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וָאֵרָא Va'era

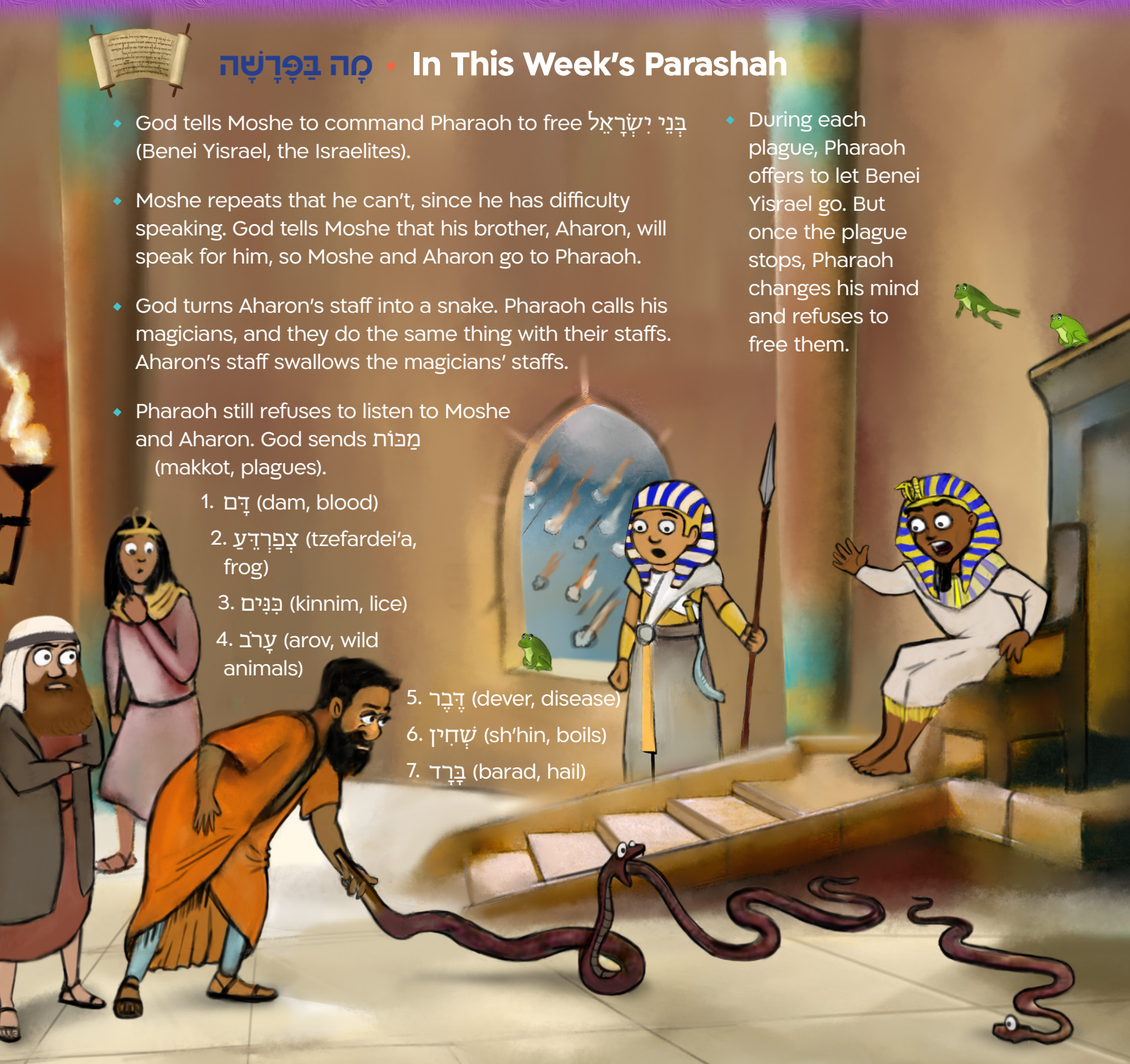
DEVASH

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כ"ו טֵבֵת - ג' שְׁבָט תשפ"ד January 7 – 13, 2024

מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- God tells Moshe to command Pharaoh to free בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Benei Yisrael, the Israelites).
- Moshe repeats that he can't, since he has difficulty speaking. God tells Moshe that his brother, Aharon, will speak for him, so Moshe and Aharon go to Pharaoh.
- God turns Aharon's staff into a snake. Pharaoh calls his magicians, and they do the same thing with their staffs. Aharon's staff swallows the magicians' staffs.
- Pharaoh still refuses to listen to Moshe and Aharon. God sends מַכּוֹת (makkot, plagues).
  1. דָּם (dam, blood)
  2. צְפַרְדֵּעַ (tzefardei'a, frog)
  3. כִּנִּים (kinnim, lice)
  4. עָרֹב (arov, wild animals)
  5. דֶּבֶר (dever, disease)
  6. שְׁחִין (sh'hin, boils)
  7. בָּרָד (barad, hail)
- During each plague, Pharaoh offers to let Benei Yisrael go. But once the plague stops, Pharaoh changes his mind and refuses to free them.





מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

God tells Moshe that he should warn Pharaoh about the plague of דָּם (dam, blood) at a specific time and place:

Bzzzz
A lot of midrashim are **bugged** by something unusual in the Torah text

Shemot 7:15

Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he is coming out to the water. Stand before him at the edge of the river. Take the staff that turned into a snake with you in your hand.

שמות ז:טו

לֵךְ אֶל פַּרְעֹה בַּבֹּקֶר הִנֵּה יֹצֵא הַמָּיְמָה
וְנִצַּבְתָּ לִקְרָאתוֹ עַל שְׂפַת הַיְאֹר
וְהַמַּטֶּה אֲשֶׁר נֶהְפַּךְ לְנָחָשׁ תִּקַּח בְּיָדֶךָ׃



What was Pharaoh doing at the river in the morning?

Rashi quotes a Midrash Tanhuma:

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

"When he is coming out to the water" - to go to the bathroom. Pharaoh pretended that he was a god and he would tell people that he never had to go to the bathroom. But he would wake up early and go to the Nile River, and that's where he'd relieve himself.

רש"י

הִנֵּה יֹצֵא הַמָּיְמָה - לִנְקָבָיו.
שֶׁהָיָה עוֹשֶׂה עַצְמוֹ אֱלוֹהַּ וְאוֹמֵר
שֶׁאֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ לִנְקָבָיו, וּמַשְׁכִּים
וְיוֹצֵא לַנִּילוּס וְעוֹשֶׂה שָׁם צָרָכָיו.

- What does this midrash teach us about Pharaoh? Why would he want people to think he was a god?
- Is there a hidden message God might be trying to send Pharaoh by sending Moshe at this very moment - when he is trying to go to the bathroom in secret so no one notices he isn't really a god? What could that be?
- Is there something else about the first plague that could explain why God sends Moshe to speak to Pharaoh specifically at the river?



תְּפִלָּה • Prayer in the Parashah



According to the midrash on the previous page (in Rashi), Pharaoh was embarrassed that he had to go to the bathroom. He snuck out to "take care of business" every morning at the Nile, hoping no one would discover that he was just human, and not actually a god.

But Jewish practices show that we should not be ashamed of being human and having bodies that work the way they do! In fact, we have a special בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing) where we thank God for the way our bodies work, and in particular for the ability to go to the bathroom. This berakhah is called Asher Yatzar.

The text of Asher Yatzar comes from the Talmud (Berakhot 60b), and the mitzvah to say it whenever you go to the bathroom appears in the Shulhan Arukh (Orah Hayyim 6:1). Here's one version of Asher Yatzar:

Blessed are You, God our Lord, Ruler of the world, Who created people wisely and created openings and hollow parts in people. It's obvious and known in Your Holy Presence that if any of these would be opened or blocked at the wrong time we wouldn't be able to exist or stand before You. Blessed are You, God, Who heals all flesh and Who performs wonders.	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶת הָאָדָם בְּחָכְמָה וּבָרָא בוֹ נְקָבִים נְקָבִים חֲלוּלִים חֲלוּלִים גָּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ לִפְנֵי כִסֵּא כְבוֹדֶךָ שֶׁאִם יִפָּתֵחַ אֶחָד מֵהֶם אוֹ יִסָּתֵם אֶחָד מֵהֶם אִי אֶפְשַׁר לְהִתְקַיֵּם וְלַעֲמֹד לְפָנֶיךָ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר וּמַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת:

- What amazes you about what your own body can do? When are you most likely to notice your body's power? Why might it be good to be thankful for what the body can do even in less obvious times?

In the Gemara, there's a מַחְלֹקֶת (mahloket, debate) about how to end Asher Yatzar. One opinion is to say רוֹפֵא כָל בָּשָׂר (rofeh khol basar, Who heals all flesh) and another opinion is to say מַפְלִיא לַעֲשׂוֹת (mafli la'asot, Who performs wonders). So the compromise is to say both!

The Rema adds another perspective about the concluding words, umafli la'asot. He explains that these words actually thank God for one more thing:

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...בַּמֶּה שֶׁשּׁוֹמֵר רוּחַ הָאָדָם בְּקִרְבּוֹ, וְקוֹשֵׁר דָּבָר רוּחָנִי בְּדָבָר גַּשְׁמִי, וְהַכֹּל הוּא עַל יְדֵי שֶׁהוּא רוֹפֵא כָּל בָּשָׂר, כִּי אָז הָאָדָם בְּקִרְבּוֹ הַבְּרִיאוּת וְנִשְׁמָתוֹ מִשְׁתַּמֶּרֶת בְּקִרְבּוֹ.

