

SHAILOS L'CHAZARA

Review Questions

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 1

לקוטי שיחות · חלק א

Parshas Va'eira

פרשת וארא

2 sichas in this booklet

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TEACHER'S EDITION

Answers are printed in italics on the answer lines, with the section (§) of the sicha.

★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

Each sicha has questions, a true chassidishe story, and a lesson for you.

Hit the Coldness First!

והיו לדם

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Va'eira, p. 119ff, sections 1-13. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Va'eira 5718 (1958). The point: *With all the great revelations, the Yidden couldn't hear Moshe; only the makkos began to break galus. The first makkah hit the Nile's water, its coldness toward kedushah, the root of all evil, and turned it into blood, warmth and life. The frogs, creatures of water, went into fiery ovens to cool off kelipah's excitement for this world. "What's wrong with not being excited?" Coldness leads to tumah, so hit the yetzer hara with "dam". From above, light comes first: lechatchilah ariber, and spreading P'nimiyus HaTorah brings the Geulah.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ Why must every detail of Yetzias Mitzrayim, even the makkos, be a lesson for us today?

All the stories of Torah are hora'os for every time and place (Torah = hora'ah). All the more so

Yetzias Mitzrayim: we must "leave Mitzrayim" spiritually every day (Tanya ch. 47), so each detail

of the physical going out is a signpost for the spiritual one. (§1)

2. ★★ Four advantages were there when Moshe brought the news of the Geulah. What were they, and what happened anyway?

(1) Hashem's name Havayah was revealed with four words of Geulah; (2) through Moshe, from whose

throat the Shechinah spoke; (3) the merit of the Avos ("Va'eira el Avraham"); (4) from Hashem

Himself. Still the galus didn't budge: "they didn't listen to Moshe, from shortness of spirit and

hard work." They couldn't even "hear" (understand) it, never mind "see" it. (§2)

3. ★★ What only began to break the strength of galus, and what is the lesson for every day?

The makkos. Even when the "Mitzrayim" inside a person is strong, whether a limited avodah based

only on understanding or real bad, spiritual "makkos" can break it and bring Geulah to the soul.

(§3)

4. ★★ Why was the first makkah on water? What is the nature of water and why is it the opposite of kedushah?

Water is by nature cold. Kedushah is life ("Hashem is called Chayim"), and life brings warmth. So

coldness is the opposite of kedushah, and coldness toward kedushah gives birth to everything

against kedushah. The first thing to break is coldness. (§4)

5. ★★★ What are the two kinds of coldness and the two kinds of water? Why were the waters of the Nile struck?

(a) Coldness toward this world's matters, which comes from kedushah, like rain from above. (b)

Coldness toward kedushah, the start of all kelipos, like water from below the earth. The Nile

rises from below; its coldness to kedushah was Egypt's avodah zarah, the root of all Egypt's evil,

so it was struck first. (§5)

6. ★★ Why did the water turn into blood? What do we learn from "from the forest itself comes the handle of the axe"?

Blood is life and warmth ("the blood is the nefesh"). The coldness itself became warmth, so the

forest gave the handle of the axe that chops it. And it says "on the dry land": even where there

isn't even moisture (attachment), there came life. (§6)

7. ★★★ Frogs came even "into your ovens". What is special about that compared to lice or wild animals?

Chazal learn the frogs' mesirus nefesh from it. Here it was from one extreme to the other:

creatures of water, the total opposite of fire, went into fiery ovens. (§§7–8)

8. ★★ What job did the frogs have in breaking the kelipah? Why does kelipah have warmth at all?

To bring the "cold of kedushah", not caring about physical things, and to put out the heat of

kelipah. Kelipah is cold to kedushah, but for bechirah it must resemble kedushah a little, "like a

monkey in front of a man", so it has warmth: excitement about this world. (§9)

9. ★★ Someone says, "What's wrong if I'm not excited about Yiddishkeit? At least I'm not doing anything bad!" What is the answer?

You can't stand in the middle (not excited about kedushah and not about bad). Coldness in kedushah

leads to sinking into the tumah of Mitzrayim. That's why the yetzer hara invests so much in

cooling down a Yid's excitement. (§10)

10. ★★★ How does the yetzer hara try to cool you down even after an open miracle?

