It is written, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as E–l Sh-ddai, but with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them” (Exodus 6:3). Here Rashi writes, “I appeared – to the Patriarchs.” He continues by citing the Midrash’s statement that Hashem spoke to Moses in a harsh manner because he had asked, “Why have You done evil to this people?” (Exodus 5:22). The Midrash states that Hashem told Moses, “Oh, for those that are gone and cannot be replaced! Many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as E–l Sh-ddai, but I did not make it known to them that My Name is the L-RD, as I have told you, and still they did not criticize My ways…or asked Me, as you asked Me, what My Name is” (Shemot Rabba 6:4).

We need to understand the nature of Hashem’s charge here, in that He criticized Moses for having asked, “Why have You done evil to this people?” We also need to explain why Rashi writes, “I appeared – to the Patriarchs.” What is Rashi telling us here that we don’t already know, since the names of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are clearly mentioned in the verse?

We know that the Holy One, blessed be He, demands that everyone observe the ways of the holy Patriarchs, for they cleared a path for us to follow and established deeds that we must perform until the arrival of Mashiach (may he come speedily and in our days). We are forbidden to deviate from this path, be it by any degree, similar to the spirit of the verse: “You shall not deviate from the word they tell you, either right or left” (Deuteronomy 17:11). Hence the Torah recounts in great detail how the holy Patriarchs lived inside and outside of Eretz Israel, as well as how they conducted themselves in exile. All this is meant to motivate us to follow in their footsteps and to find a path among them in which we too can walk.

There is more. The holy Patriarchs certainly saw the entire future of the Jewish people, and they certainly prayed and continued praying to Hashem regarding every tragedy that strikes us. Therefore they definitely foresaw the Holocaust brought upon the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis, may their name be blotted out.

Hence Hashem told Moses: Why don’t you follow the path of the Patriarchs? They saw the entire future of their descendants in every generation and in every exile, including the Holocaust, and yet they never complained. They never asked, “Why have You done evil to this people,” nor did they ever say, “You have not saved Your people,” although they could have said such things. They were content with knowing that I will put an end to all suffering. As for you, to whom I revealed Myself by the Name Hashem – the Name denoting mercy, the Name that demonstrates that deliverance is near – you were precisely the one who did complain! You asked, “Why have You done evil to this people?” and you said, “You have not saved Your people!”

Even during the sacrifice of Isaac, Hashem continued, Abraham could have asked Me, “If I slaughter Isaac, what will become of Your promises? How will the Jewish people continue to exist?” Although human intelligence prompts us to ask such questions, Abraham was satisfied with the fact that Hashem revealed Himself to him. He did not ask any questions, nor did he express any doubts. This is what Rashi meant by stating, “I appeared – to the Patriarchs,” signifying that they were the fathers of the nation, men at the forefront of all things holy, and they did not ask any questions. As for Moses, he did not reach the level of the Patriarchs despite his greatness, for he questioned Hashem’s deeds.

This is why Hashem criticized Moses. He even went so far as to punish him for not having followed the path of self-control, the path laid out by Patriarchs for their descendants whenever ones sees troubles increasing from day to day. Everyone must realize that these things come from Hashem. Even in a time of trial, a person must control himself, show himself to be wholehearted with Hashem, and not ask questions.

Above all, we must learn a lesson from the story of Purim. Whenever people, including the king’s servants, prostrated themselves before Haman, the righteous Mordechai remained standing and neither bowed nor prostrated himself (Esther 3:2). Haman nevertheless did not kill Mordechai. He controlled his emotions, as it is written: “Haman restrained himself” (ibid. 5:10). Haman demonstrated great restraint here, for he knew that he would have killed Mordechai had he failed to control himself. In that case he would have had to answer to the king, even though Mordechai was a Jew and therefore liable to death, as were all Jews at the time. Despite this, Haman did not try to kill Mordechai, and instead he controlled himself until he reached his home.

