

# THE CHABAD WEEKLY

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## ❖ PARSHAT VAERA

The first plague visited upon Egypt by G-d, as related in this week's Torah portion, Va'eira, was the plague of blood. Not just the waters of the Nile, but every drop of water in the country was miraculously transformed. The only exception was the water which was used by the Jewish people. Water, by nature, is cold -- the exact opposite of holiness. Holiness is vibrant and warm, infusing vitality and life in all with which it comes in contact. The first obstacle a Jew must overcome in his daily life is conquering this coldness -- the apathy and indifference towards holiness that is the source of all evil -- and replacing it with a warmth and passion for G-d and for Yiddishkeit. It is for this reason that the plague of blood was the first step in the redemptive process of the Jewish people from Egypt.

The second plague was the plague of frogs. The cold-blooded creatures left their natural habitat and swarmed across the Egyptian countryside, filling the Egyptians' homes and crawling into their ovens. A Jew's enthusiasm and warmth is supposed to be reserved for holiness, as opposed to the pleasures of the physical world. When the frogs overcame their natural inclination for damp and cold, and jumped en masse into Pharaoh's ovens, they demonstrated the need for us to work on ourselves to overcome the lusts and appetites for physical indulgence.

Thus the first two plagues represent our two-pronged approach toward the service of G-d: "avoiding that which is evil" and "doing good." The usual order of service is to first shun doing that which is bad, and afterward striving to perform positive deeds. An analogy may be found in the preparation of a suitable dwelling place for a king: the first step involves thoroughly cleaning the house and making sure it is free of dirt ("avoid evil"), after which the living quarters may be decorated and filled with beautiful furnishings, as befits the king ("do good"). If the house is not scrubbed spic and span, the beautiful furnishings will look out of place and do little to disguise the underlying uncleanness. Sometimes, however, the proper order is the reverse, as expressed in the saying of the fourth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel: "The world says that when one cannot go under an obstacle, the proper course of action is to jump over. And I say, one must always jump over." For when a Jew brings warmth and holiness into his surroundings, the coldness and apathy is automatically dispelled. (From: L'Chaim 5756 #402, Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Vol. I)

**"So Moshe spoke accordingly to Children of Israel; but they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work." (6:9)** Everyone needs to work. Chicken doesn't grow out of dining-room tables. Our attitude to work, however, can be very revealing. In Europe, before the war, they used to say "What do you do for a living?" Nowadays, we say "What are you?" This subtle change speaks volumes. What I do is not who I am. I may be in business, but I'm not a businessman. I may sweep the roads, but I'm not a roadsweeper. What I do doesn't define my essence. It doesn't define who I am.

The Jew defines himself in terms of his relationship with G-d. G-d created me for one reason only — to receive the ultimate goodness and pleasure. To be close to Him. That's who I am. Every Jew should think, "I am the centerpiece of this vast galactic ballet." Every star is wheeling in the sky for me. Every fish is blowing bubbles for me. Every stone is silent for me. I am the center of Creation. But I'm not the be-all and end-all of creation. That's who G-d is. We live in the Age of Man. The age in which Man sees himself as the center of the universe. Man is the idol-worship of the age. Twenty-first century man has written G-d out his world. Man is the center of all. Thus my status — what I do — really is who I am. *"So Moshe spoke accordingly to Children of Israel; but they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work" (6:9)*

The expression "shortness of breath" (kotzer ruach) can also be translated as "narrowness of spirit." The Jewish People in Egypt were steeped in idol

worship. The ultimate idol is man himself. Pharaoh declared himself a god. Hard work can bring a person to appreciation of G-d's beneficence. Or it can bring him to think, "With my own power and the strength of my hand I did all this." Hard work can bring a person to a sense of self-esteem. Or it can fill him with self-importance. Hard work never killed anybody — but it can turn us into addicts. It can make us think we are the center of the universe. The ultimate definition of a workaholic is someone who has confused what he does — with who he is. (From:Ohr Somayach web site)

**"I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt, and I shall deliver you from their slavery, and I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments, and I shall take you to Myself as a nation..And I shall bring you to the land.."** (Va'eira 6:6-8) These verses cite five expressions of redemption. The first four relate to the Egyptian exile and the three exiles following thereafter, including the present one. The fifth - "I shall bring you.." - relates to an additional, second level of ascent that will follow the initial redemption by Moshiach.