He says: "Don't get excited. Hashem can do anything; for Him changing the letters of vinegar into oil is nothing. 'He Who told oil to burn will tell vinegar to burn' (Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa), so why get so worked up?" His aim is to cool the G-dly excitement and bring indifference, the source of Egypt's tumah. Hit him with "dam"! (§10)

11. ★★ What is the normal order of avodah, and why were the makkos in the opposite order (blood before frogs)?

From below up: first sur me'ra, then aseï tov, like cleaning a house before bringing in fine furniture for the king. From above down the order is reversed: great light is revealed first, and it brings sur me'ra. The makkos came from above, so dam (aseï tov) came before tzefardei'a (sur me'ra). (§11)

12. ★★★ What did the Rebbe Maharash say about "lechatchilah ariber", and how does it connect to P'nimiyus HaTorah in our generations?

"The world says: when you can't go under, go over. I say: go over from the start", revealing much light, and the darkness is pushed away by itself. Nigleh goes from below up; P'nimiyus HaTorah starts with much light. In the last generations it is spread to everyone without the old conditions (the Alter Rebbe's mashal of the jewel in the king's crown). That, with warmth ("dam"), pushes away the evil and brings the Geulah. (§§12-13)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

One Eye on the Camera, One Eye on the Clock

Reb Levi Yitzchak (Levi Itche) Frieden of Eretz Yisrael came to 770 for the Yamim Nora'im every year from 1975 on, and photographed what he saw. Every Erev Yom Kippur, moments before the holy day began, the Rebbe blessed the yeshivah bochurim. Levi Itche wanted to capture it. With one eye on his watch, because he would never shoot one second into Yom Kippur, and the other eye in his camera, he took picture after picture.

He threw himself into his work with such fire that the Rebbe once told him to pass a message to the bochurim learning in 770: if their enthusiasm for learning matched Frieden's passion for photography, things would look much better.

He brought the pictures home and made an exhibit called "770" in Tel Aviv. One journalist wrote in the guest book that the subject was "primitive darkness of the Middle Ages". The Rebbe saw it and said to praise the journalist's courage to disagree, but to tell him that not everything in the Middle Ages was dark, and today's news isn't so bright either. Then he gave Levi Itche a dollar for the journalist.

Source: *Eli & Malka Touger, To Know and to Care, vol. 1, "Enhancing Achievement" (Sichos in English)*

Think: Which makkah is the Rebbe's message to the bochurim about (§§4–6, 10)?

"Dam": the same warmth and fire a person has for his interests should go into kedushah. Coldness

in learning is the first thing to break.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

Put your fire into Yiddishkeit ("dam"), and stay cool toward worldly excitement ("tzefardei'a"). Don't let the yetzer hara say "calm down, it's no big deal". And start from above: lots of light, and the darkness goes by itself.

For example: You can talk for an hour about the game last night but daven like you're half asleep. Before Shacharis today, think for one minute about Who you're talking to, and say Shema like you mean it.

The Arrow Has Left the Bow!

והבאתי אתכם אל הארץ

Likkutei Sichos vol. 1, Parshas Va'eira, p. 125ff, sections 14-18. From a sicha of Shabbos Parshas Va'eira 5714 (1954).

The point: *The fifth word of Geulah, "veheiveisi", said already in Mitzrayim, means the future Geulah began then. Like "isho mishum chitzav", the moment Hashem promised good it was done, and a good decree is never taken back, like an arrow that left the bow. So the Geulah already exists and only has to be revealed. The obstacles are only concealment; walk with strength and they vanish even to physical eyes.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ The four words of Geulah, "vehotzeisi, vehitzalti, vega'alti, velakachti", stand for what? What does the fifth, "veheiveisi", stand for?

The four stand for the four Geulos, from Mitzrayim and the other galuyos. "Veheiveisi" (I will bring you to the land) stands for a still higher rise within the future Geulah (which has levels: the days of Moshiach, and beyond). (§14)

2. ★★ What do we learn from Hashem saying the fifth word already at Yetzias Mitzrayim?

