



## Wembley Synagogue

וְאָרָא

### Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Vaera

ה' -G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am G-d'. (6:2) This is the second verse of the sixth chapter, and it is a continuation of Hashem's response to Moshe for his sharp criticism. Why does the first verse of the chapter start with the words "*vayomer Hashem*" — "Hashem said [to Moshe]" — while this pasuk starts "*vayedabeir Elokim*"?

Moshe made a double complaint to Hashem:

1. "Why have you done evil to this people; why have you sent me?" (5:22). Since I came things only got worse for them.
2. "You created a chilul Hashem — a desecration of Your Holy Name; since I came to Pharaoh '*ledabeir bishmecha*,' to speak in Your Name, he did evil to this people. Hence, the world will not respect Your Eminence because they know that I spoke in Your Name and Pharaoh disregarded it and nothing occurred to him."

The word "*amar*" — "said" — implies a mild form of speech, and the word "*dabeir*" — "spoke" — connotes a stronger form of speech. Hashem's four letter name indicates mercy while the name *Elokim* denotes Hashem in His attribute of justice.

Consequently, the different terms used in the verses indicate the tone of Hashem's response to both of Moshe's complaints.

1. Regarding Moshe's concern that a chilul Hashem had taken place, "*Vayomer Hashem el Moshe*" — "G-d said to Moshe" — in a soft and gentle tone, "I appreciate your concern. However, you need not worry, because very soon 'you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out,' (6:1) and there will then be a tremendous *kiddush Hashem* — sanctification of My Name."
2. Regarding Moshe's other complaint, "Why have you done evil to this people; sending me to Pharaoh only made it worse for them," "*Vayedabeir Elokim*" — He spoke like a judge — and admonished Moshe in a harsh tone for doubting His infinite love for the Jewish people and trustworthiness to redeem them. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וּמֹשֶׁה - It was Aharon and Moshe (6:26)

In the first verse, Aharon's name appears before Moshe's, but in the second they are reversed. What is the meaning of this switch? Rabbeinu Bachya suggests that the change shows that Aharon was greater than Moshe in some respects, while Moshe was greater than Aharon in others. Aharon was older than Moshe and so deserved greater respect than Moshe, but Moshe was a greater prophet. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein presents another answer that teaches us a powerful lesson. He explains that the two names are switched because they really were equal. Moshe and Aharon did not necessarily reach the same level, but both exerted themselves to the greatest extent, reached their potential, and accomplished their respective purposes. Due to this, they were considered equal, and it did not really matter which came first. We learn from this that it does not matter what we accomplish as long as we put in our best effort and do whatever we can.

וְאֶנִּי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה - And I will harden Pharaoh's heart (7:3)

Many commentators raise the question that if Hashem was the cause of Pharaoh's stubbornness, why was he punished? The fundamental basis of reward and punishment is dependent on free will, which was apparently taken from Pharaoh in this instance.

*Rambam* says that there are instances when wickedness is so severe and deep-rooted that Hashem insists on exacting full punishment from the wicked person. To ensure this, Hashem removes that person's ability to repent, which He ordinarily provides to all people. Thus, Pharaoh, who of his own free will had imposed slavery and terrible decrees upon the Jews, would definitely be punished, as Hashem eliminated his ability to do teshuvah. *Ramban* seems to agree with this position, citing a Midrash that states that when Hashem warns someone repeatedly to repent and he does not do so, He will lock him out of the door of repentance, to punish him for his sins.

*Sforno* maintains that if there were any possibility that Pharaoh would fully repent and be truly remorseful subjugating himself to Hashem's will, his repentance would have been accepted. However, compliance to let the Jews leave based on fear of loss of his

kingdom would not suffice. Therefore Hashem removed his ability to accede to Moshe's demand.

