

TorahFax: Vaeira
Rabbi Zalmen Marazov

Monday, Tevet 27, 5784 / January 8, 2024

This week's Parsha, Va'eira, begins with G-d commanding Moshe to tell the Jewish people, "I am G-d, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment; and I will take you to me for a people and I will be to you a G-d... And I will bring you to The Land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I will give it to you as an inheritance. I am G-d."

However, when Moshe spoke to the Jewish people and gave them G-d's message, "They didn't listen to Moshe due to impatience of spirit and cruelty of their bondage."

Following this, G-d says to Moshe, "Go speak to Pharaoh, King of Egypt that he shall send away the Children of Israel from his land."

Q. Why does G-d order Moshe to command Pharaoh to free the Children of Israel immediately after we are told that the Children of Israel, didn't listen to Moshe due to impatience of spirit?

A. We can understand this with the following story about Rabbi Schneur Zalmen, the first Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch (1745-1813). His Yartzeit was last Friday, 24th of Tevet. Rabbi Schneur Zalmen had a Chasid who was a wealthy wine merchant. Once, the Chasid was notified that two hundred wagons of wine were confiscated by Russian officials at the border. Upon hearing this he fainted. He had invested everything he owned in this transport and now he would be ruined. They tried to revive him, but each time he remembered his misfortune he fainted again.

When Rabbi Schneur Zalmen heard this, he said, "Tell the merchant not to worry. His wine is safe."

The merchant was a strong believer in his Rebbe and as soon as he heard that the Rebbe said that his wagons of wine were safe, he calmed down. Indeed, they were found safe near the border.

The Chassidim asked the Rebbe, "You claim that you don't perform any miracles, yet we see that you knew that the merchant's wine was safe! Isn't this a miracle?"

The Rebbe answered, "This is no miracle! Our sages tell us that G-d never gives a person more pain than he can handle. When I heard that his suffering was beyond his level of endurance, I knew that it was a mistake and that his wine must be safe!"

This explains the above question. When G-d saw that the pain and suffering of the Jewish people was beyond endurance and tolerance, to the extent that they didn't even listen to Moshe about their redemption, G-d immediately told Moshe to go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Children of Israel out of Egypt!

This is a very important lesson for us. Whenever we are faced with a difficult situation, we have to remember that G-d doesn't test us unless He gives us the ability to handle it.

Tuesday, Tevet 28, 5784 / January 9, 2024

One of the pillars of Jewish faith, as formulated by Maimonides in his Thirteen Principles of Faith, is: "The Creator, blessed be His name, is the creator and ruler of all created beings and that He alone has made, does make, and ever will make all things."

As a result, there is the ancient old question: "If everything is from G-d, then why do good things happen to bad people and bad things to good people?" So many have struggled with and been bothered by this question throughout the generations. The following story from the Midrash sheds light on the above question.

The Midrash tells that one day, as Moshe was watching his father-in-law's sheep, he saw a soldier ride his horse to a stream. The soldier got off his mount to have a drink, got back on his horse and rode off. Moshe noticed that as the soldier dismounted, he accidentally dropped a sack filled with money.

Shortly after the soldier rode off, a young shepherd boy came to the stream with his flock of sheep. As he was leaving, the young boy noticed the sack and opened it. He happily gave thanks to G-d for sending him this treasure, saying, "Now I won't have to work for my cruel boss anymore. There is enough here to support myself and my mother for the rest of our lives!"

After the young shepherd left, a beggar came to the stream. He ate a few hard pieces of bread, drank some water, and fell asleep on the grass.

As Moshe was watching, the soldier returned looking for his sack of money. Not finding it, he woke up the poor man and demanded, "Give me back my money if you value your life!" The poor man denied having his money. The soldier went into a rage and killed the poor man. After searching the poor man's bag and not finding his money, the soldier gave up and rode off.

Moshe, who saw all this, turned to G-d and asked, "How could you let all this happen? Where is justice? Why did the soldier lose the money? Why did the young shepherd find the money? And why was the beggar killed?"

G-d answered Moshe, "You only saw part of the picture. Now I will show you what happened before, and you will see that My ways are just!" G-d showed Moshe the following vision: A father was walking with his young son when all of a sudden, he was attacked by a beggar. The beggar killed the father, took his money, and fled. A soldier stood by and watched this happen but didn't come to the rescue. As the beggar fled the scene, he lost the money. The soldier picked up the sack with the money and kept it.

G-d told Moshe, "The father who was killed was the parent of the young shepherd boy who now found the sack of money. The poor man killed by the soldier at the stream was the same beggar who killed the father of the young shepherd. The soldier you saw that lost the money near the stream is the soldier who found the money that the beggar dropped as he was fleeing."