As soon as Yetzias Mitzrayim began, the future Geulah began in all its details. As the Frierdiker Rebbe said, since Yetzias Mitzrayim we are "travelling" toward the future Geulah. (§14)

3. ★★ Rabbi Yochanan said "isho mishum chitzav" (his fire is like his arrows). What does it mean, and why is he liable even though at the time of the damage he can't stop it?

Once a person lights a fire, he is already liable for the damage it will do. The liability is for lighting it, which he did willingly; at that moment all the damage was already "done", like an arrow that has left his hand. (§15)

4. ★★ How does "isho mishum chitzav" prove that the Geulah of "veheiveisi" is already done?

Hashem's measure of good is greater than His measure of punishment. If for damage everything is done at the start, certainly for good: the moment Hashem promised "veheiveisi", it was already done. (§15)

5. ★★★ Why did Rabbi Yochanan want the fast on 10 Av, if the fire started on 9 Av and “all the damage is done when the fire is lit”?

The rule is only for flesh and blood: an arrow out of his hand is out of his control. For Hashem the fire and arrows never leave His hand; He can always take them back. So the destruction wasn't “done” on 9 Av, and most of it happened on the 10th. (§16)

6. ★★★ So how can we say the Geulah is already done, if Hashem can always change it?

Hashem regrets and cancels bad decrees, but never a good one (“He said, and will He not fulfill?”, Rambam). Since it is His will that good is never cancelled, a good promise is like an arrow that has left the hand: it can never be undone. (§17)

7. ★★ What is the lesson for avodas Hashem from knowing that the Geulah, at its highest level, exists already now?

It is much easier to pass all the hiddenness of this world, of galus and of the last generations, because the Geulah only has to be revealed. (§18)

8. ★★ What are all the obstacles to Torah and mitzvos really, and why are they there?

They are not a true reality, only hiddenness and concealment, there to awaken deeper strengths in avodas Hashem. And because of the Geulah, which truly exists already, the concealments are already gone. (§18)

9. ★★ When does the concealment disappear even to physical eyes?

When you know it is only imagination, aren't impressed by it, and walk with the strength of kedushah. Then the hiddenness goes away even to the eyes of flesh, and it turns into “Hashem does it for the good”, even “gam zu l'tovah”. (§18)

10. ★★★ Connect the two sichos of Va'eira: “lechatchilah ariber” in §12 and “the obstacles are not real” in §18.

Both say: don't fight the darkness piece by piece from below. Reveal light from above, and walk with strength; the darkness and obstacles fall away by themselves, because the Geulah is already “done” and only has to be revealed. (§§12, 18)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

“They Won’t Realize It’s Him”

Reb Berke Chein taught Torah to Jewish children in Soviet Russia for years, so the KGB considered him a dangerous criminal. He was caught trying to escape, sentenced to death, and the sentence was changed to prison. Even after his release he was followed everywhere, and had to hide, never showing his face by day.

His family begged that at least his wife and daughter try to leave. His son, learning in 770, asked the Rebbe. The answer: Reb Berke himself should apply, for the whole family, with a brachah. “Should he use his real papers or false ones?” The Rebbe smiled and waved his hand: “They won’t realize that it’s Reb Berke.”

The form warned: three years’ prison for every false answer. Thirty photographs went to government offices. A year and a half later, a notice: accepted. Was it a trap? Holding on to the Rebbe’s words, Reb Berke went to the visa office. The clerks handed over the passports without a second look. In Vienna an officer shouted, “Your papers are false!”, checked, and came back: “You’re lucky. The government seal is real.” The Cheins ran to their plane.

Source: *Eli & Malka Touger, To Know and to Care, vol. 1, “Nerve Center for the World” (Sichos in English)*

Think: How does Reb Berke’s story show §18?

The KGB “wall” looked completely real, but it was only concealment. Walking forward with bitachon,

he saw it disappear, even to physical eyes.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

The Geulah is already “done”; it only has to be revealed. So the obstacles in front of you aren’t really walls. Don’t be impressed by them: walk forward with strength, and they will melt away.

For example: You want to start a daily Mishnah seder, but you think, “My schedule is too packed, it’ll never work.” Don’t let that stop you. Pick a time, start tomorrow, and watch the “wall” disappear.