

# PARSHAS VAEIRA

תשפ"ו

Hashem tells Moshe Rabbeinu that the purpose of the 10 makkos is to make Hashem real to people. The main problem that exists in our modern world is the difficulty in making Hashem real. This difficulty affects our davening and many other things.

Confronting Hashem in davening means talking properly and dressing properly.

The President of Ukraine came to the White House in battle fatigues and the President of the United States threw him out, because when you come to see the President of the United States, you come dressed properly and not in battle fatigues.

Shulchan Aruch begins with the goal of waking up like a lion. We are supposed to say *אני לפניך*. When you think about it, you are saying that Hashem is right before you. But in our technological society, we don't really believe Hashem is real. We think the world just developed on its own by some accident. We want to live a life of *hefker* – controlled by science and medicine to the point where we don't need Hashem in our lives.

But we say Hashem is the 'Rofeh cholim'. He created a world that functions consistently according to laws of nature. It is an incredible system of *chochmah*, but Hashem is the One doing it – making everything run according to those rules He sets up. But it is a challenge to keep this in mind while there are so many technological advancements and developments that we are constantly surrounded by.

Hashem tells Moshe that He is starting a process which at the end, Klal Yisroel will stand at Har Sinai and accept the Torah. But this is going to be a long, difficult process because for many generations, Klal Yisroel has become integrated into Egyptian society and worshipped Egyptian idols. But on the other hand, they retained their identity as Jews by spending Shabbos studying the megillos given to them by the Ovov. Hashem's challenge is to lift this nation of mixed culture out of all this confusion and give them a Torah. Not all of them are going to make it.

Hashem comes to Moshe, and sends him to tell Klal Yisroel that they will be taken out. The people heard this and believed him. Then Moshe comes to Pharaoh to demand their release and Pharaoh realizes he has failed in taking control of their minds. He tries harder by making them work twice as hard.

Klal Yisroel see that things are getting harder and start to doubt Moshe's promise of freedom from slavery. Moshe complains to Hashem that He has made things worse instead of better! Hashem assures Moshe that the *geulah* will begin right now with the makkos.

Throughout this parsha of the makkos, the slavery has stopped. But people are slow to change their entire perspective on life.

The first makkah is an amazing event – the Nile turns to blood. Why is it amazing? The Egyptians had two main gods – the Nile and the sun. Moshe comes to them and says you worship the Nile because it is a source of life. But I'm going to turn the Nile into a source of death. It isn't just to make life difficult for the Egyptians. I am representing an absolute power that will show you that your gods have no power.

Then an unbelievable thing happens. After the Nile turns to blood, the *chartumim*, who are the priests of *avodo zoro* worshipping the Nile, show that they also can turn the Nile into blood – a source of death. After the Nile brings forth frogs, which wreak total havoc to

the Egyptians, these *chartumim* also bring out frogs from the Nile. But these were the priests of the cult of the Nile! They dedicated their lives to promoting worship of the Nile – and here they are making it into a source of death and destruction! Hashem is playing them for fools – tricking them into making their own religion into a laughingstock.

Then comes *kinim* – lice. The *chartumim* couldn't replicate this makkah. They couldn't generate life out of dust. Egypt is being shaken to the core. Moshe is representing an incredible power that they have never confronted before.

Then comes the next series of makkos – *שחין, דבר, ערוב*. These makkos make clear distinctions between Egyptians and Jews, which proves that Hashem isn't just a very great power of nature, but an intelligent power.

Then comes *מכת בכורות*, *חושך*, *ארבה*, *ברד*. These show that Hashem is greater than any previously observed power of nature.

*Borod* is a *nes* within a *nes* – fire contained by ice. Nature is being torn apart. Egypt is being shattered to pieces. Klal Yisroel, who have been waffling between *avodo zoro* and Hashem, are finally starting to wake up.

The makkah of *choshech* blocks out the second major god of the Egyptians – the sun.

But 80% of Klal Yisroel die during this makkah. After all of this they do not want to leave. These makkos show us that people are stuck in their ways and simply don't want to change. They are used to their regular pattern of life and can't adjust to a radically new reality that is coming. When you see the *emes* staring you in the face, you have to change or you will be tragically left behind.

Being involved in a lot of *kiruv* during my life, I once heard a powerful line that stuck with me for many years. This person said, "I see the *emes* is ready for me, but I don't know if I'm ready for the *emes*."

Having a relationship with Hashem and becoming a member of His chosen nation means leaving your comfort zone and exposing yourself to a whole different world. In high school, *bochurim* aren't really exposed to this kind of intense, personal relationship with Hashem. You have *limudei Kodesh* and *limudei chol* and it's just a bunch of different subjects to study. *Gemara* and *Chumash* are side-by-side with history and math. When you come to a yeshiva just to learn, all of that is supposed to change. You are supposed to be coming to a new world, a new environment where you can create a deep and personal relationship with Hashem through Torah and *mitzvos*.

A yeshiva is a place where the center of your life is just Hashem and *limud Torah*. Twenty years from now, you are going to still be able to draw from your years in yeshiva, where you forged a new identity surrounding Torah and the deep ideas that Torah presents. How well did you integrate those ideas? How much did Torah become a part of your being?

People wonder why it's so bad for a *bochur* in yeshiva to go to the army. They do not realize that the army is a place where your entire focus and identity surrounds service to the nation, to the point where you are willing to give up your life in battle. You don't have any independent identity.

Klal Yisroel in Egypt are being asked to leave their Egyptian identity and become an entirely different human being. Contrasting to the blacks

who were freed from slavery in the U.S. Civil War, leaving Egypt didn't mean the Jews were becoming free. It meant becoming Hashem's people devoted exclusively to Him and His service. The blacks had no normal social life to return to in 1863 when they were freed, and this caused lasting psychological damage for generations. Klal Yisroel were in Egypt for so long that 80% of them didn't leave.

People don't usually want to change.

Pharaoh's heart was hardened by Hashem to enable him to keep taking more and more makkos. Hashem took away his free will to prevent him from folding under the pressure – in order to allow him to free Klal Yisroel without feeling pressure.

The night of makkas bechoros was a night of gilui Shechinoh. Klal Yisroel were able to sense Hashem's presence in a tangible way. Hashem was bringing Klal Yisroel through an entire process and only a select few were able to make it through. If you weren't able to renounce your Egyptian identity and be ready to accept a whole new identity, you weren't leaving Egypt.

Hashem is showing them who He is.

In the beginning of Parshas Bo, Hashem says I am doing this last series of makkos to make sure your children and grandchildren for the rest of history will hear about this. It will be so ingrained in your identity that you are now a different people. Hashem brought them to Har Sinai and gave them a whole culture and set of values and beliefs that is totally different than any other nation.

Hashem is showing Klal Yisroel that He is real. That He is running everything hands-on.

In Egypt, He showed us this openly with nissim and gilui Shechinoh. And now, he does it through manipulating nature in all kinds of hidden ways. But He is always there, causing everything to happen. We daven to Hashem because Hashem is real. In Shemoneh Esrei we ask Hashem for daas and parnossoh because He is the one who gives us daas and parnossoh, and no-one else!

The main lesson to take from Yetzias Mitzrayim is to make Hashem real in our lives.