

Parsha Va'era

Our Parsha opens as follows "I appeared to Avraham, Issac and Jacob" Rashi comments as follows " True Hashem appeared to each one of the Avot and Imot..." which implies that each individual has their own understanding of G-d. A Hasid once introduced himself to a Rebbe stating he was the grandson of a famous Rabbi. The Rebbe then said to this Hasid " I asked who YOU were not who your grandfather".

The parsha then continues " I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel" Actually this is a pivotal moment in our story because up to this point their slavery was unknown to Am Yisrael. Their slavery had become a part of their inner makeup. The Ishbitzer Rebbe comments that exile is when we don't know who we are. We are strangers even to ourselves! It's only when we cry out from our inner core that things move. But we need to realize that we are enslaved.

I feel the characters in Chumash resonate within us. There is an inner Moshe, an inner Aaron, an inner Miriam and even in inner Pharoah is part of our make- up. Hashem tells us "Behold, Bnei Yisrael have not listened to me" which is saying we even have an inner Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, where at times we can't even listen to our own souls. Or better yet, we walk through life with our own miseries, trauma, amnesia and torment and are oblivious to how it affects us.

Moshe the greatest of the prophets tells Hashem he is unable to communicate w/ Pharoah due to uncircumcised lips. But the truth is, it is not Moshe but Aaron who will communicate with Pharoah. Why? Aaron is a man of peace and patience. When dealing with our inner Pharoah we need to have inner peace and patience.

And we are really not so different than Pharoah are we? When we go through suffering, constriction, frustration, how many of us push forward despite it all. Sometimes this may be good but how many times do we , like Pharaoh, make our hearts heavy making ourselves into human battering rams to attack our problems and others, whatever the consequences.

The real problem according to the Ishbitzer, is we come used to being a slave. But, whether it is our soul that speaks to us or others, we finally "get it" that we are really slaves AND we can be free. Hashem so to speak, reaches out with an "outstretched arm" so to speak , and we realize even if I am in the deepest depths, freedom is possible.

Sometimes we think we are free but honestly we don't know what to do with this freedom. It as if our inner Moshe cries out: ' I have the children of Israel, the G-d wrestler within my very core. but how I can even approach my inner Pharoah who oppresses me , restricts me and enslaves me? Who am I who can't even cry out because of my uncircumcised lips? I am in such deep pain I can't even cry out to Hashem. The truth is, I want to change but my heart is hardened from trauma, failures in life, depression and doubt.

But wait, sometimes we DO try different solutions, but more "plagues" come and we give up again. We stop listening, conjuring up magical thinking like Pharoah's magicians. Or things get better but the same old problems arise again.

But the parsha hints at a remedy. Hashem tells Moshe "Rise up early in the morning and stand before Pharoah. " That is, in the morning, when there is newness and a creation of new possibilities, pray and

meditate to me even with all the distractions, dullness of heart doubt and struggle. Everyday, as the siddur says, we experience Mitzrayim AND we also become are free. "You redeemed us from Egypt, Hashem our G-d you freed us from the House of Bondage/Slavery". We can change.

If we think this is a one-time occurrence then we are fooling ourselves. Have you ever read old journals you wrote when you were younger? Sometimes the content is irrelevant I am sure, but there are issues that are still resonate with us. This actually points to our continuous slavery and more importantly new forms of ongoing exodus and new insights, new growth and new revelations. I think this is the real reason we remember our slavery and the exodus from Egypt.

I recently spoke to a woman who I knew during my days working as a homeless outreach worker. When I first met her, she was in a bad place in her life. She had experienced abuse, homelessness and addiction to Meth Amphetamines. She went on to tell me she reached a point in her life where she could no longer live the homeless lifestyle and all that went with it. First she stopped using drugs, started to attend NA meetings and with the help of others she found a new place to live and then got a job helping others who had experienced the same torment she had lived through. She too experienced her own slavery and exodos. She too left her Mitzrayim and found freedom.

Gut Shabbos.