וַיִּפֶן פַּרְעֹה וַיָּבֹא אֶל בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא שָׁת לְבוֹ גַם לְזֹאת - And Pharaoh turned and went to his house. And he didn't pay attention to this as well (7:23)

All the water in Egypt changed to blood and the people had no water to drink. Understandably, this had great ramifications, as it affected the entire economy as well. Yet, Pharaoh paid no attention to all this!

Why? The Egyptians were able to obtain water from the Jews, but only if they paid for it. Since Pharaoh raised Moshe, it was considered as though he had paid for his own water supply. Therefore, the water in Pharaoh's home did not change to blood.

Pharaoh did not pay attention to the problem because he was not personally affected by it. (Source: Meshech Chochma)

וַיִּרְא פַּרְעֹה כִּי הִיָּדָה הַרְחֹקָה.....וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֲלֵיהֶם - But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, (he hardened his heart) and did not listen to them. (8:11)

When Pharaoh begged Moshe to take away the frogs he said, "*va'ashalchah et ha'am*" – "And I will send the people away" (8:4): Why didn't he keep his word?

Pharaoh was uncertain whether Moshe was really Hashem's representative to redeem the Jews or merely a magician with unusual spiritual powers. Pharaoh was totally evil and had no intention of freeing the Jewish people. He therefore decided to put Moshe through a test and determine the source of Moshe's power.

Pharaoh called Moshe and lied, "If you remove the frogs, I will send away the people." Pharaoh thought, "If Moshe is really Hashem's messenger, he will know that I am lying and will not remove the frogs. If he does remove the frogs, then I will know that he is merely a great magician." Pharaoh concluded that Moshe had failed the test and became even more adamant in refusing to free the Jewish people. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

כִּי בַפְעַם הַזֹּאת אֲנִי שֹׁלֵחַ אֶת כָּל מִגְפְּתַי - Because this time I am sending (a plague equivalent to) all My plagues (9:14)

The Torah describes the plague of hail as "all My plagues." The Vilna Gaon notes that Hashem used three different agents to punish three different groups of sinners: Noach's generation with water, The Generation of the Dispersal (דֹר הַפְּלִגָּה) with wind and S'dom with fire. The plagues that the Egyptians suffered contained these same three elements. The first two plagues – blood and frogs came from the River Nile's water; the plague of locusts was brought by the wind (10:13) and the plague of boils came about through fire (9:8). However, the plague of hail was created through all of the above. The hail comprised of ice with fire in the centre of each large cube. Wind also played a role, as the verse says (9:13) "and Hashem brought Thunder" (which is caused by wind) and hail. In this way the plague of hail contained elements of "all My plagues" – water, wind and fire. (Source: A Gut Vort)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מֹשֶׁה כְּצִאתִי אֶת הָעִיר אֶפְרֹשׂ אֶת כַּפַּי אֶל ה' - Moshe said to him (Pharaoh), "when I leave the city I will spread out my hands (in prayer) to Hashem (9:29)

The Midrash quoted by Rashi, explains that Moshe did not want to pray within the city since it contained many idols. Therefore, Moshe told Pharaoh that he would pray for him after leaving the city. Since the Torah only mentions this here, it implies that Moshe left the city before praying only with this plague. The question is why didn't Moshe leave the city to pray when the other plagues occurred? Wasn't the city filled with idols even then? Rashi points out that the Egyptians worshipped their sheep (Bereshit 46:34). At the time of the other plagues, the sheep grazed in the fields outside of the city. Therefore, Moshe had to pray in the city. However, before the plague of *barad* (hail) all those who heeded Moshe's advice and feared Hashem brought their sheep into their houses, which were in the city (9:20). Therefore Moshe could no longer pray in the city. Any sheep that had remained out of doors were killed in the plagues (9:25). Thus Moshe could freely pray outside the city (Source: Chanukas Hatorah quoted in Shabbos Delights)

Shabbat Shalom!



**Shabbat starts 4.12pm**



**Shabbat ends: 5.20pm**

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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