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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Disappointed by Kaddish

“I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov...” (6:3)

This is the third of a series of tributes to my mother (*hk'm*) who passed away just under a month ago.

When my father (*a"h*) was saying *kaddish* for his own father, he once told me something very honest. He said he felt a little disappointed with the *kaddish*. “It doesn’t say anything about the person who passed away,” he said; “it doesn’t describe their life, their goodness, their uniqueness. It just says *Yisgadal v’Yiskadash Shemei Rabbah* — may Hashem’s Name be magnified and sanctified.”

In Parshat Va’era, Hashem tells Moshe: “*Va’era el Avraham, el Yitzchak, v’el Yaakov b’Keil Shakai, u’shmi Hashem lo nodati lahem - I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov in the name of Keil Shadkai, but my name Hashem, I did not make known to them.*” The Avos lived in a reality where G-dliness was naturally present, where faith did not need to be asserted. It did not need to be made known to them. Moshe lived in a world of exile — a world where Hashem is concealed, where His presence must be made known, it must be declared.

Every soul, every *neschama*, is a unique revelation of Hashem in the world. When a *neschama* leaves, a channel of light is gone. And that is precisely why *kaddish* does not speak about the departed; because the task of the living is not to describe what was, but to restore what is missing. My mother, *Hareni Kaporas Mishkavah*, had a light that people sensed immediately. When she left this world, something went quiet, that unique light left the world.

And so when I say *kaddish* I am proclaiming Hashem’s greatness because, when my mother passed away, that greatness became a little less self-evident in this world. By saying *kaddish*, I am bringing back some of that radiance that my mother’s *neschama* revealed in this world.

Questions

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "*I am G-d*"?
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How many years did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "*Putiel*"?
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart"?
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "*in you and in your nation*"?
13. What are "*chamarim*"?
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The plague of *dever* killed "*all the cattle of Egypt*." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

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Answers

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 -- Although G-d swore to give them the Land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pitem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague – *shechin* (boils).
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions; he therefore secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. (a) 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god. (b) 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed; it was therefore not right that Moshe should strike it.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - They would stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever*, only the cattle in the fields died. The plague of *shechin* (boils) affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air; they did not fall to the ground.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Tefillat HaDerech (Part 3)

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

Lao Tzu – Chinese Philosopher

Bon Voyage!

Tefillat HaDerech reads: **May it be Your will, Hashem, our God and the God of our fathers, that You should lead us in peace and direct our steps in peace, and guide us in peace, and support us in peace, and cause us to reach our destination in life, joy, and peace** (If one intends to return immediately, one adds: **and return us in peace**). **Save us from every enemy and ambush, from robbers and wild beasts on the trip, and from all kinds of punishments that rage and come to the world. May You confer blessing upon the work of our hands and grant me grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes and in the eyes of all who see us, and bestow upon us abundant kindness and listen to the voice of our prayer, for You hear the prayers of all. Blessed are You Hashem, who listens to prayer.**

Back in the “good old days”, travel was often a dangerous and lengthy process. Nowadays, travel is (sometimes!) streamlined and (sometimes!) effortless. We can travel in comfort to locations that are thousands of miles away in the same time that it used to take to get from one city to the next. It is quite astonishing to think that what once would have taken weeks or months now takes hours, and the ease of getting there is incomparable. If so, a person might mistakenly imagine that the obligation to recite *Tefillat HaDerech* is no longer applicable. But, as mentioned in the introduction to this series, *Tefillat HaDerech* is not necessarily associated with danger, but is a requirement when traveling more than a certain distance outside of the city limits.

Why did our Sages deem it appropriate to obligate us to recite *Tefillat HaDerech* even for a mundane, non-dangerous journey? They are teaching us that we must take Hashem with us wherever we go. That even something as simple as traveling from one city to another requires Divine assistance.