How much more does this apply to us? If that evildoer could restrain himself and not kill Mordechai (despite the fact that he had greatly offended him) just so he wouldn’t have to explain to the king why he had killed Mordechai – the king’s favorite servant, having saved him from an assassination attempt by Bigtana and Teresh – then how much more should every Jew control himself when Hashem sends him trials? It is obvious that he should accept everything with love. He must not become angry with Hashem, but rather control himself by saying that everything Hashem does is for the good, since nothing evil can come from Him.

This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, criticized Moses for not having acted as the Patriarchs did. Instead he protested to Hashem and said, “Why have You done evil to this people?” Moses should have learned from the holy Patriarchs – to whom Hashem revealed Himself by the Name E–l Sh-ddai, not the Name that denotes mercy – for the Patriarchs did not protest. In doing so, they cleared a path for their descendants after them, the path of fearing nothing but Hashem and having complete faith in Him. Everyone must follow in the footsteps of the holy Patriarchs and not protest G-d’s actions. We must control ourselves and realize that everything the Merciful One does is for the good. When we understand this, we will experience good in this world and in the World to Come.
Pharaoh's Worries

_It is written, “The Children of Israel have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me?” (Exodus 6:12)._ 

The commentators have all questioned the nature of this logical inference. The fact that the Children of Israel did not listen to Moses was due to their exhaustion from heavy labor, which was not the case with Pharaoh!

From here we learn that the worries of the Children of Israel, their exhaustion and heavy labors, were nothing compared to the worries of Pharaoh!

Is it really easy for a person to spend all his days and nights trying to prove that he is divine? “My river is mine and I made it,” Pharaoh would say in asserting that he was the Creator. However he knew the truth, and he worked hard to conceal it. He had to hide everything that contradicted it and play out his role to the end. He had to find time to quickly sleep, when nobody would see him, for a god does not sleep. He also had to hide the fact that he ate, and everything else that proved he was made of flesh and blood.

Do we have the slightest idea of the suffering that such a person goes through, or the torment he endures? Pharaoh was deeply troubled, constantly afraid that people would discover his true identity, namely that he was a man like all the rest. Therefore the logical inference used by Moses was valid. If exhaustion and the forced labors of the Children of Israel prevented them from listening to him, how could that be compared to the exhaustion that Pharaoh endured in protecting his public identity? Actually, aren’t we guilty of the very same thing? That is, who can say that he has absolutely no worries over the identity that he has created for himself? Don’t we all try to project a greater image for ourselves, even if it’s not within our reach? The story is told of a person who held three jobs, which forced him to all but ignore his family. Why did he do this? Because he wanted a new and expensive car, one that would earn him respect. Yet when he eventually purchased it, he was so crushed by debt that he couldn’t enjoy it, since he didn’t have enough spare money to buy gas! Funny, yet true!

Each person, according to his own particular level, may have problems in this area. We tend to project a satisfying image for ourselves, one that we don’t deviate from. Rabbi Mordechai Pogromanski Zatzal compared the situation to two children playing outside. One child played Mordechai the Jew, while the other played a donkey. One child therefore got onto the back of the other, who walked on all fours proclaiming, “This is what is done for the man….” It suddenly began to rain heavily, and the child playing Mordechai quickly ran home. The other child, however, didn’t run away. In fact he stayed there, outside in the rain, standing on all fours. When his mother peered through the window and saw that he was getting drenched, she cried out: “Why aren’t you coming in?” The boy replied, “Mother, donkeys don’t go inside when it rains!” We are not far from this ourselves. We project an image for ourselves and refuse to change, each of us playing our role according to our own particular level. It is therefore clear why we fail to grow.

_A Pearl From the Rav_

_It is written, “I will go through the land Egypt…. I will execute judgment” (Exodus 12:12)._ 

The Sages say, “I will execute judgment” – I, and not a messenger” (Yalkut Shimoni).

In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks why Hashem did this Himself, rather than using a messenger.

It seems that the essential purpose of the exodus from Egypt was for the Children of Israel to sanctify themselves and accept the Torah. Although they had breeched 49 gates of impurity while in Egypt, they still agreed to accept a portion of the mitzvot, and they even fully accepted the yoke of the kingdom of Heaven. Hence they embodied the principle of, “If one comes to purify himself, he is helped” (Shabbat 104a). This is why Hashem helped them to serve Him. It was therefore fitting for Hashem to help them by performing miracles Himself, as the Sages have said: “I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt” – I, and not a messenger.” This is because the Children of Israel exchanged other gods for Hashem, for the glory of His Name.

