

INSPIRE

VAERA
3RD SHEVAT -16TH JANUARY 2021

THE FOUR STAGES OF PERSONAL GROWTH

By Hanna Perlberger



One sure way to make people avoid you is if you continue to live in the past and refuse to move on from a painful experience. Catching a cheating spouse will certainly garner sympathy, for example, but if it's been years and the infidelity is still an ongoing complaint, then your circle of friends may whittle down to like-minded whiners. Even the book of Ecclesiastes urges us to move on. "To everything, there is a season" can be seen as a biblical exhortation to "go with the flow." Many Jews, however, recite daily the "Six Remembrances"—one of which is to "remember the day when you went out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life" (Deuteronomy 16:3). For starters, I already have enough on my plate in the morning. Besides, we do this anyway at great length during the Passover seder, so why ruminate about it daily?

In Va'eira, G-d tells Moses the four ways that He will redeem the Jewish people. So redemption is not a one-step process. Exiting the narrow spiritual confines of Egypt paves the way to go towards the expansiveness of connection and service to G-d. Leaving negativity is not an end unto itself, but a precursor to embracing positivity. Nor is redemption a one-and-done event, but rather, an inquiry and reflection into the false mental constructs that enslave us for our entire lives. If you are having trouble making the positive changes you want to make, it may pay to look at each component of the four-step redemptive process as described in Va'eira:

1) "I shall take you out from under the burdens."

Commit to Stopping.

This refers to G-d stopping the hard labour. While the Ten Plagues occurred over a period of time, before the Jews leaving Egypt, the physical burden of slavery came to an end. Select a negative behaviour you want to shift that is challenging but doable. State your goal in the positive. For example, instead of saying you want to stop yelling at your kids, you would say that you want to show more patience and love. And you have to genuinely full-out commit to stopping the unwanted behaviour and not repeating it. (Of course, you won't be 100 per cent perfect, but you can't merely be paying lip service to this either.) If you find yourself, however, unable to stop repeating old patterns, honestly check whether you have placed a high enough value on the change you want to see. How important it is, and what would be possible for you and your relationships if the troublesome issues were handled? What could you "be," "do" or "have" in your life if you made this change? How would you feel? Take the time to imagine this as being real for you.

2) "I shall rescue you."

Avoid temptation and come up with an if/then strategy.

This refers to G-d taking us out of the very land of Egypt. If you can avoid the place or circumstances that tempt you, you should. Weight Watchers has a great saying to help people avoid buying groceries that contain forbidden food items: "Don't bring your enemies home with you." But seriously, the key to adopting any new behaviour is having a strategy for dealing with what inevitably gets in the way. Take time to think about the obstacles that trip you up, both externally and internally. Think about the ways you give yourself permission not to honour your goals, and how you justify yourself. And then make a plan, such as, if that thing happens to derail you, then what will you do or say to yourself overcome it?

3) "I shall redeem you."

Look under the hood.

This refers to the deeper levels of our mental schema. It's one thing to take a Jew out of Egypt, but quite another to take Egypt out of the Jew. The Jewish people had to be rebuilt from the ground up, to unlearn the internal constructs of slavery, "upgrade their operating system" and understand what it means to be truly holy. If you are having real difficulty in realizing your goals, then you may need to get to the root of the hidden beliefs and fears that are blocking you. Unless you tune into the whispers of your inner voices, you can get very frustrated and not even know why. So having trouble with making a positive change doesn't mean you are a loser or incapable of doing so, but that you need to figure it out. And I stand for the proposition that it's all "figure-outtable."

4) "I shall take you to Me for a people."

"Step into your higher purpose.

Freedom is not the same as a "free for all." G-d's purpose in taking us out of Egypt was to give us the Torah, and create a new relationship between man and G-d. On my desk sits a framed quote by Henry David Thoreau: "Be not simply good; be good for something." As you incorporate a new positive change in your life, it's not a stand-alone idea. If your goal was to be more loving in a relationship, then see how many different ways you can make a person feel cherished by you. Look for the means to broaden and share your process and purpose. Allow it to evolve into higher and higher goals. Create a vision. Live with purpose. Make a difference.

FREEDOM AND TRUTH

Shabbat Times

Candle Lighting

4:00pm

Shabbos ends 5:15pm

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Why did Moses tell Pharaoh, if not a lie, then less than the full truth? Here is the conversation between him and Pharaoh after the fourth plague, arov, "swarms of insects" (some say "wild animals").

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land." But Moses said, "That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the Lord our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? We must take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, as he commands us." (Ex. 8: 21-23) Not just here but throughout, Moses makes it seem as if all he is asking is for permission for the people to undertake a three day journey, to offer sacrifices to God and (by implication) then to return. So, in their first appearance before Pharaoh, Moses and Aaron say: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the wilderness.'"

Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."

Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword." (Ex. 5: 1-3)

God even specifies this before the mission has begun, saying to Moses at the burning bush: "You and the elders of Israel will then go to the king of Egypt. You must tell him, 'The Lord, God of the Hebrews, revealed Himself to us. Now we request that you allow us to take a three-day journey into the desert, to sacrifice to the Lord our God'" (3: 18).

The impression remains to the very end. After the Israelites have left, we read:

The king of Egypt received news that the people were escaping. Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds regarding the people, and said, "What have we done? How could we have released Israel from doing our work?" (

At no stage does Moses say explicitly that he is proposing that the people should be allowed to leave permanently, never to return. He talks of a three-day journey. There is an argument between him and Pharaoh as to who is to go. Only adult males? Only the people, not the cattle? Moses consistently asks for permission to worship God, at someplace that is not Egypt. But he does not speak about freedom or the promised land. Why not? Why does he create, and not correct, a false impression? Why can he not say openly what he means?

The commentators offer various explanations. R. Shmuel David Luzzatto (Italy, 1800-1865) says that it was impossible for Moses to tell the truth to a tyrant like Pharaoh. R. Yaakov Mecklenburg (Germany, 1785-1865, Ha-Ktav v'eha-Kabbalah) says that technically Moses did not tell a lie. He did indeed mean that he wanted the people to be free to make a journey to worship God, and he never said explicitly that they would return.

Abrabanel (Lisbon 1437 – Venice 1508) says that God told Moses deliberately to make a small request, to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty and indifference to his slaves. All they were asking was for a brief respite from their labours to offer sacrifices to God. If he refused this, he was indeed a tyrant. Rav Elhanan Samet (Iyyunim be-Parshot Ha-Shevua, Exodus, 189) cites an unnamed commentator who says simply that this was war between Pharaoh and the Jewish people, and it was, indeed, sometimes necessary, to deceive.

Actually, however, the terms of the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh are part of a wider pattern that we have already observed in the Torah. When Jacob leaves Laban we read: "Jacob decided to go behind the back of Laban the Aramean, and did not tell him that he was leaving" (Gen. 31: 20). Laban protests this behaviour: "How could you do this? You went behind my back and led my daughters away like prisoners of war! Why did you have to leave so secretly? You went behind my back and told me nothing!" (31: 26-27).

Jacob again has to tell at best a half-truth when Esau suggests that they travel together: "You know that the children are weak, and I have responsibility for the nursing sheep and cattle. If they are driven hard for even one day, all the sheep will die. Please go ahead of me, my lord" (33: 13-14). This, though not strictly a lie, is a diplomatic excuse.

When Jacob's sons are trying to rescue their sister Dina who has been raped and abducted by Shechem the Hivite, they "replied deceitfully" (34: 13) when Shechem and his father proposed that the entire family should come and settle with them, telling them that they could only do so if all the males of the town underwent circumcision.

Earlier still we find that three times Abraham and Isaac, forced to leave home because of famine, have to pretend that they are their wives' brothers not their husbands because they fear that otherwise they will be killed so that Sarah or Rebecca could be taken into the king's harem (Gen. 12, 20, 26).

These six episodes cannot be entirely accidental or coincidental to the biblical narrative as a whole. The implication seems to be this. Outside the promised land Jews in the biblical age are in danger if they tell the truth. They are at constant risk of being killed or at best enslaved.

Why? Because they are powerless in an age of power. They are a small family, at best a small nation, in an age of empires. They have to use their wits to survive. By and large they do not tell lies but they can create a false impression. This is not how things should be. But it is how they were before Jews had their own land, their one and only defensible space. It is how people in impossible situations are forced to be if they are to exist at all.

No one should be forced to live a lie. In Judaism truth is the seal of God and the essential precondition of trust between human beings. But when your people is being enslaved, its male children murdered, you have to liberate them by whatever means are possible. Moses, who had already seen that his first encounter with Pharaoh made things worse for his people – they still had to make the same quota of bricks but now also had to gather their own straw (5: 6-8) – did not want to risk making them worse still. The Torah here is not justifying deceit. To the contrary, it is condemning a system in which telling the truth may put your life at risk, as it still does in many tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. Judaism – a religion of dissent, questioning and "argument for the sake of heaven" – is a faith that values intellectual honesty and moral truthfulness above all things. The Psalmist says: "Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord and who shall stand in His holy place? One who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain nor sworn deceitfully" (Ps. 24: 3-4). Malachi says of one who speaks in God's name: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips" (Mal. 2: 6). Every Amidah ends with the prayer, "My God, guard my tongue against evil and my lips from deceitful speech."

What the Torah is telling us in these six narratives in Genesis and the seventh in Exodus is the connection between freedom and truth. Where there is freedom there can be truth. Otherwise there cannot. A society where people are forced to be less than fully honest merely to survive and not provoke further oppression is not the kind of society God wants us to make.

