



# פרשת וּאֵרָא

# CIRCLE TIME AT YOUR Shabbos Table

... FOR A Meaningful and Entertaining SHABBOS WITH YOUR CHILDREN ...

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DVAR TORAH IN A STORY >>

## THE HOLY SNAKE

וְאִשֶּׁר לֹא שָׁם לְבוֹ אֶל דְּבַר ה' וַיַּעֲזֹב אֶת עֲבָדָיו וְאֶת  
מִקְנֵהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה

“And he who does not pay attention to Hashem’s word will leave his animals in the field” (*Shemos* 9:21).



How could any Egyptian not pay attention to Hashem’s words? After six *makkos*, how could he not believe his animals would be killed by hail?

Rav Yitzchok Yerucham Brodianski was the *mashgiach* in Yeshivas Kol Torah in Yerushalayim. As *mashgichim* do, he often had to travel, for students’ weddings or other purposes, and he developed relationships with many Israeli taxi drivers.

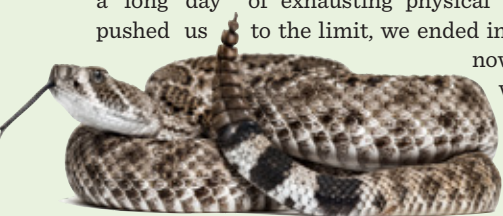
One particular driver, who identified as somewhat traditional but did not keep Torah and mitzvos, always asked the *rav* to tell a *dvar Torah* as they traveled. The *rav* complied, sharing a Torah thought that was relevant and accessible to the driver.

One evening, on the way to a wedding, Rav Brodianski was tired. When the driver asked for a *dvar Torah*, he surprised him by responding, “Why don’t you tell me a *dvar Torah* this time?”

“Me? A *dvar Torah*? To the *rav*?” the driver was a bit stunned, but soon recovered. “Okay,” he said, “I’ll tell you a story that happened when I was in the army.

“Training was rough, and we sometimes were subjected to extreme conditions and stresses. One evening, after a long day of exhausting physical workouts that pushed us to the limit, we ended in the middle of

nowhere, and we were told to make camp for the night. Another day of running



## PARSHAH RIDDLES

Answers to this week’s riddles appear on page 3.

- 1 Which two times in the Torah did Hashem say לָכֵן אָמַר?
- 2 Where is there a *kal v’chomer* in this week’s *parshah*? Do you know of any other ones in Chumash? Who learned a *kal v’chomer* from this week’s *parshah*?
- 3 Which four people are the only ones in Chumash explicitly called a *navi*?
- 4 The phrase *Keil-Shakkai* appears five times in Chumash aside from *Parshas Va’eira*. What is the connection between the context of all of them?
- 5 About which *makkos* was Pharaoh forewarned? Where and when were the warnings given?



SERIAL >> CHAPTER 4

# CHOLENT STORY

A story told in parts, designed to get children to come back to the table for the main dish!

Recap: Reb Aharon and his wife are condemned to one of the poritz's pits, left to starve as a punishment for not paying rent.

**N**

ight fell over the field of pits outside the city of Lunchitz. Reb Aharon and his wife settled in the bottom of their pit and worked on strengthening each other to be strong and have faith in Hashem that all His decisions were for the good. It was difficult, for their situation was dire, and the sound of moaning and crying came from people locked in the pits around them.

“What will become of us?” Reb Aharon’s wife wondered.

“I don’t know,” Reb Aharon said, softly. “But Hashem does. And whatever He decides is unquestionably the best possible thing that could happen to us, even though it may be uncomfortable and even painful.”

“The baby is due soon,” his wife whispered. “What will we eat? How will we feed it?” Reb Aharon was about to respond, when another voice, from way above them, cut in.

“Hey, you two!” the voice shouted. “Why do you look so calm and comfortable? Don’t you realize what’s going to happen to you?” It was the night guard, circling the pits and checking on the people in them. His face loomed over the edge of pit, silhouetted against the starry sky. “Why aren’t you crying and screaming for mercy like everyone else?”

“We don’t know what will happen to us, and neither do you!” Reb Aharon replied. “But we are not afraid, because Hashem is in control. We beg only Him for mercy, and He can hear us without screaming.”

“Aren’t you starving already?”

“We are hungry, yes. We ask Hashem for food always, whether in a pit or out of it.” The guard was shocked. What a remarkable couple! “What are you in for?” the guard asked. “Most people here are murderers or dangerous criminals, but you don’t look like the type to hurt anyone.”