"Now you see how just My ways are!" G-d said to Moshe. "The poor man who murdered the boy's father was executed and the money went back to the young shepherd to whom it rightfully belongs!"

"Righteous are all Your ways," Moshe admitted. "You are the true Judge Who does true justice!"

Thursday, Shevat 1, 5784 / January 11, 2024

Today (Thursday), is Rosh Chodesh - the first day of the new Hebrew month, Shevat. It was on this day when Moshe reviewed the entire Torah with the Jewish people before they went into the Promised Land, as told in the beginning of the last book of the Torah, Devarim.

Q. At what point did G-d command the Jewish people to observe the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh?

A. The commandments were given at Mount Sinai, which took place 50 days after the Exodus. However, the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh was given to the Jewish people two weeks before the Exodus, while they were still in Egypt. It was the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people.

This mitzvah is found in next week's Parsha, Bo. The Torah tells us that on the first day (Rosh Chodesh) Nissan, G-d told Moshe and Aaron in the Land of Egypt, saying: "This month (Nissan) shall be to you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the months of the year."

The Hebrew calendar is a lunar based calendar. The moon has a twenty-nine-and-a-half-day cycle from its appearance to its next sighting. During the first half of the Hebrew month, it keeps getting bigger. At the middle point it is full and then begins to get smaller again, until its next re-appearance.

Rosh Chodesh is celebrated on the day when the moon starts its cycle of rebirth. It is not always visible on Rosh Chodesh. From Rosh Chodesh on it gets fuller each night, until the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month when the full moon is visible.

The first day of Pesach and Sukkot are on the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month. For this reason, on the first day of Pesach and Sukkot there is always a full moon.

The sages compare life to a revolving wheel. Rabbi Shalom DovBer Shneerson, fifth leader of Chabad-Lubavitch, explained the comparison: Both those at the top of the wheel of fortune and those at the bottom often exhibit a lack of wisdom.

Those at the top may glow with self-satisfaction, even mocking those less fortunate. However, they would be wiser to realize that the wheel may turn at any moment and then they could find themselves lower than those upon whom they previously looked down!

On the other hand, those at the bottom may bemoan their cruel fate. Yet, they too, would be wiser to realize that their fortunes are merely an expression of life's revolving wheel. The very fact that now they are at rock bottom is a clear sign that at the wheel's very next turn, their fortunes will improve!

Rosh Chodesh is a lesson that just as the moon has its cycles, so too, the Jewish people will have their days of glory and times of difficulty. We must never lose hope. Even in the darkest days, we know that the bright days are sure to come. May they we merit the bright days of Moshiach very soon

Friday, Shevat 2, 5784 / January 12, 2024

In this week's Parsha, Va'eira, G-d commands Moshe to bring encouragement to the Jewish people who were enslaved in Egypt. G-d tells Moshe to tell the Children of Israel, "I am the L-rd and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment; and I will take you to me for a people and I will be to you a G-d..."

G-d then tells Moshe, "Go speak to Pharaoh, King of Egypt that he shall send away the Children of Israel from his land." When Pharaoh refused, he was punished with ten plagues.

Q. How is the above-mentioned verse connected to the four cups we drink at the Passover Seder?

A. The four cups of wine at the Seder commemorate the four expressions of redemption mentioned in the Parsha in connection with the liberation from Egypt: 1) I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 2) I will deliver you from their bondage. 3) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment. 4) I will take you to me for a people.

Q. How many of the 210 years that Jews lived in Egypt were they enslaved by the Egyptians?

A. 116 years. Explanation: The enslavement began only after the last of Yaakov's children died. Yaakov's third son, Levi, lived the longest. He died at the age of 137. He was 43 when he came to Egypt and lived there 94 years. Thus, if we deduct 94 from 210, we are left with 116. This is the total amount of years that Jews were enslaved by the Egyptians.

However, the very harsh and "bitter" enslavement was 86 years. It began at the time when Miriam was born. In fact, she was named "Miriam," which is a combination of two words; Mar & Yam – which means, Bitter & Sea. She was named Miriam for the bitter enslavement and the terrible decree of drowning every male in the Nile River.

Q. How long was it from the first plague until the Exodus?

A. Less than one year.

Q. Before each plague, Moshe warned Pharaoh about the upcoming plague. How long was the warning time and how long did the actual plague last?

A. The warning time for each plague was three weeks. The plague itself lasted one week. Except for the last plague, the death of the first born, which began at midnight and Jews left the next day.

Q. How old was Moshe, Aaron and their sister, Miriam, when they led the Jewish people out of Egypt?

A. Moshe was 80; Aaron 83 and Miriam 86.