

United We Stand

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Parshas Va'eira

3rd of Shevat 5784

The Parsha's Path

And all the water in the river turned to blood (7:20).

After the horrific exposure of Chaim Walder, a couple of years ago, Rabbi YY Jacobson gave a shiur about the purpose of the plague of blood. He explained that Egyptian society was considered the most elite, sophisticated, and refined civilization in the world, and when Pharaoh hatched his plan to drown Jewish male infants, he knew it would be considered unacceptable to promulgate such a decree. There was no way that the public would be able to embrace such inhumanity in such an overt fashion. Thus, Pharaoh quietly recruited loyal followers to secretly kidnap and drown the babies. While it may not have taken long for people to figure out what was going on and that the Egyptian government was promoting these actions, there was still no official edict, giving the Egyptian government (im)plausible deniability. The fact that the babies were washed away by the waters of the Nile meant that there was no concrete evidence of any wrongdoing. The Egyptians were able to claim to be as innocent and pure as the Nile while hiding their vicious barbarism in its waters.

The plague of blood changed all that. By turning the Nile into blood, G-d alluded to the blood of countless Jewish children who had been drowned in its waters, exposing the Egyptians for the monsters they were. This was, necessarily, the first plague, for fighting injustice and fixing an issue can only begin when the truth is exposed and confronted. Nothing lasting can be built on a lie; a moral corrective or rebuke will be totally ineffective if the lie it addresses is not exposed. This, Rabbi Jacobson said, was the comfort we could take from the horrors of the Walder saga: The fact that things were now in the open, that the lie was shattered and the truth revealed, made it possible for healing and improvement.

There is much to be horrified about from the events of the last few months. Obviously, the evil and antisemitism that saturates so much of the world has become exposed in all its vile forms, and, *lehavdil*, the disturbingly misguided ideologies of various Jewish communities across the spectrum have also been revealed. It is easy to get depressed, frustrated, and consumed by hate and anger, but this is ultimately counterproductive. We can take comfort knowing that the exposure of these ideologies in all of their practical implications is the first step towards addressing them properly and that so many people are, in fact, waking up. It is our responsibility not to turn them off or turn them away, by showing love, concern, and understanding for all Jews, leading lives of *Kiddush H'*, and doing introspection to expose falsehoods and reveal the truth in our own lives. May we then merit to see miracles far greater than when we left Egypt with the Ultimate Redemption, *bimheira* *viyameinu*.

Deeper Meanings

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They did not heed Moshe because of shortness of breath and hard work (6:9).

In this week's Parsha, Moshe tells the nation of G-d's plan to take them out and make them into His Chosen People. This is followed by Moshe's encounter with Pharaoh where Aharon turns his staff into a snake, followed by the first seven plagues.

The pasuk describes that when Moshe tried telling the nation of G-d's plan, they didn't listen due to shortness of breath and difficult work. Ramban notes that this does *not* mean that the people didn't believe in G-d and His prophet - rather, they simply didn't pay any attention. Ramban compares it to a person who is in such agony that even though he is told that his suffering would end in a moment, he would rather die now. The Jewish people were so overcome by the oppression of slavery that they couldn't even think of redemption.

The Artscroll footnotes cites the Karan Pnei Moshe, who suggests that this Ramban is the source for Mesillas Yesharim (Chapter 2). In it, he writes that one of the strategies the Yetzer Hara uses to prevent us from growing is to make us feel all wrapped up and burdened with all sorts of work and obligations that we don't have a chance to pause and reflect on our spiritual state. Just like the Jewish slaves felt so involved in their labor that they couldn't bear to think about G-d and His salvation, we are prone to getting so distracted by the goings-on in our lives that we fail to contemplate G-d and how we are working towards Him. It is not that we do not believe in G-d, nor may we lack a knowledge of our purpose, goals, and other lofty ideas - rather, life prevents us from focusing on, contemplating, and developing these ideas. They remain an external bite of knowledge when they should be penetrating our very essence and shaping how we live our lives. This was the pitfall of the slavery of Egypt, and remains the same pitfall of the slavery of work, technology, society, and distractions. Let us take heed and never allow ourselves to get pulled away from what's really important.

Goal of the week

Write a letter to families of hostages.

This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Teiviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshannah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, Ephraim Melech ben Teilah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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