“*Chas v’shalom!*” Reb Aharon exclaimed. “We never hurt a soul. We were thrown in this pit because we couldn’t pay the rent for the past three years. The crops on our field did not grow properly and we didn’t earn anything, so the nobleman is punishing us for the bad weather.”

“Really? That’s it?” Like the enforcer before him, the night guard was impressed. He returned to his watchman’s cabin and got out the loaf of bread he had brought for his dinner. He could get other food, but this nice, sweet couple could not. He wrapped it carefully and went back to the edge of the pit.

“Listen, you didn’t get this from me,” he warned Reb Aharon and his wife. “If the nobleman finds out I helped you, he’ll chuck *me* in the pit, and we’ll *all* be finished.” And he tossed the loaf of bread down into the pit.

“Thank you,” Reb Aharon said. “May Hashem bless you for your kindness.”

The loaf of bread kept the couple fed for a few days, after which the night guard sent down some more food. Each night, he would stop by to talk with the interesting, peaceful Jews. He fed them for quite some time. The *poritz’s* enforcer came to the field of pits from time to time and was surprised to see that Reb Aharon and his wife were still alive. He figured something was going on, but he had also taken a liking to them, and didn’t say anything.

But this could not last. Soon, the time came for the baby to be born, and the couple were still in the bottom of the pit, far from any doctor or hospital.

TO BE CONTINUED...

DVAR TORAH >>

# LITVAK, CHASSID, SEPHARDI

Three different angles on a *dvar Torah*, one each from Litvish, Chassidic, and Sephardic sources. These can be split between the three *seudos*.

וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם... וְהַצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם... וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם...  
וְלִקְחֵתִי אֶתְכֶם... וַיְדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה'... וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם  
אֶל הָאָרֶץ...

“And I will take you out...and I will save you...and I will redeem you...and I will take you...and you will know that I am Hashem...and I will bring you to the land”

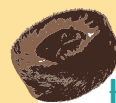
(*Shemos* 6–8).

**What happened to Hashem’s last promise—that He will bring the Jewish People to Eretz Yisrael? Nearly the entire generation that left Egypt died in the desert!**



## BINAH AHARON:

The halachah is that a Jewish *eved* who runs away from his master early is given back, unless he flees to Eretz Yisrael. The promise of *וְהִבֵּאתִי* was only part of the promise of redemption from Mitzrayim for this reason; without going to Eretz Yisrael, Klal Yisrael would have had to go back to Pharaoh, because they ran away early, before the 400 years were over! But once the generation of Mitzrayim died (because of their own *aveirah*—the *meraglim*) this was not a concern anymore, and the promise to them of going to Eretz Yisrael was no longer relevant (the promise to the *Avos* still counts, but that is a national promise that will be fulfilled when *Mashiach* comes).



## EMES:

*Targum Yonasan* says that on the night of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, when it was time to eat the *Korban Pesach*, a great eagle carried all of Klal Yisrael to Yerushalayim to eat it there, and then brought them back. This was the fulfillment of the promise of *וְהִבֵּאתִי*.



## HACHAIM:

The promise of *וְהִבֵּאתִי* is separated from the other four words of *geulah* by the phrase *וַיְדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה'*. This was a condition for the fulfillment of the fifth promise—Klal Yisrael had to have complete *emunah* in Hashem in order to get the gift of Eretz Yisrael, and when they believed the *meraglim*, they broke their end of the deal.

# PERSONAL GROWTH AVODAH OF THE WEEK

This section views the procession of parshiyos and Yamim Tovim as a ladder for personal growth. It identifies a theme in the parshah and a related area that needs growth, and assigns a weekly mission based upon it.

## Parshah summary

*Parshas Va'eira* contains seven of the ten *makkos*, which form the Torah's ultimate lesson in Hashem's control of the universe. The *makkos* are divided into three separate groups, or lessons, and the first two groups are included in *Va'eira*, as well as the beginning of the third. The first three *makkos* teach Hashem's control over the earth, from its surface on down. Hashem's dominion over the water is shown with Blood, over the land with Lice, and over the emergence and interaction of the two with Frogs.

The next three *makkos* teach Hashem's dominion over the arena of activity upon the earth, below the sky. Animals, diseases, and people are all under His control in the plagues of Wild Animals, Pestilence, and Boils. And the plague of Hail begins to show His dominion over the powers of the heavens.

## AVODAH OF THE WEEK:



1. This is the second week of *Shovavim*. Devise specific strategies for improving in the areas you selected last week and set up a reward-and-consequence system for yourself in this area for the next five weeks.
2. Learn a *mussar seder* specifically on the futility of pursuing *aveiros* in light of Hashem's complete control of the universe, when all that is up to us are our choices.

