



דבורת אמת



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PARASHAT VA'ERA

Candle Lighting:	4:25 pm
Tzeit haKochavim:	5:28 pm
Hillel Dinner:	6:00 pm
Shacharit:	9:00 am
Sof Zman Kriat Shema:	9:33 am
Sof Zman Tefilla:	10:20 am
Chatzot:	11:56 am
Mincha:	4:10 pm
Shkia:	4:44 pm
Motzei Shabbat:	5:30 pm

Parsha in a Box

- Hashem repeats His promise to Bnei Yisrael
- Background and family before and leading up to Moshe and Aharon
- Moshe and Aharon come to Pharaoh but he is not persuaded
- The plague of blood
- The plague of the frogs
- The plague of the lice
- The plague of the wild beasts
- The plague of dever, where all Egypt's livestock dies
- The plague of boils
- The plague of the hail
- After all this, Pharaoh still refuses to send Bnei Yisrael
- To be continued....
dum dum dum

Morasha

By Rabbi Kaplowitz '02

Parshat Va'era opens with Hashem promising Moshe that He will take the Jewish people out of Egypt and lead them to the land of Israel. In describing Eretz Yisrael, Hashem says: "...I will bring you to the land regarding which I raised My hand, [swearing] that I would give it to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you as an inheritance [morasha]. I am God" (Shemot 6:8). The word morasha appears only one other time in the Chumash, at the end of Sefer Devarim, when the Torah itself is described as a morasha. The pasuk in Hebrew is familiar to many of us: Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehilat Ya'akov -- When Moses charged us with the Torah/ As the heritage of the congregation of Jacob (Devarim 33:4).

The Midrashic literature offers two explanations of this phrase. On the one hand it is read as yerusha, meaning inheritance. We can certainly relate to the Torah as an inheritance – it is something that we receive from our parents and teachers and that we hope to pass onto the next generation. The same can be said for the land of

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on Page 2)

Pay Attention to the Man Behind the Curtain

By Yael Marks '14

The name of this week's portion – Va'era – is telling of its contents. Va'era contains the root "ro'eh" which means "see" and also "show". This portion is all about seeing and showing. It seems that almost every event in this portion has a subtext- there is more than what you see. We open with G-d telling Moshe that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew G-d as "El Shaddai" but not as Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei, the four-letter name of G-d that we traditionally don't pronounce out loud. Rashi explains that the forefathers not knowing G-d by this name means that they did not see G-d as one who fulfills promises. However, the Israelites will now see G-d this way because G-d has remembered the covenant that was made with the forefathers – their nation will settle in the land of Canaan and will be fruitful and multiply. So here is our first event of duality – G-d as a fulfiller of promises and G-d as a forgetter of promises. This begs the question – why is G-d only fulfilling the promise now? Wouldn't that be risking a reputation as the only G-d worth following? We'll put this question aside for a moment.

The next odd part of the portion is where the lineage of Moshe and Aharon is listed interrupting a really exciting part of the story. The list starts with Reuven and his sons, then Shimon and his sons, then Levi and his sons and grandsons. All we really need to know is Levi's

(Yael Marks continued on Page 2)

Israel. We feel connected to the land because of its history – and by extension our history as a nation and individuals – were formed and will continued to be formed by events that unfold in Eretz Yisrael. A second midrashic tradition tells us that we should not read the word as morasha but as me'orasa – a betrothal. As the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni explains the Torah is betrothed to the Jewish people. We sell ourselves, and the Torah, short if we relate to it only as an inheritance. As a betrothal we are able to show our passion, commitment and dynamic relationship that we have to the Torah. Just as one's love for his/her betrothed grows and is enriched over the course of engagement, marriage and spending their lives together, so too our relationship to the Torah is capable of growing and intensifying every moment. The use of the phrase morasha in connection to Eretz Yisrael teaches that our connection to the land of Israel – and to the State of Israel – must also be compared to the love and passion one has for one's fiancé. Our commitment and concern for Israel is absolute.

