Then the L-rd said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand and grasp its tail,' and he reached out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand." (Exodus 4:4).*

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov explained this exchange:<sup>13</sup>

"It is the way of G-d's to look at the good that people do, and even if a measure of not good also exists in them, He does not look at that. As it is written: 'He



*has not looked upon iniquity in Jacob'* (Numbers 23:21).

As such, all the more so, a person is forbidden to look at his fellow unfavorably, to only find in him the undesirable, and to seek out defects in his fellow's divine service; instead, on the contrary, one is obligated to only look at the good in others."

His student, Rabbi Natan of Breslov, expounded further:<sup>14</sup>

"The primary redemption is affected through this; through G-d's mercies being aroused to look only at the good of his people, as in the verse: *'I have indeed seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt'* (Exodus 3:7), which our sages expounded: *'I have indeed seen'* (ראה ראית): a double measure of seeing; although I see that they will ultimately come to sin, even so, *'I have seen the affliction of My people.'*

I look only at the good in them and not at the evil they may do later; thus, they are very much

worthy of redemption.

All the debate and discussion between G-d and Moses at the burning bush was about this matter. Always seeking the good in the Jewish people and advocating on their behalf is a very lofty and deep matter, and in this matter, there are many levels among the righteous.

Therefore, even Moses, our teacher, although he was entirely good, did not initially know how far G-d's mercy reaches. He did not want to go on His mission because he saw that the Jewish people would be greatly corrupted. G-d argued with him heatedly that even so, He wants to redeem them since He looks only at the good in them, as abovementioned.

This is the meaning of the wonder with the staff that He showed Moses, hinting to him not to speak ill of the Jewish people, as our sages have taught and as quoted by Rashi.

The snake easily reverted into a staff, as the Torah continues: *'Reach*

*out your hand and grasp it by the tail'* (Exodus 4:4), hinting to him that even amid the serpent's impurity, one can grasp some onto to some end, find some positive point, and through this, to turn evil into good—from a snake into a staff, as the verse immediately continues, *'and it became a staff in his hand.'*

Now, we will dwell on this subject further due to the importance of judging others favorably.

#### A Protected Space for the Divine Illumination

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (the Ramchal) wrote the following:<sup>15</sup>

When a Jew studies Torah and fulfills commandments, he sows supernal lights in the Garden of Eden. These lights grow and sprout and produce fruits, and from these fruits, a person receives lofty and exalted spiritual bounty.

However, despite this path being straightforward, few are the people who merit and know how

to harvest these spiritual lights, as it is said: *"You will take much seed out to the field but gather little in"* (Deuteronomy 28:38), and it is also written: *"You will sow but not reap"* (Micah 6:15).

The reason for this is that when a person comes to harvest and gather these lights, the forces of impurity will then sense this and lie in wait, trying to 'steal' from this spiritual bounty. So that it won't be delivered to the powers of impurity, when there lacks one who knows how to harvest the field properly, then the light is not granted by G-d and does not spread, in the mystery of: *"He has withdrawn his right hand before the presence of the enemy"* (Lamentations 2:3).

Thus, for a person to gather the divine light and draw it down, one needs to create a 'sterile' and pure place, a protected space where the evil powers do not have access. Only when there is such a space are these lights drawn downward, and the person can receive them.

The holy Ramchal elaborates there on how one can create such

a place, but there is also another way, which we shall discuss here.

### **The Spiritual Boundary of Shabbat**

As is known, a person is forbidden from going beyond the "boundary" on Shabbat. This boundary, called 'Techum Shabbat,' is two thousand cubits of distance in every direction from where a person is at the onset of Shabbat. If he spends Shabbat in a city, for example, the entire city is considered his place of residence, and he has two thousand cubits from the city's edge in every direction.

If he spends Shabbat in the field, his place of residence is four cubits, and he has two thousand cubits in every direction outside of this 'place of residence.'

Rabbi Natan of Breslov explained this halacha as follows:<sup>16</sup>

The "Shabbat boundary" is a protected and sterile space where one who resides in it can gather

and contain the divine lights without fear of them being taken by the impure powers.

This spiritual "Shabbat boundary" is made up of two Alephs (which connote the two thousand requisite cubits), and every Jew should aspire with these 'Alephs' - to enter within the Shabbat boundary.