...God keeps each person's spirit in them, tying a spiritual thing to something physical. This is what it means to thank God for being One Who heals all flesh: only when a body is functioning can it contain a soul within.

According to the Rema, Asher Yatzar draws our attention to the miracle of how our bodies work, and also the miracle that we have bodies at all! You might think that a soul, which is spiritual, and a body, which is physical, wouldn't really go together. But God made us that way anyhow, so that's a lot to be thankful for. And that also means that the body's functions aren't just good for the body—they're good for the soul, too! So when we thank God for how our bodies work, there's really a lot to be thankful for.



- When you think of yourself—who you really are—do you think of your body or your soul, or both?
- What is the advantage of having a soul and body combined? How is that better than having just one without the other?
- What's so surprising about having a soul tied to a body? Why does the Rema consider that a wonder? How does this idea affect the way you view yourself and others?



דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן • One-Minute Debate

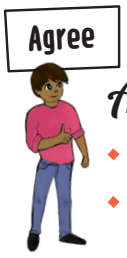


Debate: Being a נָבִיא (navi, prophet) is a great job!

How to play:

- Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!
- For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.





Agree!

- You get to talk to God all the time.
- You get to be a leader and tell people what to do.
- God might let you perform miracles.
- You get to save people.

Disagree!

- People don't like being told what to do! And they usually don't treat leaders too nicely.
- Prophets have hard lives.
- I don't like the spotlight. Let someone else perform miracles.

aliyot:
1) Shemot 6:2 to 6:13
2) 6:14 to 6:28
3) 6:29 to 7:7
4) 7:8 to 8:6
5) 8:7 to 8:18
6) 8:19 to 9:16
7) 9:17 to 9:35

Haftarah: Yehezkel 28:25 to 29:21

שְׁאֵלוֹת הַשָּׁבוּעַ • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. The answers to questions 8 and 9 are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah. The answer to question 10 is in this week's haftarah.

Good luck!

1. What name of God was familiar to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov?
2. Who is married to Aharon?
3. How many years older than Moshe was Aharon?
4. How long did the plague of blood last?
5. What did the magicians call the plague of כִּנִּים (kinnim, lice)?
6. How did the plague of שְׁחִין (sh'hin, boils) start?
7. Two crops survived the בָּרָד (barad, hail)—what were they?
8. In this parashah, which two people lived to the same age?
9. Which plagues in our parashah did Aharon help bring about?
10. **From the haftarah:** For how long will the land of מִצְרַיִם (Mitzrayim, Egypt) be empty and ruined?

* Look for the answers on page 7!



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הַפְּטָרָה • Haftarah



About 1,000 years after Benei Yisrael left מִצְרַיִם (Mitzrayim, Egypt) and entered the Land of Israel (which was about 2,500 years ago), an enemy from Bavel threatened to hurt and exile the Jewish people from their land. The Jewish people hoped that Mitzrayim might help protect them, so they made an alliance with them. But Mitzrayim let them down.

In our haftarah, God tells the prophet Yehezkel to deliver a message to the Pharaoh of Mitzrayim in those days: You will get what you deserve.

Yehezkel 29:3-6

This is what Lord God said:
I am against you, Pharaoh king of Mitzrayim.
You are a huge sea monster, sprawling in your river, saying, "The river is mine, and I made it!"

I will put hooks in your cheeks, and make the fish from your river stick to your scales. I will lift you out of your river and all the fish there will stick to you.

Then I'll chuck you into the wilderness - you and all the fish of your river - you'll fall all across the open fields. You won't be gathered in or brought back. You'll become food for the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky.

Then all of Mitzrayim will know that I am God...

יחזקאל כט:ג-ו

כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹקִים הִנְנִי עָלֶיךָ פַּרְעֹה
מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם הַתַּנִּים הַגָּדוֹל הָרֹבֵץ בְּתוֹךְ
יְאֹרָיו אֲשֶׁר אָמַר לִי יְאֹרִי וַאֲנִי עֲשִׂיתְנִי:

וְנָתַתִּי חַחִים בִּלְחָיֶיךָ וְהִדְבַּקְתִּי דְגַת
יְאֹרֶיךָ בְּקַשְׂקְשֹׂתֶיךָ וְהַעֲלִיתִיךָ מִתּוֹךְ
יְאֹרֶיךָ וְאֵת כָּל דְּגַת יְאֹרֶיךָ בְּקַשְׂקְשֹׂתֶיךָ
תִּדְבָּק:

וּנְטַשְׁתִּיךָ הַמִּדְבָּרָה אוֹתְךָ וְאֵת כָּל דְּגַת
יְאֹרֶיךָ עַל פְּנֵי הַשָּׂדֶה תִּפּוֹל לֹא תֵאָסֵף
וְלֹא תִקָּבֵץ לְחַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וּלְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
נְתַתִּיךָ לְאָכְלָה:

וְיָדְעוּ כָּל יֹשְׁבֵי מִצְרַיִם כִּי אֲנִי ה'...