The Sefat Emet comments that both understandings of the word morasha are correct. Thus we must relate to the Torah and to Israel as both an inheritance and a betrothal. As he explains, "Torah really is a gift within the souls of Israel, but it is only as the person prepares himself that the light of Torah is renewed for him." As an inheritance, we have access to the Torah within our souls. But it will not remain within ourselves and our souls if we do not act on it. Just as both partners in a relationship must continually contribute to the relationship in order for it to grow and not become stale, our relationships with Torah and Israel become stagnant if we do not work on them. In this vein, the Chizkuni says that the verse from Devarim relating to the Torah should be read in reverse order: "Moshe charged us with the Torah in order that it become a morasha to the congregation of Jacob." When it comes to both Torah and Eretz Yisrael it us up to us to ensure that they are a morasha in both senses of the term.

Rabbi Kaplowitz challenges Rocky to a dance showdown!

family tree because that's where Moshe and Aharon come from, so why start with Reuven? Perhaps whoever is reading this book needs to be absolutely sure that we're talking about the same family we've been talking about for many chapters now. These are the stars and grains of sand G-d promised to the forefathers – these are the people who will make up the Jewish nation. Also, we are confirming here that the Moshe who was pulled out of the water, spent some years in the palace, ran away to Midian, spoke to G-d at the burning bush, etc. is the same Moshe who is the son of Amram who, according to midrashic traditions, was a leader in the Israelite community. Moshe comes from an important family and deserves respect as a leader. This is yet another show – a show of status. Not only is Moshe appointed by G-d, but it also makes sense that this Moshe is a leader, coming from "good stock".

Of course, the showiest show of all – the first seven plagues and the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. I'm always struck by the irony of this parsha. G-d and Moshe know that Pharaoh's heart will be hardened – Pharaoh won't feel the fear that would be natural to feel because G-d wants to "multiply my signs and marvels in the land of Egypt" (7:3). G-d explicitly says, "this is all a show". What is going on here?

I think the intended audience for this show is the Israelites. G-d did not fulfill the promise during the forefathers' lifetimes because that was not the point. Knowledge of G-d in the world cannot be spread and established with only three people. Moshe makes the same point later in the Torah when G-d wants to eradicate the entire Jewish people and start over with Moshe. Moshe tells G-d that a nation cannot stand on one foot – the presence of G-d cannot be brought into the world by one person alone. So G-d is fulfilling the promise now and making a big show out of it so that every Israelite will experience the same process that Avraham experienced in discovering G-d. If G-d can be discovered by several million people there is a better chance that G-d's presence can be brought into the world because more people are involved in the task.

Nowadays there is no one speaking on behalf of G-d and nothing that we can objectively say indicates G-d's presence. Hopefully we can nevertheless continue to be B'nei Yisrael – children of G-d-wrestlers, and experience a discovery of G-d that will help make our lives and the lives of others more meaningful.

Yael has one of the best voices north of the mechitza.

Pharaoh's Heart

By Jillian Hoenig '15

Va'era presents us with a troubling scenario: (Shemot 7:3) "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt." G-d seems to be directing Pharaoh's actions. Where is Pharaoh's free will?

Perhaps we can derive an answer by looking further in the perek. After Moshe retracts the plague of frogs, it is not G-d who hardens Pharaoh's heart, but Pharaoh himself. As pasuk 8:28 says, "Pharaoh hardened his heart," (Pharaoh being the subject and not Hashem). Pharaoh began hardening his heart, and Hashem continued it. We can see that only after Pharaoh initiated his downfall did G-d facilitate it.

In whatever man sets out to accomplish, G-d assists him. For this reason there exists the concept, which is brought down in Perkei Avot (4:2), that a mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and an aveira leads to another aveira. For one who performs a mitzvah, G-d makes the next one easier or more accessible, as He does for one who chas v'shalom performs an aveira. Once man sets out in a direction, whichever direction that may be, G-d opens the path to him.

This concept extends even further to say that not only does G-d facilitate man's strivings when he sets out for something, but man must necessarily start the action.

