



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
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PARSHAT VA'EIRA

Parshat Va'eira is the transition from Divine promises to Divine action. Responding to Paro's first refusal at the end of last week's parsha, G-d assures Moshe that He will release the Jewish people from slavery and bring them to the Land of Israel. After Moshe's reluctance, Moshe and Aharon are sent to Paro. The first seven plagues occur: blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, animal disease, boils, hail. Paro responds in fits and starts, at times acquiescing then changing his mind.



1ST ALIYA (6:2-13)

In response to the futility of Moshe's approach to Paro at the end of last week's parsha, G-d responds firmly and definitively: I am G-d, a name unknown to the Avot. I promised them the Land of Israel. I heard the people's cries. And I remember the covenant. So, tell the people: I, G-d, am taking them out, saving them, redeeming them, bringing them to Me, bringing them to the Land. The people cannot hear due to their burdens. G-d tells Moshe to go to Paro. He objects: the people

didn't hear me, how will Paro?

There is no other place in the entire Torah where G-d Himself acts as a Torah commentary. Here He states to Moshe that something was missing from the stories of the Avot, the Patriarchs. They did not know the name of G-d. And you, Moshe and the Jewish people, you will know that name.

And He explains. I *promised* them the Land. But you I will *take* to the Land.

Meaning. I made a promise. But they, the Avot, never saw it realized. You Moshe, you will see the promise realized.

This is the essential meaning of the story of the Exodus: G-d's direct intervention in Jewish history. Up until now, we know G-d as the One who promises to Avraham that he will be given the Land of Israel. But we have yet to see this promise become a reality. The promise of the Land has not been granted. It was promises and patience. Promises but waiting. Wondering. When?

Everything changes now. Now, for the first time, He tells us exactly what He is going to do. And it happens immediately. He tells Moshe and the people in vivid detail exactly what He is going to do: take them out, save them, redeem them, bring them to Him, bring them to the Land.

This is a profound lesson both in how G-d acts in the world. As well as how He doesn't.

Sometimes He acts directly. And sometimes His promises take time. Years. Hundreds of years. Understanding His Ways is elusive.

The Torah tells us He intervenes now. It doesn't tell us why He didn't intervene through

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all the suffering until now.

The story of the Exodus is to establish that G-d intervenes, manipulates the world. How? When? That remains elusive.



2ND ALIYA (6:14-29)

The lineage of Reuven, Shimon and Levi is outlined. Including the birth of Moshe and Aharon. These are the Aharon and Moshe who G-d commanded to go to Paro. The ones who speak with Paro.

Moshe's lineage is given. Kind of an odd sidebar. Perhaps the Torah is stating the pedigree of the actors in this story. Moshe is not pedigreed. He is

not distinguished in his lineage. He is not from the first-born son Reuven. Nor from the first-born son of Levi. Nor even the first-born son of Amram. There is only one pedigreed actor: the Creator.

Moshe's lack of lineage is to emphasize that he is but a pawn in the Hand of the Divine. You need someone to make all this happen; but the main billing is not Moshe. He is but a pawn in the Hand of the Divine.



3RD ALIYA (6:30-7:7)

G-d tells Moshe to go to Paro. Moshe objects: I am tongue-tied, how will Paro listen? G-d tells Moshe: I am making you Paro's judge and Aharon your mouthpiece. I will harden Paro's heart. He will not listen to you.

By normal political measures, Moshe knows he will not be successful. He, weak. Paro, powerful. But he is told: You aren't the one making this happen. I am.



4TH ALIYA (7:8-8:6)

The plagues begin. Go to Paro in the morning when he goes to the river. In this you will know that I am G-d; the water will turn to blood. Moshe warns Paro. Aharon hits the water; it turns to blood. The

sorcerers do it. Paro does not listen. The 2nd plague: come to Paro and tell him G-d says to let My people go and serve Me. If not, frogs will invade your home, bed, ovens, and slaves' homes. Aharon raises his staff and the frogs invade. Paro calls Moshe and requests he pray for this to stop.

We are familiar with the 10 plagues. In our parsha we have the first 7.

The plagues divide into 3 groups; 1-3, 4-6, 7-9. And then the first born.

This grouping is based on the repeating patterns of the plagues. There are 3 patterns: where Moshe you will meet Paro. Where the plagues occur. And what their purpose is.

The first pattern is where Moshe meets Paro. Plague 1, at the water. Plague 2, in the palace. 3, no meeting. Then the pattern repeats with plagues 4, 5, 6; water, palace, no meeting. And 7, 8, 9.

The second pattern is where the plagues occur. Water. Land. Sky.

And a pattern of their purpose: so that you will know that I am G-d, that I am G-d in the midst of the Land, and that there is none like Me.



