



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

BSD

Parashat Va'era

Removing Egypt from the People of Israel

-Eran Cohen-

Last week, in parashat Shemot, we first met Moshe. We discovered a humble leader who was not quick to accept the appointment as savior of Israel. This week's parasha, Va'era, also opens with a recital of a negotiation between Hashem and Moshe concerning Moshe's acceptance of his task: "Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Come, speak to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and he will let the children of Israel out of his land.' But Moshe spoke before Hashem, saying, 'Behold, the children of Israel did not hearken to me. How then will Pharaoh hearken to me, seeing that I am of closed lips?'" Rashi *ad loc* explains that "This is one of the ten *kal vachomer* inferences mentioned in the Torah," i.e., inferences from major to minor, such as in this case. In other words if, because of my speech impediment, the children of Israel, who have everything to gain by listening to me, did not listen to me, Pharaoh, who has everything to lose by listening to me, will surely not listen to me. There is much logic to Moshe's response; however, Rashi's explanation also raises several questions.

First, the previous pasuk already stated that they "did not hearken to Moshe because of [their] shortness of breath and because of [their] hard labor." The people had an objective reason why they could not hearken to Moshe, but this would seemingly not reflect in the least on Pharaoh and the possibility of him taking serious note of Moshe and his message. Another question relates to the connection between Hashem's commandment and the response offered by Moshe. Hashem commanded Moshe to speak to Pharaoh, but Moshe answered Him thusly: "'Behold, the children of Israel did not hearken to me.'" Moshe's task was to relate a message to Pharaoh; what difference did it make what response Moshe found when relating his message to Israel? This exchange is suggestive of an important principle concerning a messenger's obligation to have faith in the ideology and/or message he was sent to convey or in the product that he was dispatched to bring to market. When it is evident that someone does not truly have faith in his product, he will find it very difficult to convince his audience to purchase his wares.

We hear criticism of the State of Israel and its policies on a daily basis. In this regard, we can borrow from David Ben Gurion's famous speech before the UN Commission for the Partition of Palestine, which contended that the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel would result in the theft of Arab land. Ben Gurion responded to this contention as follows: "Three hundred years ago a ship called the Mayflower set sail to the New World. This was a great event in the history of England. Yet I wonder if there is one Englishman who knows at what time the ship set sail? Do the English know how many people embarked on this voyage? What quality of bread did they eat? Yet more than three thousand three hundred years ago, before the Mayflower set sail, the Jews left Egypt. Every Jew in the world, even in America or the Soviet Russia knows on exactly what date they left – the fifteenth of the month of Nisan; everyone knows what kind of bread the Jews ate. Even today the Jews worldwide eat matzah on the fifteenth of Nisan, in America, Russia and other countries. They retell the story of the Exodus and all the troubles Jews have endured since being exiled from their homeland. They conclude this evening with two statements: This year, slaves. Next year, free men. This year here. Next year in Jerusalem, in Zion, in Eretz Yisrael. That is the nature of the Jews." Ben Gurion was able to convince the members of the commission that the Jewish people throughout



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history had yearned for their return to the Land of Israel and for the establishment there of a national homeland. This is our deed of ownership over the Land.

In our parasha it was clear to Moshe that there was no point in approaching Pharaoh and the royal house of Egypt with signs and miracles depicting the power of God so long as the people of Israel were not convinced that the time had come for them to leave Egypt. Before Israel could be removed from Egypt, Egypt had to be removed from Israel. Only then could Moshe approach Pharaoh and convey his message with the appropriate level of confidence.

Eran Cohen is the vice president of the Tzohar organization