## RIDDLE ANSWERS:

1. לָכֵן אָמַר לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה' וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם (Shemos 6:6). פִּינְחָס בֶּן אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הִכְהֵן הַשֵּׁיב אֶת חַמְתִּי... לָכֵן אָמַר הַנְּנִי נַחֵם לֹא אֶת בְּרִיתִי שְׁלוֹם (Bamidbar 25:11). הֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי - וְאִיךָ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פִּרְעֹה (Shemos 6:12).
2. הֵן כֶּסֶף... הַשִּׁיבֵנו אֵלֶיךָ - וְאִיךָ נִגְנַב מִבַּיִת אֲדֹנֶיךָ כֶּסֶף אוֹ זָהָב (Bereishis 44:8). וְאֲבִיָּה יָרַק יָרַק בְּפִנְיָהּ - לִשְׂכִינָה אֲרֻבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם (Bamidbar 12:14). הֵן בְּעוֹדֵנִי חֵי עִמָּכֶם הַיּוֹם מִמָּרִים הֵיטֵם - וְאִיךָ כִּי אֲחֲרֵי מוֹתֵי Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah learned from the frogs—who jumped into the fire without being ordered to do so—that they, who are commanded in *kiddush Hashem*, should go into the furnace.
3. הָשֵׁב אֶשֶׁת הָאִישׁ (אֲבָרָהָם) כִּי נָבִיא הוּא (Bereishis 20:7). וְאֶהְרֹן אָחִיךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאָךְ (Shemos 7:1). וְתַקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה (Shemos 15:20). וְלֹא קָם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּחַשָּׁה (Devarim 34:10).
4. In all instances in which *Keil Shakkai* is used, a *brachah* is being given. These are: Hashem's *brachah* to Avraham regarding *bris milah*; Yitzchak's *brachah* to Yaakov when sending him to Lavan; Hashem's *brachah* to Yaakov when returning; Yaakov's *brachah* to the *shevatim* when returning to Mitzrayim for food; and Yaakov telling Yosef about his own *brachah* from Hashem.
5. The warnings were issued in a three-*makkah* cycle. Warnings for the first in each set of three (Blood, Wild Animals, Hail) was given early in the morning, when Moshe met Pharaoh going to the water. The second in each set of three (Frogs, Plague, Locusts) were given at standard times at the palace; and the third in each set of three (Lice, Boils, Darkness) came without warning at all. The last warning was given when Pharaoh called Moshe himself, and the Torah does not record Hashem's command to warn him.



Did you notice that the story of the haftorah, besides relating to the depth of the parshah or day, usually sounds like it is right out of current events?

# HAFTORAH FROM THE HEADLINES

The *haftorah* is a prophecy received by the *navi* Yechezkel in the month of Teves, during the second year of the Babylonian siege around Yerushalayim. The Jews in Eretz Yisrael were hoping that Egypt, led by Pharaoh Chofra (Apries) would attack Nevuchadnetzar's army, and sent messages asking for support. The Jews had been playing politics for a while, previously banking on Nevuchadnetzar to save them from Pharaoh Necho, and now switching to ally with Egypt against Bavel. Egypt would ultimately let us down, setting out to support us against Bavel but turning back before engaging it.

## HAFTORAH SUMMARY

The *navi* (who was already in exile in Bavel) foretells the downfall and destruction of Egypt at the hands of the Babylonians. His message is twofold: he rips Pharaoh Chofra for failing to keep his word, predicting his punishment and humbling his arrogance; and he reminds the Jewish People to depend only on Hashem, not the promises of any nation or political manipulation—because fate is only in Hashem's hands, and the nations will collapse and disappoint.

(Later, Egypt was indeed overrun and destroyed by Bavel. Egyptian culture was never revived; it remained powerless until taken over by the Greeks. Later Pharaohs, such as Cleopatra and Ptolemy, were in fact Greeks.)

## CONNECTION TO THE PARSHAH

The central theme of both the *parshah* and the *haftorah* is the punishment and destruction of Egypt, although the two destructions are more than a thousand years apart. The point of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* for the Jewish People was to teach us *emunah* and reliance only on Hashem, and this is the *navi*'s message as well. Both repeatedly use the phrase, "And through this you will know that I am Hashem."

In both the *parshah* and *haftorah*, arrogant Pharaoh claims to be a god who created the Nile and is shown to be a liar. In both, he is compared to a serpent (Aharon's staff).

## RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES

With changing US administrations comes worry regarding American support for Israel. Much speculation and maneuvering is devoted to building American and international support. There is much hope that new treaties with Arab countries will help further Israel's interests at the UN. The *navi* reminds us: they are all a "splintered reed." Rely on Hashem.

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and lifting was ahead.

"We all turned in quickly—we were beat. But no sooner had we fallen asleep, when we were all awakened by the sound of screaming. A man was yelling for his life. We rushed to the scene of the screaming but pulled up short when we saw one of our troop lying on the ground, half out of his sleeping bag, with a rattlesnake wrapped around his leg. He was screaming with everything he had.

"The snake was wound tightly, and there was no way to get him off. The soldier knew, as we did, that if he moved a muscle, the snake would sink its venomous fangs into his leg. Even if he didn't move, it might bite him anyway.

"No one moved. No one knew what to do. The screaming continued, but we were frozen, not wanting to provoke the snake into biting him.

"Finally, the commander called to one of the platoon's snipers. 'Get your rifle,' he said, 'and shoot the snake.'

"Shoot the snake?! Its head is right near the soldier's upper leg! If I miss, I could kill him, or cripple him for life! And if I miss altogether, the snake will bite him for sure!"

"There's no other choice. Don't miss."

"Trembling, the young sniper, who was in training like the rest of us, went to get his weapon and lined up for the hit-or-miss shot. Covered in sweat, he aimed. We were all terrified that he would hurt the soldier.

"Suddenly, one of the other guys in the platoon, a religious guy, said to the soldier with the snake around his leg, 'Hey, say *Shema Yisrael* first!'

The soldier didn't know the words, so the religious guy said it with him, word for word. And wouldn't you know it? As soon as he said it, the snake unwrapped itself from his leg and slithered away into the night, without a backward glance."

"That's an amazing story," Rav Brodianski said. "But what's the end of the story?"

"Well, that soldier went home and looked up a rabbi. He started taking classes and learning Torah and now he is as religious as you are."

"Yes, but I mean you. What is the end of the story for you?"

"Me? What does it have to do with me? The snake wasn't on my leg, it was on his leg!"

"Interesting. So if it doesn't happen to you, just to the guy next to you, it doesn't count? It's not that impressive?"

*Apparently, when it doesn't happen to you, the message is not driven home. So the Egyptians who saw the makkos—but may not have felt them—weren't impressed yet!*



# OUT FOR DISCUSSION

See this week's *Circle* magazine for the full comic story and halachic dilemma.

## THE SNATCHED CASH

Elazar was a *shomer* (custodian) for the tzedakah money. Assuming that he was not paid or rewarded in any way for guarding the *tzedakah* money he is a *shomer chinam* – an unpaid custodian - who is not responsible for the object in his care unless he is negligent with it. Assuming that his wallet was in a safe place and he was not negligent by carrying it where it can get stolen easily, he is not obligated to replace the stolen money. Additionally, if he uses or borrows the money, he becomes a *shomer* and as such he is responsible for the money, even if it gets stolen.



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## GEMATRIA

86 = 017

The slavery lasted 86 years. It began when Miriam was born (she was named after its “bitterness”). It ended when Moshe was 80. Miriam was 3 years older than Aharon, who was 3 years older than Moshe, so she was 86 when it ended.

The slavery was counted as 430 years (*Shemos* 12:40), which is 5 times longer than it actually was ( $86 \times 5 = 430$ ). We drink 4 cups of wine at the Seder in gratitude for the  $4 \times 86$  (017) that we did not have to actually serve.

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 91a) relates that Geviha ben Pesisa told the Egyptians that they owe wages for 430 years of work by 600,000 people. But didn't we only work 86 years? Remember, only a fifth of Klal Yisrael left Egypt; the rest died during the plague of darkness. So the repayment has to be 5 times greater than the 600,000 people who left, which exactly equals the payment for 430 years.

# THIS DATE IN JEWISH HISTORY



A fragment of a scroll found in the Cairo *genizah* relates that on the third of Shevat in the year 4762 (1012 CE), Jewish mourners were attacked at a funeral in Fostat, Egypt, possibly for failing to heed epidemic restrictions. Sound familiar?

Fostat was home to a large Jewish community in the early part of the 11th century. Later, the Rambam lived there when he fled Muslim persecutions.