5TH ALIYA (8:7-8:18)

Moshe prays, the frogs stop, Paro reneges. 3rd plague: Aharon raises his staff; lice invade man and beast. The sorcerers unsuccessfully try to imitate; it is the hand of

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G-d. Paro does not listen. The 4th plague: Go to Paro in the morning when he goes to the river. Tell him: there will be wild beasts in Egypt but not in Goshen. In this you will know that I am G-d in the midst of the land.

This first set of plagues originate in the water. Water turns to blood. Frogs emerge from the water.

The Nile is the source of all agriculture in Egypt. Flood irrigation. It is the source of all life. And is ascribed Divinity. Naturally. In the world of idolatry, the most powerful forces are ascribed Divinity. The Nile is powerful.

Hence, it is hit first. Your god is made somewhat farcical in the face of our G-d. Water becomes blood; life becomes death. Frogs, all over Egypt. And the dead fish and frogs smell. You god has become a farce.

And the Torah states that. Moshe says in the warning to Paro: so that you will know that I am G-d.

The pattern of the plagues is 2 plagues emerging from the water, then one plague that attacks your body. The first 2 get warnings. The 3rd doesn't.



6TH ALIYA (8:19-9:16)

The plague of beasts happens. Paro agrees to allow the people to leave to celebrate in the desert. Moshe prays for cessation of the plague. Paro changes his mind. The 5th plague: Come to Paro, the animals will be smitten with disease, though not those of the Jewish people. Paro checked, saw that it was true. But hardened his heart. The 6th plague: Moshe, throws dust in the sky in front of Paro. It became boils and blisters on animals and people. G-d hardened Paro's heart. 7th plague: Moshe, go to Paro in the morning. With this plague you will know that there is none like Me.

Plagues 4 and 5 repeat the pattern; warning at the river, then in the palace. And they both

occur on the land, attacking animals. The wild animals and animal disease attack only the Egyptians, not in Goshen. And their purpose is stated: so that you will know that I am G-d in the midst of the land.

Which is another way of saying: G-d is involved in the activity of man, distinguishing between evil and good.

Turning water to blood was an attack on the Egyptian god; hence you know that I am G-d. Here the plague distinguishes between people, the Egyptians and the Jews to teach: I am G-d working in the midst of the land.

Plague 7 begins the next series of the 3, plagues coming from the sky. And their purpose is stated: there is none like Me.



7TH ALIYA (9:17-35)

Hail will rain down and kill all in its path. Moshe raised his staff and hail rained down amidst thunder, with fire. Paro called Moshe and Aharon: I have sinned; G-d is righteous. Pray to remove this and I will let you go. Moshe did so. Paro refused to send the people out.

The parsha ends after 7 plagues. The last 3 will be in next week's parsha.

The plagues express the 3 core beliefs of Judaism: there is a G-d, He acts in the world, and He is One, Unique, none like Him. Kind of like the Shema. There is a G-d, He is our G-d, and He is One.

The story of the Exodus is the most repeated story in Jewish life. Because it teaches what kind of G-d we believe in: a Mover of history.

But there is another message, not in what happens, but in what does not. This story, of overt Divine involvement, will never happen again.

As if to say: I am going to show you My Hand once. Just once. Pay attention. It won't happen like this again. But I am doing it because I know

how difficult it is for you to see Me. Watch carefully: My Hand is revealed in Egypt, in the plagues, in the crossing of the sea.

I know all too well that you, My Jewish people will live in the future in the thick fog of life, when seeing My Hand is oh so difficult – you will refer back, many times, in prayer, in mitzvot to this glorious sunny, clear day of My Hand. And you will know that as my Hand was so clear and obvious then, so too is My Hand, while obscured in the fog of life, nonetheless present now.

Perception of G-d is hard in this foggy world of ours. He created it that way – the Hebrew word for world is olam, similar to ne'elam, hidden. To perceive His Hand as shaping history requires great faith and insight. Oh, how many have chosen in our time, due to the eclipse of His Face, the lack of His Hand in our history in the Holocaust, oh how many have abandoned Him.

We who are privileged to walk in our Land have glimpsed again His Hand in history. There are times when His Hand is oh so hard to see. And then there are the winks, like the exodus from Egypt, when the fog seems to clear. And those moments are blessed ones. ■

STATS

14th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 11 in Shemot.
Written on 221.8 lines in a Torah; (16th).
16 parshiot; 8 open, 8 closed.
121 pesukim - ranks 20th (4th in Shemot).
1748 words - ranks 15th (3rd in Shemot).
6701 letters - ranks 17th (3rd in Shemot).
Pesukim are above average in length.

MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Va'eira.



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