



Va'era

DON'T FALL PREY TO THE GASLIGHTER

Sometimes the Best Strategy Is to Simply Scream "Go Away!"

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Va'era

G d reveals Himself to Moses. Employing the “four expressions of redemption,” He promises to 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; and lice infest all humans and beasts. Hordes of wild animals invade the cities; a pestilence kills the domestic animals; and 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.”

TEXT 1A

Exodus 6:10–12

י. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

יא. בֹּא דַבֵּר אֶל פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם, וַיְשַׁלַּח אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶצוֹ:

יב. וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי ה' לֵאמֹר, הֲזֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי, וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פַרְעֹה וְאֲנִי עֶרְל שְׂפָתַיִם:

10. G-d spoke to Moses, saying:

11. “Come, speak to Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and he will let the Children of Israel out of his land.”

12. But Moses spoke before G-d, saying, “The Children of Israel did not hearken to me. How then will Pharaoh hearken to me, seeing that I am of closed lips?”

TEXT 1B

Ibid., 6:29–30, 7:1–2

כט. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר אֲנִי ה', דַּבֵּר אֶל פַּרְעֹה
מִלֶּדֶת מִצְרַיִם אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי דֹבֵר אֵלֶיךָ:

ל. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לִפְנֵי ה', הֲאֵין אֲנִי עֶרְל שְׂפֵתַיִם וְאֵיךְ
יִשְׁמַע אֵלַי פַּרְעֹה:

א. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה, רְאֵה נִתְּתִיךָ אֱלֹקִים לְפַרְעֹה,
וְאַהֲרֹן אֲחִיךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֲךָ:

ב. אַתָּה תְּדַבֵּר אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶךָ, וְאַהֲרֹן אֲחִיךָ יְדַבֵּר
אֶל פַּרְעֹה וְשַׁלַּח אֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרְצוֹ:

29. G-d spoke to Moses, saying, “I am G-d. Speak to Pharaoh everything that I speak to you.”

30. But Moses said before G-d, “I am of closed lips; so how will Pharaoh hearken to me?”

1. G-d said to Moses, “See! I have made you a lord over Pharaoh, and Aaron, your brother, will be your speaker.

2. “You shall speak all that I command you, and Aaron, your brother, shall speak to Pharaoh, that he let the Children of Israel out of his land.”

TEXT 2

Rashi, ad loc.

"אתה תדבר". פעם אחת כל שליחות ושליחות כפי
ששמעת מפי, ואהרן אחיך ימליצנו ויטעימנו באזני
פרעה.

"You shall speak." Once every message, as
you have heard it from My mouth, and Aaron,
your brother, will interpret it and explain it in
Pharaoh's ears.

QUESTION

Moshe already had this exact exchange with G-d in last week's *parshah* of *Shemot*, so why was he pushing back against G-d yet again?

TEXT 3

Exodus 4:10–11, 14, 16

י. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה', בִּי אֲדֹנָי, לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אָנֹכִי גַם
מִתְמוּל גַּם מִשְׁלֹשׁ גַּם מֵאִזְ דִּבְרֶךָ אֶל עֲבָדֶךָ, כִּי כָבֵד
פִּה וְכִבְד לְשׁוֹן אָנֹכִי:

יא. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלָיו, מִי שָׁם פִּה לְאָדָם אוֹ מִי יְשׁוּם אֱלֵם
אוֹ חֵרֶשׁ אוֹ פֶקֶח אוֹ עִוֵּר, הֲלֹא אָנֹכִי ה': . . .

יד. וַיִּסַּר אַף ה' בְּמֹשֶׁה, וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ הַלְוִי
יִדְעָתִי כִּי דַבֵּר יִדְבַר הוּא, וְגַם הִנֵּה הוּא יֵצֵא לִקְרֹאתְךָ
וְרָאֶךָ וְשָׁמַח בְּלִבּוֹ: . . .

טז. וְדַבֵּר הוּא לְךָ אֶל הָעָם, וְהִזְיָה הוּא יִהְיֶה לְךָ לְפִה
וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לוֹ לְאַלְהֵימ:

10. Moses said to G-d, “I beseech You, O G-d. I am not a man of words, neither from yesterday nor from the day before yesterday, nor from the time You have spoken to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue.”

11. But G-d said to him, “Who gave man a mouth, or who makes [one] dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, G-d?” . . .

14. And G-d’s wrath was kindled against Moses, and He said, “Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? I know that he will surely speak, and behold, he is coming forth toward you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart. . . .

