

Va'era

January 13th 2018
26th of Tevet 5778

732

Weekly Bulletin on the Parshah

Pachad David

Published by Mosdot Orot Chaim U'Moshe in Israel

Under the auspices of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita
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Maskil L'David

Weekly talk on the Parshah given by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Recognizing one's faults

“With this you will know that I am the Lord.” Behold, I will smite with the staff that is in my hand upon the water that is in the Nile, and it will turn to blood”

(Shemot 7:17)

The main purpose of the ten plagues was that the Egyptians should recognize Hashem and realize His strength and understand that He is the sole ruler of the world and master over all of creation. Likewise, the purpose of the plague of blood was so that Pharaoh should recognize Hashem and subjugate himself before Him, as it is written, “With this you will know that I am the L-rd.” Also through this plague Hashem demonstrated His strength and power and omnipotence. This plague was sufficient in proving to Pharaoh and his people that Hashem conducts the world according to His Will, and the world belongs to Him. However, somehow the Egyptians remained unmoved and did not marvel at the extraordinary occurrences and refused to recognize Hashem.

One who reflects upon the tremendous wonders inherent in the extraordinary plague of blood would perceive the miracle, since as we know, the human body is composed of liquids, which include both water and blood. The amount of water in the human body must be precise and in balance. Therefore, Hashem created man in His Divine wisdom in a way that allows for openings and cavities, as we recite in the blessing of “Who fashioned man;” we declare, “You.... Created within him many openings and many cavities,” and in this way the excess water accumulating in the body can get out. Otherwise the person would be in danger and die,

G-d forbid. On the other hand, if the body lacks the necessary amount of water, it can lead to dehydration and death as well.

In fact, during the plague of blood, all the water in Egypt, without exception, turned into blood. The pasuk states (ibid.7:19), “And there will be blood throughout the entire land of Egypt, even in wood and in stone.” Rashi comments: “Throughout the entire land of Egypt” – even in the bathhouses, and in the bathtubs in the houses. “Even in wood and in stone” – water in wooden vessels and in stone vessels [turned into blood].

It would seem in such a situation in which every drop of water in the land of Egypt at once turned into blood, then it would follow that the water in the people's body would turn into blood and thus they would die. However, since Hashem orchestrates all events, He allowed the water to remain intact in their bodies without turning into blood. Of course, anyone who reflects upon this should marvel at the enormous miracle and clearly see that Hashem is the sole Master over nature and He determines which waters turn to blood and which not.

Furthermore, until this point, Jewish people were enslaved and subjugated by their tyrannical masters, the Egyptians. But with the plague of blood, things turned around in a moment. The Jewish people became the masters and boss, while the Egyptians stood before them as submissive slaves, begging the Jews to sell them a drop of water in order to revive them from their thirst. Yet, Pharaoh hardened his heart and shouted (ibid. 5:2), “Who is the Lord that I should heed His voice to let Israel out? I do not know the Lord, neither will I let Israel out.”



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Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Directed to the Right Address

I once found myself, as I often do, at the airport. I asked one of my escorts, R' Chaim Kurson, shlita, to procure a permit for himself so that he would be allowed to enter the section where only passengers may enter.

R' Chaim looked at his watch. "Honored Rav," he began, "it's getting late. The clerk who gives this type of permit has already gone."

"Nonetheless," I pressed, "go and try. Maybe he is still in his office."

R' Chaim obeyed and returned with a huge smile on his face.

"Honored Rav, I did not obtain the permission slip, as you had asked. When I left you, I knew it was already too late for that. And when I got to the office, the man was, indeed, gone. But I am so happy that I listened to the Rav anyway. Next to the office, what did I hear but a fellow Jew crying out, 'Ribbono shel Olam! From where will come my help?'

"I understood that Hashem had sent me to the right place at the right time.

"The man was delighted to see someone take an interest in him. 'Blessed is Hashem Who heard my prayers. I have been standing here for ages, and have no idea what to do. The person who was supposed to meet me and escort me to my destination is nowhere to be seen. I have no address to go to, and I don't know a word of this language!'

"Of course, I immediately went into action. Finally, I found the address he needed, and sent him off in a taxi.

"I just have one question to ask the Rav," he continued. "When you sent me for the permit, did you know that the clerk would be gone, and in his place a fellow Jew would be waiting for help?"

"Not at all," I replied. "And there was no special reason why I chose you to go, above everyone else here with me."

Hashem had arranged that I insist on him going to the office for the permit, so that he could help a fellow Jew in need.

"Many designs are in a man's heart, but the counsel of Hashem, only it will prevail."



Words of Our Sages

Gems on the Parashah From the Torah Sages

Why did Rabbi Kotler suffer an attack of appendicitis?

"That is Aharon and Moshe" (Shemot 6:26)

"In some places, [Scripture] places Aaron before Moses, and in other places it places Moses before Aaron, to tell us that they were equal." (Rashi)

Why does Aharon precedes Moshe specifically here?