Where Exactly Are They Buried?

_It is written, “But with My Name the L-RD I did not make Myself known to them” (Exodus 6:3)._ 

The Sages say, “Oh, for those that are gone and cannot be replaced!” (Shemot Rabba 6:4).

Community leaders from a large city with very few bnei Torah wanted to appoint a great gaon as their Rav. They boasted to him that illustrious Jewish figures such as the Taz, the Magen Avraham, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger were buried in their city, meaning that they were offering him an important position, one that was fitting for him to take.

This gaon later discovered that the Taz was buried in Lemberg, the Magen Avraham was buried in Kalish, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger was buried in Posen! He went to see the leaders of the community and said to them, “Why did you deceive me?” They replied, “Rabbi, we didn’t deceive you in any way! People study the Taz in Lemberg, which means he’s not buried there at all. On the contrary, there he is alive, for “his lips move in the grave” when his teachings are recited. The Magen Avraham is also alive in the town of Kalish, and so too for Rabbi Akiva Eiger in the town of Posen. Yet here in our town, where nobody studies their works, they are indeed buried!”

This is the meaning of the words, “Oh, for those that are gone and cannot be replaced” – woe to these who have departed in this way, for their deeds, their words, and their ideas will not persist among the living, and they “cannot be replaced,” which is a great loss indeed. Yet as long as there are disciples and those to prolong their legacy, nothing has been lost.

– Ma’ayana Shel Torah

With the Staff That is in My Hand

_It is written, “So says the L-RD, ‘With this you will know that I am the L-RD. ’Behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the waters that are in the Nile, and they will turn to blood” (Exodus 7:17)._ 

The book Aderet Eliyahu states, “Look at how Hashem scorned them. He first sent him there with the staff that turned into a serpent. Pharaoh called for his wise men and sorcerers, and even for children, and they displayed their magic arts by turning their staffs into serpents. However Aaron’s staff swallowed them all. This is why Moses told Pharaoh, ‘Behold, with the staff that is in my hand.’ In other words: ‘The staff – the one you are familiar with, the one in my hand – this is the staff that swallowed the staffs of your magicians, and therefore all your powers are inferior to it. I will strike with this staff, and when an enemy is struck with its own weapon, it is completely humiliated! We will kill you through your own weapons!’

The River Laughs at You

_It is written, “So says the L-RD, ‘With this you will know that I am the L-RD. ’Behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the waters that are in the Nile, and they will turn to blood” (Exodus 7:17)._ 

Aderet Eliyahu also states that the plague of blood contained another humiliation for Egypt. That is, the blow that I strike you with will be on “the waters that are in the Nile,” meaning your god, for it will be struck first. If you want to contradict me and assert that your river, which is your god, transformed itself into blood as a sign that you should kill your enemies, then why have all the fish died? If you argue that this is also a proof against Israel, which is compared to fish, your argument only reinforces the allusion. You must then explain why the Nile became foul. If that weren’t enough, the Children of Israel are drinking water in abundance, whereas you Egyptians can only draw blood out of the Nile! Why does your god, the Nile, make fun of you and love the Jews? As such your assertions are rejected, and your shame is immense.

At Least We Survived!

_It is written, “The L-RD will separate between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, and not a thing that belongs to the Children of Israel will die” (Exodus 9:4)._ 

What does it mean that “not a thing” would die among the livestock of the Children of Israel? How could a “thing” die? The Midrash HaGadol states, “This teaches us that among the Children of Israel, kitchen utensils were not damaged, no bricks
were broken within their homes, and their trees did not wilt. Not only were their animals protected, but their implements too."

Ironically, as the Alsheich notes: “Hashem also did not take everything from the Egyptians at once, but rather little by little. After each plague, the Egyptians told themselves that although the plague which had just ended was difficult, at least they had survived. What they didn’t know was that the Holy One, blessed be He, left them some gifts and a few grains of wheat in preparation for the next plague.”