16. “And he will speak for you to the people, and it will be that he will be your speaker, and you will be his leader.”

TEXT 4

*Rabbi Moshe Alshich,
Exodus 6:13*

איך חוזר משה ואומר לו יתברך "הן אני ערל שפתים", והלא טענה זו כבר אמרה למעלה? . . . ואיך חוזר עתה לאומרו?

ולא עוד, כי גם על הפעם הראשונה שאמר "הן בני ישראל לא שמעו וכו' ואני ערל שפתים", הנה יפלא כי אכן ששמעה על טענה זו "מי שם פה לאדם כו", איך יחזור שנית ושלישית להזכירה?

How did Moses repeat to G-d his claim of, "I am of closed lips?" Did he not make this claim earlier, . . . so how could he repeat it again here?

Not only that, but when Moses first made his claim of, "The Children of Israel did not hearken to me . . . I am of closed lips," G-d answered him, "Who gave man a mouth?" It is astonishing that the person who heard this reply could go ahead and repeat the claim a second and third time!

TEXT 5

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
16, p. 72*

"כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי" איז רש"י מפרש:
"בכבדות אני מדבר", דאס הייסט, אז ער קען ריידן,
נאר דאס קומט אים אן "בכבדות", מה שאין כן "ערל
שפתים" . . . איז א שטערונג צום ריידן.

און דאס איז דער חידוש אין זיין צווייטער טענה:
פריער האט ער געמיינט אז ער איז (בלויז) "כבד פה
וכבד לשון" — ער קען ריידן על כל פנים "בכבדות",
און דעריבער האט דערצו מספיק געווען מיטצונעמען
אהרן'ען, וואס וועט מאריך ו"מטעים" זיין דאס וואס
משה וועט זאגן בקיצור צו פרעה. אבער איצט איז ער
געקומען צו דער הכרה אז "אני ערל שפתים": זיין
ריידן איז . . . אינגאנצן ניט מעגלעך, כאילו ער וואלט
געווען "אטום" — ובמילא האט דאך ניט קיין ארט
זיין שליחות צו פרעה.

Rashi translates “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” as “I speak with difficulty.” In other words, Moses was able to talk, but it came with difficulties. By contrast, “closed lips” . . . is complete obstruction of speech.

This is what Moses added in his claim here: Before, Moses assumed that he was just “heavy of mouth and tongue”—at least he could speak, albeit with difficulty. To that end, taking Aaron along was enough, as he would be able to expand and explain whatever Moses said cryptically to Pharaoh. But now Moses realized that he was of “closed lips,” namely that speech was . . . completely impossible, as if he were stuffed up. As such, his mission to Pharaoh made no sense at all.

TEXT 6

Rashi, Exodus 6:29

"אני ה'". כדאי אני לשלחך ולקיים דברי שליחותי.

"I am G-d." I have the power to send you and [also] to fulfill the words of My mission.

Moses' aim wasn't to convince Pharaoh of the folly of his ways or to try to reason with him in any way. Instead, Moses had a singular goal: to transmit G-d's word exactly as it was stated to him.



TEXT 7

*Rabbi Avraham Azulai,
Berit Avraham, Exodus
6:11-12*

שלא תוסיף כלום מעצמך, אבל תאמר הדברים כסדר
שאסדר אני לך, ובוודאי בסייעתא דשמיא.

G-d told Moses, “You shall not add anything of your own, rather you shall say [My words] exactly as I delivered them to you, and you will certainly receive aid from on High.”

TEXT 8

Talmud, Sotah 36b

כָּל לִישָׁנָא דְאִישְׁתַּעֵי פְרַעֲהַ בְּהִדְיָה אֶהְדַּר לִיהָ.

אִישְׁתַּעֵי אִיהוּ בְּלִשׁוֹן הַקֹּדֶשׁ, לָא הָוָה קָא יָדַע מַאי הָוָה

אָמַר. אָמַר לִיהָ: אֶגְמְרִי, אֶגְמְרִיהּ וְלֹא גָמַר.

אָמַר לִיהָ: אִישְׁתַּבַּע לִי דְלֹא מְגַלִּית. אִישְׁתַּבַּע לוֹ.

When Joseph appeared before Pharaoh, in every language that Pharaoh spoke with him, he answered him.

Joseph then spoke in the sacred tongue, Hebrew, and Pharaoh did not know what he was saying. Pharaoh said to him, “Teach me that language.” He taught him, but he could not learn it.

Pharaoh said to him, “Take an oath for my benefit that you will not reveal that I do not know this language.” He took an oath for his benefit.