A wonderful explanation is cited by the gaon, the author of "Chatam Sofer," zt"l:

Only in parashat Va'era the name of Aharon the Kohen precedes [Moshe], because although it is clear that Moshe was greater and therefore he was entrusted with redeeming Am Yisrael, but since at the end of parashat Shemot we are told about Aharon that "when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart," and because of this they are considered equal. This is the reason that specifically in parasha Va'era the name of Aharon precedes Moshe teaching us that they are both equal.

This teaches us an important principle about the tremendous significance of positive virtues, and to what extent one can acquire a pure heart. It is to the extent of "when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart." Whoever rejoices in his heart over his younger brother's success, is worthy to have a Breastplate placed upon his heart.

Rabbi Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, shlita, the mashgiach of the yeshiva Orchos Torah, relates in the name of Rabbi Hillel Zaks, zt"l that once a disciple came to Rabbi Aharon Kotler clutching his stomach groaning in pain. He was quickly diagnosed as suffering from an attack of appendicitis and arrangements were made to take him to quickly to an appropriate hospital for treatment.

Rabbi Aharon saw the pain of his student and was grieved. He accompanied him to the entrance of his house and wished him a speedy recovery before the student departed to the hospital for surgery.

A week later, Rabbi Aharon himself suffered an attack of appendicitis. It was rare and dangerous for a person his age, and with the grace of Hashem, Rabbi Aharon was cured.

When Rabbi Hillel came to visit his Rabbi, Rabbi Aharon confided that he felt that Hashem was teaching him a lesson about "sharing in his fellow's yoke," since he should have sympathized more with the discomfort of his student when he came to him doubled over in excruciating pain a short time ago...

The Haftarah

The haftarah of the week:

"So says the L-rd"

(Yechezkiel 28)

The connection to the parashah: In the haftarah there are prophecies regarding the defeat of the land of Egypt, and this is similar to the parashah which tells about the punishment that came upon Egypt with the ten plagues they received from Hashem.



Guard Your Tongue

The Power of Speech

A stumbling block

It is not permitted to believe lashon hara, even if the narrator relates the lashon hara in front of the subject, since the subject did not confess to its truth. All the more so, if the subject is not present, but the narrator just claims that he would have related the story in front of him, it is prohibited to believe it.

Unfortunately, many people stumble in this.



Chazak U'Baruch

Up until now we have learned of the paramount importance of loving one's fellow and how much we have to gain from it both spiritually and materially. Now, let us examine another facet: Let us see what we may lose if the love is replaced by hatred, and if unity is replaced with dispute.

In fact, just as we are commanded in the holy Torah to love our fellow by the mitzvah of "Love your fellow as yourself," we are likewise commanded (Vayikra 19:17), "You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, but you shall not bear a sin on his account." This implies that hating one's fellow does not only result in losing out on the mitzvah of loving one's fellow, but rather it is an outright prohibition of the Torah in itself.

When we hear of a certain person that got sick with a dangerous illness, G-d forbid, we shake our heads sympathetically: "Oh, how awful! How much bad news there is!" But oddly enough, regarding the dreaded illness of our hearts, we do not grieve over it and do not sense at all. We do not even notice it, and moreover, we do not realize how dangerous it is.

We are actually referring to the dreaded illness of baseless hatred. Yes! It is truly an illness, maybe even a widespread plague! But unlike most illnesses, this disease is an all-embracing disease that affects all 248 organs and 365 sinews of our body.

When one commits a sin, an impure spirit is drawn to that organ involved in the sin, as Chazal say (Ketubot 5b) "A man shall not let his ears hear idle things, because they are burnt first of [all] the organs." This implies that by hearing forbidden speech, a spirit of impurity is drawn upon the ear, and thus ultimately it is burnt first of all the organs. So too, every organ that is used to commit a sin, an impure spirit is drawn upon it, but this is not the place to expound on the topic.

While certain sins cast impurity upon organs that the neshamah is not dependent on, it is nonetheless a great impediment. How much more so is the danger when the spirit of impurity is cast upon an organ that the neshamah is dependent on, such as the heart, which the life of a person hinges. If the person, G-d forbid, lacks a heart, then he is considered dead! Thus, the severe sin of baseless hatred, which lies in the heart of a person, draws the impure spirit upon one's heart. Since it is the central organ of a person, consequently the spirit of impurity gets circulated throughout one's entire body!

When a disease affects one organ, it can be really dangerous, but still there is a chance to save the patient. However, what happens when a tumor has spread to all the vital organs in the body, such as the heart, brain, and the like? Then the situation is so much worse, and the chance for surviving is almost non-existent.