The very fact that this fifth expression, too, is mentioned in context of the redemption from Egypt, indicates that all the aspects of the Messianic redemption, including its highest stages, started already with the exodus from Egypt. The Rebbe Raytaz (Sixt Rebbe of Lubavitch) was wont to say of this, that ever since the exodus from Egypt we are on our way to the Messianic redemption. From the very moment that the Almighty promised "I shall bring you to the land..," that promise came into effect. G-d, of course, is always in full control and "Who will say to Him 'What do You do?' " (Job 9:12) Thus it would seem that for as long as the promise is not actualized in reality, one cannot say that it has been achieved.

In truth, however, it is an established principle of the Torah that G-d revokes and nullifies only decrees about impending evil, but He never repents of good decrees: "Shall He say something and not do it, or speak and not fulfill it?" (Bamidbar 23:19) The Divine promise of "I shall bring you.." is a favorable edict and, therefore, not subject to revocation. To be sure, one cannot apply concepts like "compulsion" and "restriction" to G-d, and everything remains forever subject to His Will. Even so, by virtue of the fact that it is the Divine Will never to revoke or nullify something good, this becomes an inevitable principle. This principle applies to G-d only because He Himself wills it that way, thus altogether voluntary on His part. As far as the "good event" is concerned, however, it is inevitable because it is irrevocable.

There are, then, practical implications to the five expressions of redemption in our parshah: The Messianic redemption, including its highest levels, is already inherent even now - indeed, ever since the exodus - except that it still needs to become manifest in our physical reality. Consciousness and realization of this fact makes it so much easier to overcome all and any impediments and obstructions in this world in general, in the era of the galut in particular, and especially so nowadays, at the very end of the galut, when we are on the threshold of the Messianic age and Moshiach is about to come. (From: Insights to the Geula, Chabad in Cyberspace)

## ❖ LAWS OF SHABBAT - 39 Melachot:Dosh (Threshing)

The Melocho of Dosh may be defined as *Threshing*. Threshing is the removal of the grain kernels from their chaff, as well as from the stalks. The basic concept of Dosh (in any of its forms) is the extraction of a fruit, vegetable or earth - grown commodity *from its natural inedible shell, peel or similar attachment*. EX: Breaking apart kernels of grain (e.g. wheat) from the stems and chaff is the Av Melocho of Dosh. Similarly, extracting peas from their inedible pods is included under the Melocho of Dosh. Removing the thick outer peel covering the shell of a walnut is likewise (a Tolda of) Dosh. (From: The 39 Melochos by Dovid Ribiat)

THE DAILY RECITAL OF TEHILLIM AFTER DAVENING APPLIES EQUALLY TO CHABAD CHASSIDIC SHULS AND TO THOSE WHO FOLLOW THE ASHKENAZIC OR POLISH NUSACH - MAY G-D BE WITH THEM. ON ACCOUNT OF AHAVAT YISRAEL, LOVE OF OUR FELLOW...AND ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE AND INNER PURPOSE OF SAYING TEHILLIM WITH A MINYAN, WHICH LITERALLY AFFECTS ALL OF ISRAEL, MATERIALLY IN "CHILDREN, LIFE AND SUSTENANCE," AND SPIRITUALLY ...WE MUST ENDEAVOR MEANS POSSIBLE THAT IT BECOME AN ESTABLISHED PRACTICE IN EVERY SHUL OF EVERY NUSACH. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM SHEVAT 1)

*The thoughts of a diligent man lead only to advantage, but everyone that is hasty hastes only to want.*

-King Solomon