– Esh Dat

Just Who is the Destroyer?

It is written, “There shall not be a plague of destruction upon you when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13).

A famous question asks: Is it not written that Hashem said, "I, and not a Seraph. I, and not an angel"? How does this square with the verse, “He will not let the destroyer enter your homes to strike” (Exodus 12:23)? The Beit Halevi states that as soon as the Egyptians died in the plague of the firstborn, their bodies immediately began to decompose, which caused pestilence to spread. Hence in addition to the plague of the firstborn, there were “destroyers.” (This is what the verse means by stating that Hashem will not let the destroyer attack Jewish homes, for they would not be touched by either the plague of the firstborn or the pestilence that followed.)

– Esh Dat

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Va’eira describes the “mighty hand” and miraculous signs that Hashem used in order to take His people out of Egypt through His envoys.

Before recounting how Moses and Aaron carried out their mission to the Children of Israel and Pharaoh, the parsha describes the revelation of Hashem to Moses, who along with Aaron served as Hashem's envoys. The mission to Egypt begins with the sign of the serpent, and it continues with the first seven plagues, from the plague of blood to the plague of hail. Besides the raging plagues, Hashem had already declared in Parsha Shemot, “I will slay your son, your firstborn” (Exodus 4:23). The plagues form three groups: (1) Detzach, (2) Adash, and (3) Be’achav. In the first group, the plagues come through Aaron. In the third group they come through Moses, and in the middle group the first two plagues come directly from Hashem, while the third comes through Moses and Aaron. The first two plagues in each group come with a warning to Pharaoh to let Israel go, while the third comes without warning.

EISCHET CHAYIL

I Have to Thank Your Mother

A long line of people stood by the doorstep of a general store in the Polish town of Radin. They were there because they wanted to purchase their goods from the Chafetz Chaim, whose store was run by his wife. She worked to earn a living for her family, enabling her husband to completely devote himself to Torah.

When the Chafetz Chaim returned from the Beit Midrash, she would show him the store’s ledger. He went over everything to make sure that all was in order, and then he returned to his studies. Their business continued in this way until they realized that their revenues exceeded their expenses, at which point they reduced the store’s operating hours. Never did the Chafetz Chaim’s wife ask him to come and help her, since all she wanted was for him to perfect himself in Torah. It was in this way that she accompanied her husband along the path of his spiritual ascent.

Their son states that the Chafetz Chaim told him, “I have to thank your mother for the little Torah that I know, because she was content with dry bread. She never asked for beautiful clothes or a nice home.”

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Best of Serpents

It is written, “He who feared the word of the L-RD” (Exodus 9:20).

From here Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, “The best of serpents, crush their heads. It is written, ‘He took 600 chariots’ [Exodus 14:7]. From where did he get them? From those who feared the word of Hashem. From here we learn that it was from them that Israel was threatened" (Yalkut Shimoni).

Rabbi Shimon is teaching us that we must not trust a person who has the nature of a serpent, for such a person will always remain this way, even if crowned by the title of one “who fears G-d.”

It would seem that if he really feared G-d, he would be afraid of following the ways of a serpent. But we shouldn’t expect this from him. By his very nature, the good that dwells in him never stops emulating the ways of a serpent. Therefore there is nothing to do with even the best of serpents, other than to crush its head.

As long such a person doesn’t change his nature, he will continue to be a serpent. This characteristic has the ability to hide even under the cover of the fear of G-d.

The author of Tummim was once invited on the eve of Yom Kippur to a certain town. When he arrived in synagogue, he was seated by the mizrach, and next to him sat someone with an air of importance, a man who prayed with great concentration and wept a great deal. The author of Tummim listened carefully and realized that he shed many tears as he lingered over the words, “I am dust in my life, and how much more in death!”

When this man finished praying, the Shamash approached him and announced that he would receive an Aliyah on the following day. According to the tradition of that community, he was told which Aliyah he would receive.