- What do you notice? What are the big ideas here?
- How many times does the river appear in these pesukim? How might this connect to Parashat Va'era?
- Can you see a connection between what Pharaoh claims in this prophecy and what Rashi above (p. 2) said about Pharaoh in our parashah? What does Pharaoh mean by saying that "The river is mine, and I made it!"?
- How many times does God call the river "your river" when speaking to Pharaoh? What kind of point is God trying to rub in?

דִּקְדּוּק • Grammar

What do you think is the most powerful letter in Biblical Hebrew? It would be fair to say it's vav. Why? Because by just adding a vav to the beginning of a word, you can change its entire meaning!

Here's an example from this week's parashah:

וְהַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר בַּיְאֹר תָּמוּת וּבָאַשׁ הַיְאֹר

And the fish in the Nile will die and the Nile will stink
(Shemot 7:18)

This pasuk is talking about something in the future, something that hasn't happened yet – but will happen later during the plague of דָּם (dam, blood).

Look closer at the Hebrew words and you'll see something surprising:

- The word תָּמוּת (tamut, will die) is in the normal form for a future tense verb.
- The word בָּאַשׁ (ba-ash) is in the form for a past tense verb! It means "stank." Normally, to say "will stink," in the future, you'd say תִּבְאַשׁ (tiv'ash).

So how can the word וּבָאַשׁ (u-va'ash), which seems to be about something in the past, be used to talk about the future?

It's the power of the vav at the beginning! This kind of vav is called **וי"ו הַהֲפוּכָה (vav ha-hipukh, the reversing vav)**. (The really fancy name for it in English is "the vav consecutive.") In a later week of Devash, we'll see an example of vav ha-hipukh reversing things in the opposite direction: from future to past!

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. אֵל שַׁדָּי/El Shaddai (6:3)
2. Elisheva (6:23)
3. Three (7:7)
4. Seven days (7:25)
5. אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹקִים (etzba Elohim, the finger of God) (8:15)
6. Moshe threw soot into the air in front of Pharaoh (9:10)
7. חִטָּה and כֻּסֶּמֶת (hittah and kussemet, wheat and spelt) (9:32)
8. Levi and Amram — 137 years (6:16, 6:20)
9. דָּם (dam, blood; 7:19-20), צְפַרְדֵּעַ (tzefardei'a, frogs; 8:1-2), כִּנִּים (kinnim, lice; 8:12-13), שְׁחִין (sh'hin, boils; 9:8-9)
10. 40 years (Yehezkel 29:11)

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פֵּרוּשִׁים • Commentary

What does it mean to know God?

Shemot 6:3

I appeared to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov as El Shaddai.
But I did not make Myself known to them by My name (the one spelled י-ה-ו-ה).

שמות ו:ג

וָאֵרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב
בְּאֵ-ל שַׁ-דָּי
וּשְׁמִי ה׳ לֹא נוֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם׃

What does God mean, in saying that our אָבוֹת (avot, forefathers) did not know the name of God? Didn't they have a close relationship with God when God spoke directly to them?

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

I was not known to them in My attribute of total truthfulness, which is represented by My name י-ה-ו-ה, and which means that I am certain to keep My promises.

I made promises to the avot, but I did not fulfill them for the avot.

רש"י

לֹא נִפַּרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּמִדַּת
אֱמִתּוּת שֶׁלִּי, שֶׁעָלֶיהָ נִקְרָא
שְׁמִי ה׳, נֶאֱמָן לְאַמֵּת דְּבָרַי,
שֶׁהֲרֵי הִבְטַחְתִּים וְלֹא קִיַּמְתִּי.

According to Rashi, God is pointing out to Moshe that Moshe is having a special experience that even the avot weren't able to have. God made promises to the avot that their descendents, Benei Yisrael, would eventually be saved from Egypt, but they didn't live long enough to see those promises come true. Moshe is privileged to see God make that salvation happen before his own eyes.



- What does it say about God that God's special name (י-ה-ו-ה) is about truthfulness and fulfilling promises? How can we apply that in our own lives?
- How does seeing the redemption of Benei Yisrael change Moshe's relationship with God?
- Do you think you have a relationship with God that is different from your parents or grandparents? How so?