PARSHA SUMMARY

G-d reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the “four expressions of redemption,” take out the Children of Israel from Egypt, deliver them from their enslavement, redeem them, and acquire them as His own chosen people at “Mount Sinai”; He will then bring them to the land He promised to the Patriarchs as their eternal heritage. Moses and Aaron repeatedly come before Pharaoh to demand in the name of G-d, “Let My people go, so that they may serve Me in the wilderness.” Pharaoh repeatedly refuses. Aaron’s staff turns into a snake and swallows the magic sticks of the Egyptian sorcerers. G-d then sends a series of plagues upon the Egyptians. The waters of the Nile turn to blood; swarms of frogs overrun the land; lice infest all men and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities; a pestilence kills the domestic animals; painful boils afflict the Egyptians. For the seventh plague, fire and ice combine to descend from the skies as a devastating hail. Still, “the heart of Pharaoh was hardened and he would not let the children of Israel go, as G-d had said to Moses.

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

Ezekiel 28:25-29:21. This week's haftorah begins with a mention of the ingathering of the exiles, echoing G-d's promise mentioned in the Torah portion: "I will take you out of the suffering of Egypt." The prophet then goes on to discuss the decimation of Pharaoh and Egypt, reminiscent of the primary theme of the Torah portion—the devastation G-d wrought upon Egypt. Ezekiel begins with a description of what will occur during the ingathering of the exiles. "When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they have been scattered, and I have been sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, then shall they dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob. And they shall dwell upon it securely..." The prophet then proceeds to convey a prophecy regarding Pharaoh and Egypt, foretelling the fall of the Egyptian empire. Egypt merited this punishment for two reasons: a) They had reneged on their promise to come to Israel's aid against the attacking Babylonians. b) They had incredible arrogance, considering themselves un-reliant on G-d, instead attributing their success to the bounty their deified Nile afforded them. Therefore, Ezekiel warns: "And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and in ruins, and they shall know that I am the Lord! Because he [Pharaoh] said, 'The river is mine, and I have made it.'" G-d warns that the land of Egypt will be empty and desolate for forty years, after which G-d will return the people to the land to reinhabit it, but it will no longer be an important nation to be reckoned with. The haftorah ends with another prophecy wherein G-d informs Ezekiel that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, will be the one to conquer Egypt and take its spoils. This as a reward for his effort in defeating the wicked nation of Tyre.

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Bermange, Ashley & Karen mother Solomon, Myra Friday 15/01/2021 Shevat 2, 5781

Levene, Ian mother Levene, Bobby Bloomah bas Shaul Saturday 16/01/2021 Shevat 3, 5781

Steen, Noemi mother (Steen), Bella Bella Bat Schmuel Monday 18/01/2021 Shevat 5, 5781

Shaw, Phillip brother Shaw, John Monday 18/01/2021 Shevat 5, 5781

Lorraine, Sandra mother Rockman, Celia Tzirrel bas Shneur Zalman HaLevi Tuesday 19/01/2021 Shevat 6, 5781

Trainis, Avril father in law Trainis, Joe Yosef ben Avraham Tuesday 19/01/2021 Shevat 6, 5781

Wrightman, Geoffrey mother Wrightman, Sophia Sophia bas Avram Chaim Yaakov Berel Tuesday 19/01/2021 Shevat 6, 5781

Kashket, Norma father Bryer, Max Mordecai ben Yisrael Wednesday 20/01/2021 Shevat 7, 5781

Davis, Richard Aunt Davis Wednesday 20/01/2021 Shevat 7, 5781

Allen, Dawn sister Bond, Aidelaide (Dell) Aidelaide bas Leib Friday 22/01/2021 Shevat 9, 5781

JEWISH HUMOUR

Chaim Yankel wanted to make business connections in the non-Jewish community and he was told that he needed to improve his golf game. So he joined a golf club and started practicing. But feeling self-conscious, he would only golf alone, except for his caddy being present. One day he had a new caddy and Chaim Yankel was playing particularly badly. "I think I am playing the world's worst golf game," he confessed to the caddy. "Oh, I wouldn't say that, sir," was the consoling response. "From what the boys were saying about another gentleman who plays here, he must be worse even than you are." "What's his name?" The caddy replied, "I think they call him Chaim Yankel."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

A boy was at a carnival and went to a booth where a man said to the boy, "If I write your exact weight on this piece of paper then you have to give me \$50, but if I cannot, I will pay you \$50." The boy looked around and saw no scale so he agrees, thinking no matter what the carny writes he'll just say he weighs more or less. In the end the boy ended up paying the man \$50. How did the man win the bet?