To the utter dismay of the author of Tummim, however, the man who had been weeping over the words, “I am dust in my life, and how much more in death” actually became angry with the Shamash! “Are you crazy?” he told him. “You gave me that Aliyah? I deserve Shlishi or Shishi!” The author of Tummim could not contain himself, and so he approached the man and asked, “Were you the one standing with tears in your eyes for almost a quarter hour as you read the words, ‘I am dust in my life’? How can you argue with the Shamash over an Aliyah that doesn’t seem to measure up to your importance?”

The man replied, “It’s true, I am dust in my life. But do I have to speak to the Shamash in the same way that I speak to Hashem? How arrogant of him not to give me Shlishi because of that!”

From here the author of Tummim noted that a person can weep for a long time and constantly repeat, “I am dust in my life,” yet never think for a second that he really is. Such was the “fear of G-d” that the Egyptians possessed. They did not change their nature, and despite the veneer of godly fear that covered them, they never ceased being serpents. Hence Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai teaches us that in order for them to stop being serpents, there is no other solution but to crush their heads.
Your Eyes Shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Moshe Yehudah Leib Zilberberg - The Av Beit Din of Kutna

The gaon Rabbi Moshe Yehudah Leib Zilberberg Zatzal was among the greatest rabbis of his generation. He was the son of the gaon Rabbi Binyamin Beinush, who was the son-in-law of the gaon Rabbi Zeev Wolf (the Av Beit Din of Lintshtitz). Rabbi Moshe Yehudah was of noble heritage, and all who saw him realized that he well brought up from his youth. He was a mighty gaon, an expert in all fields of Torah and its hidden treasures. Rabbi Moshe Yehudah became the Rav and Av Beit Din of several towns, including Kwahl, Shareptz, Dobry, and Lassek. He finally became the Rav and Av Beit Din of Kutna, whose name became synonymous with his own, for he was known as the gaon of Kutna. In each town that he stayed, he established a yeshiva that attracted students from every corner of the land to learn from him. Similarly, he became famous for answering very difficult questions in every area of Halachah. From his responsa, the book Zayit Raanan was later published.

In Rabbi Moshe Yehudah’s second book, Tiferet Yerushalayim, he addresses all the difficult questions raised by Rabbi Akiva Eiger on the mishnayot. On this subject, it is said that one morning Rabbi Moshe Yehudah decided to prepare a thanksgiving meal. When his students asked him why, he said: “I had a dream in which Rabbi Akiva Eiger appeared to me and said that the answers I gave to his questions in a certain area were incorrect. This means that all the others answers were correct, which is why I’m rejoicing and preparing a thanksgiving meal.”

Near the end of his life, Rabbi Moshe Yehudah left for Eretz Israel, for the city of Jerusalem. There he was welcomed with great honors, and he was among the city’s rabbanim. To the great regret of all his students and admirers, Rabbi Moshe Yehudah’s soul ascended to Heaven on Shevat 3, 5625. He is buried on the Mount of Olives, where his body will remain until the coming of Mashiach. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

Returning Man to His True Place

It is written, “For just as the new heavens and the new earth that I will make will endure before Me…so will your offspring and your name endure” (Isaiah 66:22).

Here Isaiah is prophesizing about new heavens and a new earth, yet the Sages are divided on whether his prophecies deal with the era of Mashiach or are a description of life in the World to Come (Shabbat 63a). Whatever the case may be, mankind’s present state is not what the Creator originally planned. At first man was placed in the Garden of Eden, and just as every animal found its sustenance with ease, the same was planned for man. However for educational purposes, he was chased out of the garden. In fact if the man who sinned had continued to live without working or dying, he would have had no reason to repent of his sin. The need to educate man required that his success and growth in the material realm be limited. However the goal, as the Ramban states in his commentary on Parshiot Bereshith and Nitzavim, is to return to a state in which man once again becomes worthy of receiving the blessing of the Garden of Eden by being faithful to his spiritual role. Such was also the prophesy of Jeremiah, who said that in the future man will do good because he will automatically understand this goal, for “I will place My Torah within them and I will write it onto their heart” (Jeremiah 31:32).