The Chofetz Chaim elucidates that the same applies to illnesses of the soul. Every transgression affects a certain organ, with which the man sinned. When it comes to a less central organ, then even though the patient's condition is dangerous, there is still a chance to save him. The danger to his life is not immediate. However, when a person sins with an organ that his soul is dependent upon, like when a person harbors baseless hatred, then his condition is far more dangerous, and there is almost no chance of saving him.

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoon Hatzaddik,
Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shilita



Reminder to the world: Who is the Boss?

"In order that you know that there is none like Me in the entire earth" (Shemot 9:14)

The main purpose of the plagues that struck Egypt was to teach Bnei Yisrael the lesson that Hashem is the ruler of heaven and earth, and there is no one besides Him who can change the laws of nature and do with the world as he pleases.

For example, during the plague of the mixture of noxious creatures, all the animals, reptiles, and all sorts of birds gathered together in the midst of Egypt. Usually, when different kinds of animals and livestock meet, it results in chaos and a power struggle between them, because each creature tries to devour and defeat the others. However, here they made peace between them and all of them were united in their common goal of fulfilling the Will of Hashem to smite the Egyptians.

In fact, also in our times, Hashem sends us a reminder from time to time demonstrating clearly Who the Master of the universe is, and Who governs the world. For example, the terrible disaster that struck Haiti (in the winter of 2010), when a strong earthquake struck the area, and destroyed the country completely. It resulted in hundreds and thousands of casualties, Rachmana litzlan, and thousands of people without shelter wandering among the ruins. Who orchestrated all this? Of course it is Hashem, as it is stated (Tehillim 104:32), "He Who looks at the earth and it quakes; He touches the mountains and they emit smoke."

In the blink of an eye, Hashem can change the entire order of Creation and turn over the world. Hashem does this in order to refresh our memories so that we should recall that He is the Master of the universe and controls every living creature.

Surely we should not think that, G-d forbid, Hashem deals cruelly with His creatures and wishes to destroy them. In fact, Chazal tell us that when Moshe Rabbeinu split the Sea and Bnei Yisrael passed through it, the angels wanted to sing shira, but Hashem told them, "My handiwork is drowning in the sea, and you sing shira?!" (Megillah 10b). Although the Egyptians were wicked, and they were rightfully drowning in the Sea, nevertheless, it was difficult for Hashem to witness the wicked people suffering to death; how much more so it is difficult for Him to witness the death of the righteous.



The Yetzer Hara resembles a spring

The wicked Pharaoh said during the plague of hail: “I have sinned this time. The Lord is the righteous One, and I and my people are the guilty ones,” and afterward it is stated, “So he continued to sin, and he strengthened his heart.” How is this possible? Pharaoh already realized that Hashem is righteous!

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explains in his sefer “Michtav Mi’Eliyahu”: One who subdues his Yetzer Hara, but does not conquer it, even though he overcame it momentarily, it is only as if he pressed down on a spring; the more he will press on it, the more pressure it gathers to spring back when it is released, and ultimately the person defeats his purpose.

Pharaoh did not repent. He only subdued his evil inclination momentarily and admitted to the truth. Therefore, his wickedness sprang back in full force, and he strengthened his heart even more against Hashem.

Men of Faith

Excerpts from the book *Men of Faith on the lives and deeds of the House of Pinto*

One night, when Rabbi Chaim Hakatan arrived at the Beit Hakeneset to recite the tikkun chatzot as usual, he stumbled over a man sitting on the steps of the entrance in the dark.

“What are you doing here at this hour?” Rabbi Chaim asked him.

“All my limbs are paralyzed!” the man answered. Tearfully, he pleaded before the tzaddik, “I came here especially for the Rav to notice me and take pity. I beg the honorable Rav to pray for me and beseech that in the merit of his holy forefathers, I should be healed from the terrible illness that has stricken me.”

Rabbi Chaim helped him into a prone position, and while holding him, brought him into the Beit Hakeneset to join him in reciting the tikkun chatzot. Afterward, Rabbi Chaim called to a few of the congregants and asked them to take the paralyzed man to the old cemetery where his grandfather, the holy tzaddik and mekubal, Rabbi Chaim Hagadol, was buried.

When they came to the cemetery, Rabbi Chaim approached the grave of his holy grandfather and cried out, “Grandfather, Grandfather, pray to Hashem that He should have mercy upon this man. Neither I nor he will budge from this place until he is healed from his illness.”

An unbelievable miracle occurred. The moment that Rabbi Chaim concluded his prayers, the paralyzed man began to experience sensation in all his limbs. A few minutes later, he was able to stand on his feet normally.

Eventually the man married a righteous wife, and they had many children. He made sure to relate to all his descendants the story of Rabbi Chaim Hakatan’s greatness and the extraordinary merits of his holy grandfather, Rabbi Chaim Hagadol. (Heard from Rav Hillel Ben Chaim, who lives in Be’er Sheva and was the shamash of the Beit Hakeneset of Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hakatan.)