

Shabbat Shalom Fax

Parshat Va'eira

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The Fax of Life

ת"וב

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GOOD MORNING! This week's Torah portion teaches us a fundamental life lesson, and explains why a person should constantly strive for an attitude of gratitude.

Two old friends met each other on the street one day. One looked forlorn, almost on the verge of tears. His friend asked, "What has the world done to you, my old friend?"

The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you: three weeks ago, my uncle died and left me forty thousand dollars."

"**I am sorry for your loss**, but that's a lot of money."

"**But you see**, two weeks ago, a cousin I never even knew died and left me eighty-five thousand dollars." His friend replied, "Sounds to me that you've been very blessed."

"**You don't understand!**" he interrupted. "Last week my great-aunt passed away. I inherited almost a quarter of a million from her." Now the man's friend was really confused. "Then, why do you look so glum?"

"**This week...nothing!**"

In this week's parsha we find the Jewish nation suffering terribly after being enslaved for 190 years by the Egyptians. God sends Moses to Pharaoh to demand, "Let my people go!" When Pharaoh refuses Moses begins to bring about the following plagues: 1) all the water turned to blood 2) an infestation of frogs 3) a lice epidemic 4) wild animals 5) a debilitating sickness that killed the Egyptian livestock 6) a horrible rash that resulted in the Egyptians being covered in boils on their skin and 7) a miraculous hailstorm (it was made of fire and ice) that rained down and destroyed homes and crops.

{If you want to visualize these stories you may want to watch or rewatch the famous 1956 award winning movie "The Ten Commandments," directed by the famous Cecile B. Demille and starring Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brynner as the Pharaoh Ramses. An interesting sidenote is that Heston, a non-Jew, played Moses while Yul Brynner, who was a Jew, played Pharaoh.}

A careful reading of the story in the Torah reveals a fascinating lesson. Whenever the Nile was attacked (by the first two plagues; blood and frogs), God commanded Moses to ask his brother Aaron to cause the plague (see *Exodus* 7:19 and 8:1). This seems very odd, after all, Moses was the spokesperson for God, why did he not do it himself?

Our rabbis explain why those plagues had to be enacted by Aaron and not Moses: When Moses was a baby Pharaoh decreed that all the baby boys were to be drowned in the Nile. Moses' mother, in order to conceal him, fashioned a waterproof basket and set him adrift in the Nile between the bulrushes so he would not be found and murdered. Eventually, Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe in the Nile and found him floating in the basket and took him home. She then raised him in the royal palace as her own son (see *Exodus* 2:2-11).

God decreed that because the Nile had played such a pivotal role in saving Moses from being discovered when he was baby, he was prohibited from inflicting a plague upon it. Our rabbis in the Talmud sum it up with the following metaphor; "Do not throw stones into a reservoir from which you drank" (*Bava Kama* 92b).

Having gratitude is a tenet and a core value of Judaism; perhaps the value of the highest order. In fact, the name Jew is a derivation of the word thank you; it comes from the biblical name Judah. Judah was one of the original twelve tribes and was given that name by his mother Leah as an expression of her gratitude to God (see *Genesis* 29:35). In Hebrew the word for thanks is "*todah*," which is based on the same root word as the name Judah.

But this concept is a little difficult to understand. One can certainly understand that if a kindness was received a thank you is "owed." Thus, if someone goes out of their way to help another there is a debt on the recipient of the kindness to express appreciation. But in Moses' situation he was "saved" by the Nile; an inanimate object. How can there be an obligation to an inanimate object?

According to the great medieval Kabbalist and philosopher Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, God created the world to bestow good upon mankind. The ultimate good that God bestowed upon mankind is the ability to have a relationship with Him, which can be earned through our good deeds. This relationship is an expression of God's love for His children.

There is a remarkable book called *365 Thank Yous* written by John Kralik. If memory serves, I was originally given this book many years ago by my beloved friend and mentor Rabbi Kalman Packouz of

blessed memory. This small book is an absolutely exhilarating story about how a year of writing thank you notes changed the author's life. I highly recommend it. In fact, it inspired me to begin to hand write thank you notes for the last ten years. You can find it here <https://tinyurl.com/thank-yous>.

The true reason that a person must give thanks isn't because it is something that he owes. Rather the real benefit of internalizing a kindness that you received, whether it was from a person or an inanimate agent of God, is to understand your self-worth. God loves you and He did something for you because you have a special value to Him. So being thankful is actually a way to begin to appreciate your own value and build self-esteem!

Of course, in order to be grateful, a person must begin by taking careful stock of what he has and begin to focus on not taking life for granted. Never has this been more true than today.

A young couple living in New York in the early 1990's were visited by the wife's elderly grandmother who grew up in prewar Poland and was visiting America for the first time. As the young couple proudly showed off their modern kitchen they pointed out all their modern appliances. They explained how a microwave meant you could warm anything in mere minutes, an ice maker assured that you always had ice and how a dishwasher means you never have to scrub or dry any pots, plates, glasses, or silverware, etc.

After giving the tour, the granddaughter asked her grandmother, "If you could have had any one thing from this kitchen back in your kitchen in Poland, what would you choose?"

What do you think the grandmother pointed to?

The faucet! She explained that she would have been thrilled just to have running water in the house and not to have to go down to the well every time she needed some water for cooking and cleaning.

We take everything for granted; we rarely stop and appreciate all that we have. We must make a conscious effort to acknowledge what we have in our lives that is simply amazing. We have been gifted such an incredible world, yet we rarely focus on all the good with which we have been blessed. We have come to expect it. Most of us don't even really appreciate our own good health until it begins to slip away.


We must commit ourselves to recognize the blessings in our lives. Start today by making a list of everything in your life that you are grateful for. Then thank God and the people who are responsible for those special gifts in your life. Internalize that these things were given to you because someone cares about you. Review that list often; you will have a greater appreciation for yourself!

TORAH PORTION: Va'eira, Exodus 6:2-9:35

Here begins the story of the Ten Plagues which God put upon the Egyptians not only to effect the release of the Jewish people from bondage, but to show the world that He is the God of all creation and history. The first nine plagues are divisible into three groups: 1) the water turning to blood, frogs, lice 2) wild beasts, pestilence/epidemic, boils 3) hail, locust, and darkness.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that these were punishments measure for measure for afflicting the Jewish people with slavery: 1) The first of each group reduced Egyptians in their own land to the insecurity of strangers. 2) The second of each group robbed them of pride, possessions and a sense of superiority. 3) The third in each group imposed physical suffering.

SHABBAT LIGHTING: *Jerusalem* 4:30 Miami 5:40 Guatemala 5:39 Hong Kong 5:49 Honolulu 5:58 Jo'Burg 6:45

 LA 4:57 London 4:19 Melbourne 8:21 Mex. City 6:06 New York 4:45 Singapore 7:00 Toronto 4:59 Moscow 4:27

"QUOTE OF THE WEEK": Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a GIFT.

That's why it's called the PRESENT.

In memory of
Meyer Jacobs.

Beloved husband, father, and grandfather.

Dedicated by

Dr. Baruch and Robin Jacobs & family.



Shabbat Shalom,

Yitzchak Zweig

Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig

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