This concept is hinted to in Bereishit. In Bereishit 2:5-6 the pasuk says, "G-d had not caused it to rain upon the earth... But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground." Rain did not start as rain, but as dew—meaning, it did not originate from the heavens, but the earth. These pasukim, by using the image of rain, which according to Rabbi Leibtag can represent divine intervention, are perhaps suggesting the notion that it must start with man on earth, like the dew, and not in the heavens, like the rain. In fact, right after the pasuk mentions that there had not yet been rain, it adds that there was no man to work the ground. The pasuk is perhaps insinuating the above mentioned idea, that without man nothing can go on in this world.

This idea can possibly give us a better grasp on

the elusive concept of tefillah. Tefillah is the vehicle through which we take the first step so that G-d may take the second. Tefillah is the beginning of the process.

Another idea I heard from Kyra Borenstein, my roommate, who said something interesting about the parsha. She said that G-d was not necessarily causing Pharaoh to act against his free will. She explained that humans can have two conflicting wants at any given moment—the first being their desire for something that will bring them instant gratification, and the second their desire to do what will be best for them in the long-run. G-d was not suppressing Pharaoh's free will, but subduing one of his desires so that he could be free to act upon the second one—his inclination to keep the Jews enslaved.

Have a great Shabbos, and I hope that we will all be zoche to merit the reward for doing mitzvot, as defined subsequent to the above mentioned line in Perkei Avot, of more mitzvot.

Jillian's picture was once published in Torat Emet because she is an eishes chayis (but don't Hillel).

Snakes on a Pyramid

By Benny Sternberg '14

Snakes. Awesome creatures, yet, according to that Big Dude in heaven, they have their wily ways. It all starts with the classic story of Eve in the Garden of Eden, tempted by a snake to break G-d's will. The snake is cursed, made to be the downtrodden animal of all animals. The snake, in this story, is the very representation of non-belief in G-d.

The tale of Ol' Slytherin does not end there. The snake is referenced as the temptation to forget G-d several times in the Torah. In Deuteronomy 32, 33, G-d says that the foreign nation's wine is the venom of serpents, and the cruel poison of asps. These non-believers drink wine, but they will not help the nations, doomed to be destroyed by the hand of G-d.

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Am Yisrael Chai

By Marcie Lieberman '13

In this week's Parsha, the Children of Israel go through a process of regaining their identity as a nation and individuals that is similar to the process experienced by those who have gone on Birthright. G-d introduces himself to Moshe at the burning bush by saying, I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob with [the name] Almighty G-d, but [with] My name Y-H-W-H, I did not become known to them. One way of interpreting this pasuk is to say that Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov all viewed and experienced Hashem as Elokim, a name that implies judgment, not mercy. They accomplished much, and suffered much within their pursuits in life, and through their suffering attained great heights in character.

Another way to look at this pasuk is to say that while Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were very great, they did not "know" Hashem, in that they did not have the same level of prophecy as Moshe, who spoke to Hashem face to face. Therefore, despite or because of their efforts, the Children of Israel lost all of their customs, including circumcision; nonetheless, they kept their names and their clothes. Despite losing all of their customs, they remembered their faith, and in thought kept their Jewish Identity alive. This is similar to the applicants of Birthright; in order to be accepted into the program, you do not have to be practicing Jewish customs, but you must have some semblance of a connection to the Jewish nation in order to apply. Through their knowledge of faith in the past, even though they did not participate in formal customs, the Israelites began the process of becoming a nation of G-d through those ideas.

One may connect these two ideas by saying that the potential for the nation's faith was always present, but they needed to be ready to truly see and know G-d. Much like the patriarchs attained heights through suffering, the Children of Israel went through the same process in order to become a nation of G-d. For years, much like the forefathers, they were exposed only to Hashem's aspect of judgment, Elokim, and not Y-H-W-H, Hashem's aspect of mercy

Now Hashem reveals this aspect to Moses, saying that it is time to begin taking the Children of Israel on the process towards becoming a true nation of

G-d. This required years of bondage because to concede to a higher power, one must lose their sense of self-importance built around society's definitions, and consider that G-d knows them better than they know themselves. G-d quite significantly told Moses that he heard their cries. He had been listening all of these years, and now he is showing that he is committed to the new relationship, and the Children of Israel are committed in turn, as they have been calling out to G-d and have kept their names and clothing, and eventually having Nachshon ben Aminadav jumping into the Sea, trusting that G-d is worth the commitment and faith.