**Answer for last week by
Your Name**

STORY TIME

One Saturday night, after Shabbat had departed, Rabbi Moshe Alsheich (1521-1593) was walking down the street and overheard a conversation which was taking place inside the house of a poor couple. He heard the man wishing his wife "a good week," as is customary. Then the man began to sing the hymn "Eliyahu Hanavi," (Elijah the Prophet). The musical tones were touchingly beautiful, but the singing was interrupted by the voice of the man's wife, who was complaining: "I can't understand you! Have you no heart? How can you sing when your children are facing yet another week with no food in the freezing cold house? Where is this Eliyahu you're singing about, and why isn't he helping us?" Rabbi Alsheich was not only an outstanding scholar, but he was also a very wealthy man and a great philanthropist as well. He felt such sympathy for the poor family that he returned to his home and filled a small sack with gold coins. He then quietly approached the house of the poor couple and tossed the coins inside, quickly running away so to avoid being seen. His act of selfless charity aroused the heavenly host, who clamored to reward the tzadik. The prosecuting angel wasn't going to allow such a tumult to continue unchallenged. "This isn't such a big deal," he said, and he suggested that since Rabbi Alsheich was such a great soul, it was only right that he should be subjected to a further test before receiving any reward. In fact, the prosecutor continued, he would go down and administer the test himself. The very next Shabbat a poor stranger appeared in shul and declared: "I am very hungry. Who will bring me home for the Shabbat meal?" Rabbi Alsheich was the first to seize this opportunity for the great mitzva of hachnasat orchim (hosting guests) and invited the man to dine with him. Upon their arrival, the poor man was seated at the fine table. The first course was placed before him and in a twinkling, he immediately devoured everything he had been served. As soon as he had downed the last bite he announced that he was still starving. Another portion was brought at once, and another, and yet another, but nothing seemed to quell his terrible hunger. Every delicious variety of food was put before the man, and he gobbled up every morsel. After each portion disappeared, he announced that he was still very hungry. Finally, with no more food in the kitchen, Rabbi Alsheich served him his own portion. When that had been eaten, the portions of the family were eaten one by one by the poor guest, but the man insisted he was still hungry. Rabbi Alsheich didn't know what to do. He brought food from the neighbors in his courtyard to satisfy his guest, but the man was a bottomless pit of hunger. As Shabbat drew to a close, the man was still eating away, and declaring that he was not full yet. Rabbi Alsheich had exhausted all sources of food, but he promised the man, "When Shabbat ends I will make sure that you can eat your fill. You will not leave my house hungry." After Shabbat, Rabbi Alsheich ordered that an ox be slaughtered, but upon examination it was discovered to be not kosher. He had another slaughtered, but it too was not kosher. The financial expenditure was enormous, but Rabbi Alsheich was unwilling to renege on his promise. He had another and yet another slaughtered, but each animal was found to be not kosher! Finally, on the fortieth try, the animal was kosher and could be prepared. When at last the meal was prepared and served, the poor man had disappeared and could not be found. This tremendous act of benevolence was unbelievable. Now, there was no question that the prosecutor's argument was null and void. Even the Adversary had to concede that Rabbi Alsheich possessed tremendous merits and deserved a reward. But what should be the reward of such a man? Of course the most dearly sought possession of a Torah scholar is a deeper understanding of Torah. And so, a decree came down from the Heavenly Court that Rabbi Alsheich merited to have one of the seventy facets of Torah revealed to him. A special messenger was immediately dispatched to impart this holy knowledge to him. When these events transpired, Rabbi Joseph Caro (the redactor of the Shulchan Aruch - The Code of Jewish Law) was serving as the Chief Rabbi of Safed. On the following Shabbat, when he entered the synagogue, he noted that Rabbi Alsheich was not in his usual place. It had been revealed to him through his holy insight, that Rabbi Alsheich had ascended greatly in his understanding of Torah. He was impatient to see for himself, and he instructed the congregation to delay their prayers until Rabbi Alsheich entered. When Rabbi Alsheich finally arrived, Rabbi Caro requested that he ascend to the pulpit and deliver the weekly Torah discourse in his stead, but Rabbi Alsheich refused. It was only when he was ordered to speak, that he acquiesced, and the words which he uttered astounded the entire assembly. The profundity of his discourse made it apparent that something radically new had occurred. That day marked a change in the procedure of the Shabbat, for from that time forth, Rabbi Alsheich (who was later to be known as the "Holy Alsheich") delivered all the weekly Torah discourses. He also began to write down his Torah insights, Torat Moshe, which are studied to this

FOOD 4 THE SOUL^{day}

All that can be cherished from this world, All that makes life worth living, Is that which you have mined from its bowels through your own toil, Fashioned from its clay by your own craft, Fired in the kiln of your own heart. That for which you bruised your hands and wearied your limbs, For which you beat back the beast inside you, For which you defied a mocking world. Oh, how precious, how resplendent a feast, a life forged by the hands of its own master!