We quote his words:

*"It is stated in the teachings of our holy master, several pieces of advice and ways to strengthen and rejoice one's soul constantly, through which they will remain upright and never fall, G-d forbid, and this is critically important, as is known.*

*But a critical component to strengthening oneself is the two 'Alephs,' the two holy teachings that begin with an Alephs, namely, the teaching of 'Azamra' (on the verse 'I*



**Parshat Va'era - This Is the Way of Ascent**

will sing to my G-d'),<sup>17</sup> and the teaching of 'Ayeh' (on the verse 'where is the lamb for a burnt offering?') (Genesis 22:7)."<sup>18</sup>

Let us conclude our talk by expanding further on these two teachings.

**This Is the Way of Ascent**

It was G-d's will to create man, having attained no lofty levels, and that throughout his lifetime, through his divine service, he would merit to ascend level upon level, and thus, man would, through his divine service, build his eternal world.

Before a spiritual ascent, there is often a preceding descent.

In the words of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov:<sup>19</sup>

*"In this many of the pious err, it may suddenly seem to them that they have fallen from the proper service of G-d, but this is not truly a fall at all; rather,*

*because they stand to ascend from level to an even higher level, the impure husks, which are the unholy desires and confusions and illusions and thoughts and obstacles, are awakened and strengthened anew, and therefore the person as well needs to strengthen themselves each time anew to return and subdue and break the husks and obstacles, at each following level anew. But in truth, this is not a true fall at all."*<sup>20</sup>

However, when a person is in this intermediate state, he is in great danger, and there were

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17. Likutei Moharan I, Torah 282.

18. Likutei Moharan II, Torah 12.

19. Likutei Moharan I, Torah 25.

20. In this context, we share the following story ('Eser Kedushot', 2:17):

Once, at the end of the morning prayer, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch of Zhidichov left the

study hall and walked to his home, wrapped in his tallit and tefillin.

As he was walking, he heard an announcement in Heaven regarding him: "Give honor to the likeness of the King."

Later, when he reached his home, he momentarily made a movement and action without unifying G-d's name, and he heard

**Parshat Va'era - This Is the Way of Ascent**

many who, out of bitterness about their spiritual state, retreated and stopped doing even what they could do at that point in time.

Therefore, one who has mercy on his soul must contemplate these two inner teachings; 'Azamra' and 'AyeH.'

The teaching of 'Azamra' tells us that a Jew is absolute good, and the evil he fails in is incidental; the evil merely stems from a lack of knowledge and awareness.

From the second teaching of 'AyeH,' we learn that spiritual setbacks are part and parcel of the path to growth.

When a Jew falls, he must not despair but instead cry out from the bitterness of his heart: 'Father in Heaven ! Where can I find you; where are You hiding ?'

One will then merit to ascend from the deepest depths, and with

this ascent, he will also elevate the sparks of Torah study that were captured by the forces of impurity.

Thus, when one merits to rise from a spiritual fall, they merit to discover new parts of the Torah.

To summarize: When a Jew grows spiritually, from day to day, he understands that everything he goes through and encounters is part of his path of growth, as encapsulated by the teachings of 'Azamra' and 'AyeH.'

This, consequently, gives birth in one's heart to '*Love a fellow Jew,*' for even when he sees his fellow doing something that may be wrong, he understands that it might simply be part of his path to spiritual growth.

One then understands and knows that his fellow Jew is truly good, and the evil he failed and committed is no more than incidental. One further

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

that they were announcing in heaven: "Woe to so-and-so who rebels against his divine Master."

This exemplifies a 'fall' of the righteous, between one lofty spiritual level and another even higher one.

On the same note, once Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch was heard saying: "If, G-d forbid, I take food or drink into my mouth without unifying G-d's name, it would be better for me to be strangled," for his constant attachment to the divine was unique and extremely great.

**Parshat Va'era - Manna In Merit of Moses**

is aware that when his fellow Jew rises back up, he will merit to reveal a new and even greater Torah.

Thus, the 'Shabbat boundary' leads to 'Love of Israel,' and by the same token, one whose heart burns with the 'Love of his fellow Jew' can gather and

receive the lofty spiritual lights from above without hindrance or worry.

The Love of one's fellow Jew creates around the person a domain and boundary—a 'Shabbat boundary' that protects and defends him from the impure powers.

**Manna In Merit of Moses**

Moses succeeded in kindling the Jewish spark, and after thirty days following the Exodus from Egypt, the nation of Israel received the manna from Heaven.

Although the manna was not a regular and tangible food, the nation of Israel lacked nothing.

Their souls, satiated by the light of Torah and the commandments, did not feel any deficiency and could sustain themselves for forty years, morning, noon, and night, on ethereal food—the manna.

Our sages reveal to us that just as well, a Jew who properly studies

the Torah merits such great spiritual satisfaction that he does not require the consumption of any delicacies.