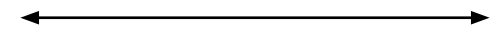
Commitment is also at the forefront of being a part of Birthright. A Birthright " camper" must submit two applications, must attend an interview, and must deposit money and trust that they will send the money back to you. To go on the trip you must be committed to doing so, or else you can't even begin. Moreover, you must trust the staff of Birthright that whatever effort you expend to become a part of the program, they will pay it back, and you will reap rewards for your efforts.

For many years we enjoyed the mercies of G-d in the desert, and in Egypt, being completely surrounded by miracles. However, after this period, upon entering into the land of Israel, the question is even though G-d isn't fending for you to the same extent, does your faith continue? The Israelites saw G-d perform 10 plagues and the splitting of the sea, and birthright participants have 10 days of learning about Israel and discussions afterwards about the Jewish identity. They were able to be introspective and connect to the wonders of Israel for that period. Once they left, the test remained if they still felt connected.

Even after the years of bondage, did the Israelites believe that Hashem knows them, more than they know themselves? Eventually this proved to be true when the nation finally declared, "We will do and we will listen," showing that they comprehended that G-d understood them, and they were committed to serving G-d as a nation. However, it is important to point out that G-d introduces himself in

(Marcie Lieberman continued from Page 4)
three ways: as Y-H-W-H, a name not previously known to anyone before Moshe, as "The G-d of your forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov," and as, "G-d of the Children of Israel." In the first name, the name not previously known to individuals, G-d is asserting Himself as the G-d of the world, not connected to particular beings or

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When Moses meets God for the first time, at the famous scene of the burning bush, G-d commands him to throw down his staff. It became a snake. After grasping it by its tail, it became a staff again. Of all wonders to choose, why the creation of a snake? Rav Binyamin, of the great shtetl of Buffalo, claims that it shows that G-d is so infinitely powerful, that he creates the very idea of non-belief in him.

The snake symbolism reaches a peak in this week's parsha. As instructed by G-d, Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh and demand for the release of the Jewish people, showing the power of God through a miracle, the turning of Moses' staff into a snake. Pharaoh's magicians are also able to turn their staffs into snakes, however G-d gets the final word and has Moses' snake consume the magicians' snakes.

The snake wielded by Moses in this case, according to a prominent commentator (not Rav Binyamin), was actually made out of wood. It was Moses' staff, not a snake, that ate Pharaoh's snakes. This wood references trees, namely Etz Chayim, the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, which in the famous prayer said on Shabbat mornings, references the Torah. Thus, Moses' staff represents G-d in His infinite power, combined with the beauty of the Torah, consuming the non-belief of Pharaoh. We must trust, accordingly, in G-d and the Torah, to conquer the evil that can creep within us, though Mace Windu can help too. commandments.

Benny is shomer shabbos because of Settlers of Catan.

Mitzvah of the Week: Judging Others Favorably

By Daniel Kasdan '13

Source: "In righteousness shall you judge your fellow" (Vayikra 19:15).

The simple meaning of this pasuk is that judges should be unbiased in court proceedings, showing favoritism to neither litigant in a given case. Chazal, however, derive a fundamental principle from this verse: "Judge your fellow to the side of merit" (Shevuos 30a). The rabbis thus extend the commandment to all Jews, imploring us to judge each other favorably.

While this may sound like a fairly simple task, it is arguably one of the most neglected mitzvot in the entire Torah. Too often do we find a Jew who is meticulous in his observance of Shabbos and Kashrut, yet has no qualms about assuming the worst in his peers. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim emphasizes that one is obligated to study the halachot governing mitzvot *bein adam l'chaveiro* (between man and his fellow) with the same vigor as he or she would study all other halachot (see his introduction to "Kevod Shamayim").