A charming story about Rabbi Yehudah Assad (1786-1866) teaches us just how seriously *Tefillat HaDerech* was regarded by even the simplest Jews not so long ago:

Rabbi Yehudah Assad was rabbi of Szerdahely in Romania and recognized as one of the preeminent authorities in Jewish Law in his generation; he became the spiritual leader of Hungarian Jewry after the passing of the Chatam Sofer. Once, Rabbi Assad was being taken to another city in a horse-drawn wagon. At one point the wagon driver wasn't concentrating properly and he turned a corner too fast. The wagon tipped over and his venerable occupant

was thrown out onto the grassy embankment. After ascertaining that his esteemed passenger was unharmed, the wagon driver indignantly turned to Rabbi Assad and accused him of not having recited *Tefillat HaDerech* properly! “If you would have said *Tefillat HaDerech* with the correct intent and concentration, this would never have happened!” he said.

Rabbi Assad replied, “How do you know that I am at fault? Maybe I did say the *Tefillah* with the correct intent but it hasn’t been answered yet.”

What makes the story so delightful is the simple unaffected reaction of both wagon driver and rabbi: both understood immediately that whatever had happened revolved around *Tefillat HaDerech*. While they disagreed - the wagon driver assuming the prayer hadn’t been said properly and the suggesting that it had - yet it was completely clear to both of them that Hashem was in charge and that nothing happens without His directive.

And that really encapsulates the essence of *Tefillat HaDerech*: Awareness. The more we realize that Hashem “*bestows upon us abundant kindness*”, the safer we are; the more we internalize that it is only Hashem who “*...leads us in peace and directs our steps in peace, and guides us in peace, and supports us in peace, and causes us to reach our destination...*” the easier it is to reach our journey’s end. Not just to arrive at today’s destination, but to navigate our way through the entire journey of life with Hashem at our side.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt, but the people do not listen. Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians, sending plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale, encouraging Pharaoh to remain obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only Hashem could perform such miracles.

Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. Despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will release the Jewish People, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

WITCHCRAFT

Mitzvos #62 and #511

Witchcraft was so prevalent in ancient Egypt that when Moshe sought to impress Pharaoh with the miracle of Aharon's staff turning into a snake, Pharaoh replied that even Egyptian schoolchildren know that trick (*Shemos Rabbah* 9:6). When Aharon's staff swallowed the Egyptians' conjured snakes, it began to dawn on Pharaoh that there is a power that is exalted over all. It would take ten national calamities and a mass drowning before Pharaoh would acknowledge this truth wholeheartedly (*Midrah Sechel Tov, Shemos* 14:28), but this was surely a start.

The Torah refers to a practitioner of witchcraft using the feminine term *machasheifah* because most are women (*Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin* 7:13). *Radvaz* (§553) explains that this is because women are more adept in this practice, for Kabbalistic reasons.

The Torah subjects one who practices witchcraft to the most severe type of death penalty (stoning) and exhorts us not to allow him or her to remain alive. We do not find such an exhortation regarding most other death penalties. *Ramban* explains that the Torah is especially stringent regarding this prohibition because a witch is steeped in impurity, attracts fools, and is a stumbling block for society. In other words, not only do foolish people who seek her counsel become contaminated with the impurity of witchcraft, but they also follow her predictions, which are questionable at best.

Sefer HaChinuch gives several reasons why the Torah regards this sin with such severity. First, manipulating reality through witchcraft for any purpose contradicts the natural order that Hashem decreed in His world. Second, Hashem designed the world to provide the maximum benefit for His creatures, and witchcraft, which is always destructive, runs counter to this goal. Third, witchcraft is similar to idolatry, as it acknowledges powers other than Hashem. Fourth, Hashem wants us to trust in Him and only in Him, and one who invests even the smallest measure of his trust in witchcraft weakens his relationship with Hashem. Fifth, witchcraft is a lowly, abominable practice, and it is not fitting for the holy Jewish people, possessors of the sole truth, to dabble in it instead of focusing their attention on the exalted service of the Creator.