

LOOKING AT PART OF THE PICTURE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vaera

Looking At Part Of The Picture

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 797 - Sheva Brochos At The Seder. Good Shabbos!

There is a direct link between the beginning of Parshas Vaera and the end of Parshas Shemos. At the end of Shemos, Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon finally appear in front of Pharaoh. They present Hashem's demand "Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness." [Shemos 5:1]

Pharaoh's reaction is not only that he will not send out the Jews, but that he is determined to make their lives more miserable. While in the past, Pharaoh had provided the slaves with straw for use to make the bricks, from now on, they would need to keep up the same quota of bricks while gathering their own straw. Therefore, Moshe's first visit to Pharaoh's palace seemed to be counter-productive.

The people criticized Moshe and told him in no uncertain terms that he made matters worse. Moshe was taken aback by this setback. He questioned G-d about the efficacy of his mission. This is the conclusion of Chapter 5, the end of Parshas Shemos.

Chapter 6 begins: "Hashem said to Moshe: 'Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out, and through a strong hand will he drive them from his land.'" [Shemos 6:1]. According to Chazal, the Almighty is upset with Moshe Rabbeinu for blaming Him for "making the situation worse".

The Jewish people had an extremely natural and understandable reaction. We as human beings are bound by time and space. Our perspective on life is extremely narrow. We see the here and now, and nothing beyond that. It is the equivalent of going up to a beautiful picture and getting so close to it that you only get a skewed view of what the picture is all about. The only way to appreciate a picture is to stand back and take it all in.

This is perhaps what the Talmud means [Brochos 10a] when it makes a play on words with the pasuk "There is no G-d (Tzur -- literally Rock) like our G-d" (Ayn Tzur K'elokeinu) [Shmuel I 2:2] and

interprets, "There is no Artist (Tzayar) like our G-d". G-d is in the midst of painting a mural, but not one that goes from wall to wall, but rather a mural that goes from the beginning of time to the end of time. Often we are like someone who goes up close to a small section of the "mural" and tries to make sense of what the "Artist" is seeking to convey.

This is what happened with the Jews in Egypt after Moshe's first encounter with Pharaoh upon his return to Egypt. The hopes and spirit of Klal Yisrael were raised, only to be dashed a short time later. Not only did their situation not improve - it got worse! They were staring at a moment in time - a snapshot - and they failed to see the larger picture.

In effect, the Jewish people were asking that age-old most troubling question: Why do the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? There is really no complete earthly answer to the question, but part of the answer is that we are just looking at a moment in time and we fail to see the whole picture. Therefore we question.

The Medrash says that for man to try to understand the ways of Divine Providence is in the category of becoming confused between "the bandage and the misfortune". Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi points out that the characteristic of the Almighty is not like that of one who is flesh and blood: A surgeon cuts with a scalpel, but he heals with stitches and bandages and medicine. The surgeon does not heal with the instrument with which he cuts. The Almighty, however, brings the cure with the very instrument He uses to bring the plague, as we find by Yosef: He was sold into slavery because of his dreams (as the brothers say: "Here comes the dreamer") and he was elevated to royalty through dreams (by virtue of his being able to interpret Pharaoh's dreams).

If we would stop in the middle of the story of the righteous Yosef, we would come to the conclusion that dreams were his downfall. But, as the Medrash points out, because of dreams he came to rule over Egypt. The seeming cause of the problem was the greatest source of healing.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, zt"l, heard the following thought from Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva, zt"l: Imagine what it was like to live through the Spanish Inquisition. Imagine what it was like to be a Jew on Tisha B'Av in 1492. Spanish Jews were given the choice: Convert to Christianity or leave the country penniless. Thousands and thousands of Jews got up and left Spain penniless rather than convert to Christianity.

After all that the Jews did for Spanish society (the Finance Minister gave a large portion of his own money to finance the Government of Ferdinand and Isabella), what Spain did to the Jews was a horrible injustice. What would the Jews of that era be thinking? What would you and I be thinking if we were Jews in that era? We would be thinking: "Spain is going to get it! The Almighty will pay them back before our very eyes!"

Instead, on that very day -- Tisha B'Av 1492 - Columbus set sail and came across the greatest bonanza that any country had discovered in the last 500 years! The discovery of the New World and all the raw materials made Spain a great, wealthy, and powerful country - the super power of the

world in those days! It was not until almost 100 years later - beyond the lifetime of any of the Jewish exiles - that the Spanish Armada was defeated. The exiles never saw that. They went to their graves thinking: "This is Torah and this is her reward? Is this the Justice of the Almighty that Spain should hit this great windfall on the very day they throw us out?"

Yet the irony is "that with which He smites, He heals." The irony is that the country of Spain did for the Jewish people one of the greatest favors that has ever been done for them - they discovered America! For 300 years, more or less, Jews could come to America. When there was no place to go prior to and after the Holocaust, America was the haven for thousands and thousands of Jews. America was the haven for thousands of Jews who left Russia at the turn of the century, rather than put up with the pogroms of Czarist Russia. America saved a great portion of Klal Yisrael.

Who did that? The Spanish Government did it, acting as the instrument of the Master of the World. But that took 400 years! From 1492 until the late 1800s was four hundred years! Imagine going to your grave thinking there is no justice in this world, because nobody lives for 400 years.

This is the lesson of Hashgocha. There is no Tzur [G-d] like our G-d. There is no Tzayar [Artist] like our G-d. It is still a work in progress. History is still being written.

Klal Yisrael complained to Moshe Rabbeinu: "You made the situation worse! Now we need to suffer even more!" They failed to realize the increased suffering (making bricks without straw) saved them 190 years of decreed slavery. Rather than having to be in Egypt for 400 years, they only had to be there for 210 years. What a favor that really turned out to be! But there are many Jews who went to their graves without ever realizing that because they looked at the picture from up close and they could not see the full span of history.

The lesson of Egypt and the lesson of Spain and the lesson - one day, G-d willing, we may begin to understand what the Holocaust was all about - is that this is the way the Almighty works. We have to wait. It is very difficult for us, especially when one suffers; but one day, IY"H, everything will begin to make sense.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Va'eyra are provided below:

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- Tape # 130 - The Issur of Entering a Church
- Tape # 177 - Magic Shows: More Than Meets the Eye
- Tape # 223 - Learning in Kollel: Is It Always Permitted?
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- Tape # 313 - Converting a Church Into a Shul
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