Therefore the verse, “For just as the new heavens…will endure before Me” means that they will endure before G-d as a goal, since man was originally destined for the Garden of Eden, and even now his goal is the same. Hence, “So will your offspring and your name endure” means that this too is a fixed goal. The fact that Israel is destined to sanctify G-d’s Name in this world – to the point that mankind will be worthy of the Garden of Eden when sin is annulled – will “endure” as a goal. As the prophet Jeremiah said, “They will no longer teach each man his fellow…for all of them will know Me…and I will no longer recall their sin” (v.33).

Let Him Dip His Foot in Oil

Our Sages taught: “Let him dip his foot in oil” [Deuteronomy 33:24]. This refers to the territory of Asher, which flowed with oil like a fountain. The people of Laodicea were once in need of oil. They hired an agent and told him, “Go and purchase for us 100 manehs worth of oil.” He first went to Jerusalem and was told, “Go to Tyre.” He went to Tyre and was told, “Go to Gush Halav.” When he went to Gush Halav [located within the territory of Asher] he was told, “Go to so-and-so in that field.” [He went] and found a man breaking up the earth around his olive trees. He said to him, “Have you 100 manehs worth of oil that I need?” The other replied, “Yes, but wait until I finish my work.” He waited until the other had finished his work. … The agent thought to himself, “Does this man really have 100 manehs worth of oil? I see that the Jews were playing with me.” As soon as he reached his hometown, the man’s maidservant brought him a bowl of hot water, and he washed his hands and his feet. She then brought him a golden bowl of oil, and he dipped his hands and feet in it, thus fulfilling the verse, “Let him dip his foot in oil.”

After they ate and drank, the man measured out 100 manehs worth of oil for the agent and then asked, “Do you perhaps need some more oil?” The agent replied, “I do indeed, but I have no more money with me.” The man said, “Well, if you wish to buy more, take it and I will return with you for the money.” He then measured out for him another 18 manehs worth of oil. … When he reached his hometown, all the townspeople came out to meet and applaud him. “Do not applaud me,” he said to them. “Instead [applaud] this man, my companion who measured out for me 100 manehs worth of oil, and whom I still owe 18 manehs.” This illustrates the verse, “Some pretend to be rich and have nothing, while others act poor and have great wealth” [Proverbs 13:7].

The Chazon Ish

It is written, “She bore him Aaron and Moses” (Exodus 6:20).

The doctor looked at the young couple sitting before him and said, “If you bring children into the world, you are risking your life!”

The harsh verdict stuck the couple like a lightening bolt on a clear day. Reisha Leah burst into tears, while her husband Shmaryahu Yosef was so stunned that he couldn’t speak.

When Rabbi Shaul Katzenelboigen heard the doctor’s prognosis, he controlled his feelings of compassion and painfully advised his son-in-law to divorce his daughter. However Reisha Leah absolutely refused to listen to the doctor.

“I was born to become a mother in Israel. I have to do what’s expected of me, and Heaven will show me mercy!”

In fact Heaven did show her mercy. Rebbeitzin Reisha Leah lived a long time, almost 90 years, and merited an exceptional family. She and her husband Shmaryahu Yosef Karelitz produced 15 children. Six of them died while young, but the rest became great teachers in Israel.

Whenever the Rebbeitzin looked back on what her doctor had said, she would smile and say, “How happy I am that I didn’t listen to him, and how sad the world would have been if I hadn’t given birth to the Chazon Ish!”

– Chaye HaChazon Ish

The Deeds of the Great

Your Eyes shall Behold Your Teacher

Rabbi Shaul Katzenelboigen – Menachot 85b

After they ate and drank, the man measured out 100 manehs worth of oil for the agent and then asked, “Do you perhaps need some more oil?” The agent replied, “I do indeed, but I have no more money with me.” The man said, “Well, if you wish to buy more, take it and I will return with you for the money.” He then measured out for him another 18 manehs worth of oil. … When he reached his hometown, all the townspeople came out to meet and applaud him. “Do not applaud me,” he said to them. “Instead [applaud] this man, my companion who measured out for me 100 manehs worth of oil, and whom I still owe 18 manehs.” This illustrates the verse, “Some pretend to be rich and have nothing, while others act poor and have great wealth” [Proverbs 13:7].