His soul will be so rich and full of inner goodness that he will feel all the tastes, scents, and sounds within his meager "*bread with salt and measured water.*"

Yossi pondered these insights: It's a pity this man wasn't here to hear all of these teachings. If only he had learned what we studied today, his soul would have been filled with joy and sustenance, and he wouldn't have the constant need for cocoa, sugar, fat, milk, and flavorings (called "chocolate" in common parlance)...

### Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. Every Jew must know the words of our sages in the Mishnah: *"Do not desire the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown is greater than theirs."* Therefore, Torah scholars should not desire worldly riches and wealth, as their table is far greater than that of kings.

**Even** in our times, in the most physical sense, the life of a Jew who studies the Torah and observes its commandments is far more rewarding even than that of royalty, and the happiness they experience in their heart is authentic and meaningful.

2. Every Torah scholar must be cognizant that although a feeling of pleasure can also be achieved from worldly delights, true happiness and delight can solely be found among those who wholly dedicate themselves to studying Torah exclusively.

3. When a person sins, their body becomes desensitized and coarsened, and blocked from beholding divine visions and enlightenment. They consequently also become brazen, and this brazenness blocks any expression of the soul and denies it "permission to speak."

4. To nullify the brazenness and coarseness of the body, a person must understand that the pleasures of this world are essentially hollow; the soul will

never be filled or satisfied by them; they will instead feel an emptiness and void.

**The** world is also full of suffering and pain. Even the great, rich, and powerful lack a complete worldly life; all their days involve anger, pains, troubles, worries, sadness, and grief. Each and every person bears their own suffering, and there isn't even one among all of the wealthy and famous who has everything in order as he would have wished.

5. Once a person understands this, they must turn instead to the true and lasting purpose of life: *"Happy is he whose labor is in Torah."*

**Since** every person is born to toil, and it is impossible to escape this fate, even if one has all the happiness and gold and silver in the world, he will nonetheless have much toil, suffering, and worries involved therein.

**Therefore**, a wise person who gazes to the future will turn to the toil of Torah, for this he was born—to toil in Torah—and then fortunate he will be, to have been saved from the unfruitful toil of this world and to merit the World to Come.

6. Moses is the quintessential symbol of a true leader of Israel, who gives everything he has, from soul to flesh, for the sake of the Jewish people.

**Parshat Va'era - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

**This** quality was evident in him from birth, and his essence was ingrained with the trait of unity and love of Israel. He taught us the qualities of a worthy leader and shepherd of the Jewish people, which require a deep love and appreciation of the Jewish people.

**Shabbat Shalom !**



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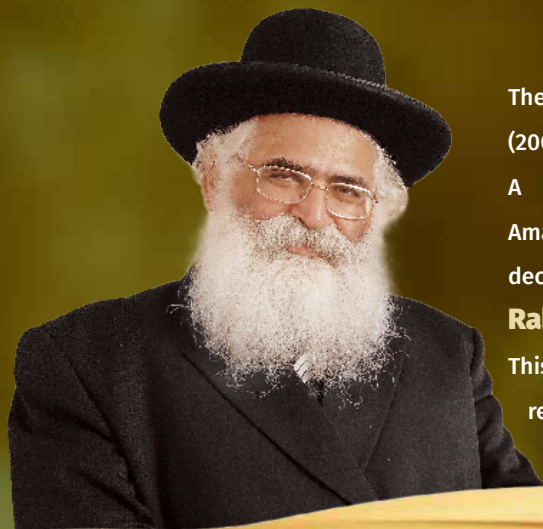
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# Va'era

25th of Tevet, 5785



| City        | Candle Lighting | Shabbat Ends | Rabbeinu Tam |
|-------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| New York    | 4:46 pm         | 5:49 pm      | 6:17 pm      |
| Miami       | 5:41 pm         | 6:35 pm      | 7:11 pm      |
| Los Angeles | 4:59 pm         | 5:57 pm      | 6:30 pm      |
| Montreal    | 4:32 pm         | 5:39 pm      | 6:03 pm      |
| Toronto     | 5:00 pm         | 6:05 pm      | 6:32 pm      |
| London      | 4:18 pm         | 5:32 pm      | 5:50 pm      |
| Jerusalem   | 4:51 pm         | 5:42 pm      | 6:16 pm      |
| Tel Aviv    | 4:47 pm         | 5:39 pm      | 6:12 pm      |
| Haifa       | 4:45 pm         | 5:40 pm      | 6:12 pm      |
| Be'er Sheva | 4:48 pm         | 5:43 pm      | 6:16 pm      |

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