A plague killed many people in Egypt, including Rav Shemaria ben Elchanan, who was the world-famous *rosh yeshivah* of Cairo; and Paltiel, the *chazzan* of Fostat. Jews conducting the *levayah* for one of them—there are conflicting reports as to whom—carried the bier by hand to the gravesite, and the locals took exception to that, possibly because of fear of spreading the plague. The Jews were attacked and beaten, and 23 were arrested by the local authorities and sentenced to be executed the next morning. Among them was a *dayan* visiting from Yerushalayim named Shmuel ben Hoshana.

Several influential Jews contacted the local ruler at the time, a man named Al-Hakeem, and convinced him to free the 23 captives and return their belongings. Al-Hakeem later became an anti-Semite and ordered all the Jews in the region to convert to Islam, a decree the Jews avoided as well.

Rav Shemaria ben Elchanan was a *Gaon*, and *rosh yeshivah* in Neharda'a, Bavel. He was one of the *arba shevuyim*, a group of four *geonim* (which included Rabbeinu Chananel) captured at sea by an Arab admiral named Ibn Rumais (or Ibn Demahin), leading to the spread of Torah around the world. The four had been traveling from Bari to Sebaste to collect money for the yeshivah in Bavel. Rav Shemariah was sold by his captor at the port of Alexandria, Egypt, where he was ransomed by local Jews. He then went to Cairo, where he founded a flourishing yeshivah. He exchanged *teshuvos* with *geonim* and *gedolim* from all over the world, including Rav Sherira Gaon.







# HALACHAH



## Respecting a King

Several times in the parshah, Hashem tells Moshe to show respect for Pharaoh, for although he is a rasha, a king deserves respect. What are some halachos about respecting a king?

### How important is it to respect a king?

Yosef allowed himself to have a haircut when he was taken to Pharaoh for the first time, although it was Rosh Hashanah. Rashi explains that this was out of respect for the king, and the Chasam Sofer says that this fits with the Shach's opinion that such a haircut is allowed on Yom Tov for the sake of mitzvah. The *Mishnah Berurah* rules that a *kohen* may become *tamei d'Rabbanan* for the sake of this mitzvah.

### Should one go to greet a king passing through his area?

The Gemara tells us that one should try to rush to see a king, Jewish or otherwise, so that he will be struck by the difference when Mashiach arrives.

Several sources say the Torah was taken out to greet a king and show honor. The Jewish community of Saragossa was nearly destroyed when they took out an empty Torah case to honor the king, and a *moser* tipped him off to the ruse.

### What brachah does one say upon seeing a king?

Upon seeing a Jewish king, one says בא"י אמת"ה שחלק מן כבודו ליראיו לבריותיו. When seeing a non-Jewish king, or a Jewish non-G-d-fearing king (like Achav or Yeravam), one says לבריותיו שחלק מן כבודו לברש"ו דם שחלק מן כבודו. According to the Gra, both *brachos* should be לברש"ו דם שחלק מן כבודו, which spells out the word ש"לו with its initial letters, fulfilling Chazal's command to pray for the peace of the local government, for the sake of order. There are many other *tefillos* we say for the government, such as *Yekum Purkan*. One should only say the *brachah* once per king every 30 days, and does not have to run to greet him more than once.

### To what level of kingship does this apply?

The Radvaz rules that this applies to any government subordinate that can issue judgments regarding life-or-death cases, is important as a king, and whose word cannot be contradicted. He rules that one can say the *brachah* on mayors or governors without *sheim u'malchus*. Many *poskim* rule that the *brachah* can be said even on a queen.

### What about the president of the United States?

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ruled that the *brachah* is not said on the president, because he cannot put someone to death. Others say the president does get the *brachah*, because he can pardon someone from the death penalty and start deadly wars. Rav Wosner *paskened* that the judge-to-death requirement only applies to a king's subordinate, but the president is clearly a king. Rav Ovadia Yosef ruled that the *brachah* is only said on a king who wears special royal clothing, which excludes the president. Rav Moshe Sternbuch writes that the president doesn't count because he has a limited term and can even be impeached. He does say that one can say the *brachah* on British royalty.

### Does one have to see the king in order to say the brachah?

The Gemara relates that Rav Sheishes said the *brachah* on a king even though he was blind. *Mishnah Berurah* says that a blind person from birth should say it without *sheim u'malchus*. The *Chida* rules that one can say it if he just sees the king's parade, entourage, or motorcade go by. *B'Tzel Hachochmah* notes that one may not say it just by seeing a king on a screen, even in real time.

## THE LAST WORD

A one-liner worth remembering

"IF YOU LOOK REALLY CLOSELY, MOST OVERNIGHT SUCCESSES TOOK A LONG TIME."

—Rabbi Berel Wein



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