But why do we continue to judge others in a negative light? Why are we so quick to condemn each other's actions as unconscionable? According to Rav Hanoach Teller, this is because we utilize a double-standard: "we judge others by their actions, yet we judge ourselves by our intentions."

A simple example will help clarify Rav Teller's assertion. Suppose you show up late to davening one morning (shocker, I know). How do you rationalize it? "Well, I had such a busy night—I had a really long BOO Board meeting, then I had to finish a giant research paper which I had hardly started, and then I had to spend a couple hours skyping that 'special someone.' By the time I went to sleep, it was almost 5:00am. I really wanted to show up to davening on time, but I was just so exhausted. So G-d understands why I was a few minutes late."

And what do you say when you see someone else walk into davening a few minutes late one morning? "Gee, that guy is such a bad Jew! He simply doesn't care at all about davening!"

Do you see what you did there? You judged someone else by their actions (showing up late), while you judged yourself by your intentions (wanting to show up on time). Now what if I told you that your friend showed up late to davening that day because he had spent half the night in the

emergency room with his grandmother who suffered a massive stroke? Would that change your perception of him?

While my example may have been extreme (and possibly not so relevant), the point still stands. We view each other in a negative light because we choose to find fault in actions that could just as easily be interpreted positively. We choose to see the worst in people.

It would thus do us well to internalize the advice of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah: “Judge every man to the side of merit” (Avot 1:6). After all, ordinary people have a *chezkat kashrut* (a presumption of innocence), and any ambiguous behavior should be viewed in a positive light. As Rav Shlomo Katz so brilliantly told us last semester, “none of us have a clue what is really going on in each other’s lives.”

And what if there is no way to view a specific instance positively? What if the evidence against someone is so overwhelming that vindicating that person would be nothing short of naïve? Then a more literal translation of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah’s statement may come in handy. He had told us to judge “kol ha’adam” favorably (Avot 1:6). This expression is generally translated as “all people,” meaning that we should judge everyone in a positive light. But more literally, “kol ha’adam” actually means “the entirety of a person” (see Irving Bunim’s commentary *Ethics from Sinai*). In other words, even when a person does something objectively bad, we need to take a step back, to analyze that person as a whole, to judge this single incident in the context of the totality of that person. If we can manage to do that, then one minor flaw will seem insignificant when compared to the person’s countless positive qualities.

As we enter the new semester with a fresh start, we should keep this mitzvah in mind. The next time someone does something unreasonable—something offensive or hurtful—we should strive to view the situation (or at least the person) in a positive light. Have a good shabbos!

nations. In the second name, G-d is qualifying Himself as a G-d over individuals, as individuals serve and believe in Him. And with the last name, G-d is qualifying that He is a G-d over a nation, the nation of Israel.

Within the Israelites period of Bondage, we were purely a nation, operating under suffering, crying out to G-d as one. However, as we went forwards in our relationship with G-d, we were not only having faith in the G-d of the Children of Israel, but the G-d of all of us as a collective. We were becoming committed to G-d as individuals within a nation, as the G-d of Avraham, Yiztchak and Yaakov.

On Birthright you are on a guided trip with peers which is said to be important because we learn about ourselves from one another, as individuals. We also experience being a nation and a community by connecting to those on our trip. Your friendships from the trip are so concentrated because you become connected to people not just as individuals, but also as a part of a nation. After you return home and recover from whatever illness which was being passed around, and leave the world where Judaism is forced into your everyday life, you enter the world of autonomy. You must choose what your personal connection to Judaism will look like. However, one thing learned from the story of the Jews becoming a nation, and from the Birthright experience is that if you lose faith, as a Jew, the potential is always there. Hashem is always with us wanting us to become connected as individuals and as a nation, no matter how trying the circumstances might be. As it says in the Shema: “Listen Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One.” There is plural and singular, emphasizing that as individuals within a family, there are always opportunities to listen and grow. Everyone has an endless potential to connect and reconnect to G-d, and to discover their Jewish Identity as an individual of a nation.

Marcie would like to thank Michelle and Atara for all their help.

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