

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

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## The Proper Rebuke

The Parsha opens with Gd (ELOKIM) speaking (VAYDABER) to Moshe and saying (VAYOMER) to him, "I am HASHEM" (6:2). The use of different verbs for "saying" along with the text's employing different names for Gd are both significant.

Typically, VAYDABER conveys a measure of harsh admonition, while VAYOMER denotes a much softer way of communicating. Likewise, ELOKIM generally refers to Gd's uncompromising justice, while HaShem speaks to Gd's attribute of mercy and compassion. How may this be explained?

The Netziv offers the following insight. Gd was upset with Moshe, both for protesting against His perceived actions in allowing Israel to suffer as well as for wondering why he was sent in the first place (5:22). Hence, the opening phrase, ELOKIM speaks (VAYDABER) rebukingly to Moshe for his lack of complete faith. And then, immediately, switches to a milder form of speech (VAYOMER) and changing His Name in the process (now, it's HASHEM).

There is a critical lesson to learn from this description of HaShem's behavior towards Moshe. Clearly, there are times when we must rebuke, correct and

reprimand others for some wrong or misbehavior. How does one accomplish this in a way that the well-intentioned reproof doesn't backfire and lead to animosity and verbal reprisals? The answer is that with every reprimand must come words of kindness and empathy. If the person you are scolding knows that the words are coming from a place of genuine concern and love, it will be received in the right spirit. What is essential is to realize that your love must be displayed and validated not only by what you say but - more importantly - in how you say it.

## Plan A and Plan B

Here are two questions which may have one answer:

One: Why does Moshe propose to Par'o that the Israelites leave Egypt for just three days (5:3 and 8:23)? Was there ever any intention of them returning? And if not, was it proper for Moshe to engage in such chicanery?

Two: The Yerushalmi (Rosh HaShana 3:5), based upon the verse in 6:13, tells us that even before the onset of the plagues, Moshe is told by HaShem to teach the people the laws of freeing slaves. Why? They were not the task-masters!

The entire drama of the events leading up to the climactic Exodus contained a number of fundamental and eternal lessons for the Jewish People. One of them was the absolute conviction that

no human being ought to be a slave to another. A person created in the Divine image is free, and to treat anyone otherwise contravenes G-d's Will. This principle became hardwired into our collective psyche and explains, in part, why we have always been the champions of the downtrodden throughout the ages. Thus, at the very outset, Moshe commands the People about the manumission of slaves.

Now, there was a Plan A and a Plan B about how the People would gain this freedom. Plan A was to have the most powerful potentate of the ancient world - Par'o - publicly declare that slavery was wrong. This acknowledgement would begin by allowing the Jewish People to leave Egypt for three days and celebrate with G-d. Par'o would in effect be saying that while he may be a supreme ruler, he was not a god. According to this narrative, the People would indeed return (Moshe then was not deluding anyone), and Egypt would then begin a slow but peaceful learning curve ultimately leading to a complete rejection of the entire Egyptian pantheon and an acceptance of HaShem as the omniscient and omnipotent Only One.

Unfortunately, Par'o rejected Plan A, and we all know the rest of the story.

That Plan B was recorded in our Torah has this lesson to teach: At the end of the day, there are certain sacred and absolute truths about life, ethical and

moral rules, which, when followed, make every moment a wonderful and meaningful experience. There are religious precepts that, when observed, release an ecstatic joy that elevates man to unimaginable heights of spirituality.

That is the ultimate goal, and mankind is destined to eventually acknowledge these truths. In fact, this is what the messianic era is all about. But how we will come to recognize and live by these great verities - how long it will take and what difficulties we will have to face - will depend upon us. There is always a Plan A and Plan B, much like the fateful decision that faced Par'o of old. Let's just hope we're not as foolish and stubborn as our ancient adversary and make the wrong choice.

## Brotherly Love

Many of our commentators have offered various explanations as to why the Torah, at the outset of the Exodus drama, details the genealogy of Moshe (see 6:12-28). The Rav offers this important observation.

HaShem's original intention was to have only one messenger - Moshe - to act as His agent in the redemption of His People. Moshe reluctantly agrees. Both he and Aharon appear before Par'o and their mission meets with disaster. Par'o blasphemes Gd and makes it even more onerous for the People to make their tally of bricks.

At this point, Moshe turns to HaShem

and again expresses his unwillingness to approach the king. If the People will not listen to him, what hope does he have of convincing Par'o? HaShem responds by telling Moshe that Aharon will accompany him. But there was much more at play in Aharon's partnering with his brother. Now, that role would be shared with Aharon. This is why the Torah emphasizes (6:26) that it was both Aharon and Moshe who were to speak before Par'o. As Rashi comments, they were both equal.

The sharing of the role of the redeemer was an extraordinary event. "It was unique that a brother would surrender part of his role to another brother." As such, the Torah wanted to tell us "who these brothers were; what family did they come from that might have led one brother to relinquish his place in Jewish history in order to allow his brother to share the title with him. That is why the Torah concludes the lineage description of Shevet Levi with Moshe and Aharon."

One might ask: What really made this Tribe so unique? More, why does the Torah tell us how long Levi lived? Indeed, he survived all of his brothers. Why? Could there have been some critical message that only he could best transmit to his brothers and their descendants?

The Book of B'reishit is rife with the story of brothers fighting and contending with one another: Kayin and Hevel, Yitzchak and Yishmael, Yaakov

and Eisav, Yosef and his brothers. This often-bitter dissension would have to end if the People were to be redeemed. Levi was one of the prime instigators in the sale of Yosef. Why then should his great-grandson, Moshe, on the very night of the Exodus, assume total responsibility to find and carry the bones of Yosef out of Egypt (Sh'mot 14:19)? Apparently, says the Rav, Levi regretted his early hatred and began to admire and revere his younger brother, Yosef. This genuine and deep affection - the critical element in brotherly love - was clearly passed down through the generations. Moshe understood how important it would be for him, a descendant of Levi, to personally remove Yosef's remains for burial in Israel.

And it was this very commitment to the supreme ethic of brotherhood solidarity and fraternal admiration that allowed Moshe to happily share the role of redeemer with his older brother.

This lesson should not be lost upon our generation in which, notwithstanding our disagreements, our unity and solidarity must be preserved. The example of Moshe and Aharon is an ethical and communal leitmotif worthy of emulation.