Moses role really had nothing to do with what he said or how he said it. It was simply to break Pharaoh and Egypt with the force of G-d's will.



TEXT 9

Rashi, Exodus 7:1

"נתתיך אלקים לפרעה". שופט ורודה לרדותו במכות
ויסורין.

"I have made you a lord over Pharaoh." A
judge and a chastiser, to chastise him with
plagues and torments.

TEXT 10

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
16, p. 74*

משה'ס ענין אין זיינע רייד צו פרעה איז ניט געווען
אים אויפצוקלערן מיט דברי טעם וכו' (דאס איז
געווען אהרן'ס תפקיד) . . . נאר אים צו "שופט" זיין
— אין אן אופן ווי "ורודה" וואס דאס איז "לרדותו
במכות ויסורין".

און על דרך זה בעניננו: משה רבינו האט געדארפט
זאגן צו פרעה "שלח את עמי" מיט א שטרענגקייט און
בייזערן זיך אויף אים, אז פונעם אופן הדיבור (און
פונעם אויסדרוק פון משה'ס פנים בשעת מעשה וכו')
זאל פרעה פארשטיין אז דאס איז "קשות" — בדוגמא
פון מכות ויסורין.

Moses's role in speaking to Pharaoh was not about explaining anything to him; that was Aaron's role. Rather, Moses's role was to assert authority in a harsh manner, through the plagues and suffering.

This explains our topic of discussion: Moses's task was to tell Pharaoh "Let my people go!" with a brazenness and anger that would intimidate Pharaoh with the sheer force of speech, as well as Moses's body language such as his face, and let him understand that this was no laughing matter—plagues and suffering were coming.

TEXT 11

Rashi, Exodus 18:9

עד עכשיו לא היה עבד יכול לברוח ממצרים, שהיתה
הארץ מסוגרת, ואלו יצאו שישים ריבוא.

Until the Exodus, no slave had been able to escape from Egypt because the border of the land was locked, but the Jews fled, six hundred thousand strong.

All the time that the evil of Egypt enjoyed its moment, there wasn't a force in the world that could overpower it, not even the holiest *tzadik*. Nothing less than G-d Himself was able to break such a powerful supervillain.



By being completely subservient to G-d, Moshe acquired a G-d-like superpower to vanquish the forces of evil.



TEXT 12

Rabbi Menachem Mendel
of Lubavitch, Or HaTorah,
Exodus, vol. 1, p. 231

"ראה נתתיך אלקים לפרעה" . . . נראה לפרש ועיקר
על פי מה שכתוב במקום אחר על פסוק "ואם זרוע
כא-ל לך כו' עדה נא גאון וגובה כו' והדוך רשעים
תחתם", דמשמע שצריך לזה זרוע כא-ל, ואין כח
לאדם בזה גם לצדיק. וכמו שיעקב הכניע את עצמו
לעשו . . .

והענין שהצדיקים שרשם משם מ"ה דתיקון והרשעים
שרשם מעולם התהו . . . וכיון שבחינת התהו גבוה
מהתיקון ומקבלים מבחינת "ורב חסד", אין ביכולת
הצדיק שמהתיקון להכניעם . . . ועל כן אמר "ואם
זרוע כא-ל לך כו'", שזהו רק יכולתו יתברך שהוא כל
יכול . . . ביכולתו להפילם אף בעודם בתקפם כו'. ועל
זה נאמר למשה "ראה נתתיך אלקים לפרעה", שנתן לו
ממשלה זרוע כא-ל ממש על פרעה, שעם היות פרעה
יונק . . . מהתהו, יהיה למשה דתיקון ממשלה על
בחינה זו, כמו אלקים ממש הכל יכול.

"I have made you a lord over Pharaoh." . . . This verse is explained in light of what is stated in another verse, "Do you have an arm like G-d? . . . Bedeck yourself now with pride and excellence, . . . and crush the wicked in their place" (Job 40:9–12). This verse implies that G-d-like strength is needed, and no human can do it, even a *tzadik*, like Jacob who subdued himself before Esau. . . .

What is behind this? *Tzadikim* (the righteous) are from a world kabbalah calls "*tikun—order*," whereas the *resha'im* (the evil) are from a world of "*tohu—chaos*." . . . This world of *tohu* is greater than *tikun* and is animated by G-d's level of extreme kindness. As such, a *tzadik* is unable to subdue the *rasha*. . . . This is why the verse states, "Do you have an arm like G-d?" for only G-d is capable of doing so, . . . to topple them while they're still peaking [at their greatest strength]. This, then, is what G-d told Moses, "I have made you a lord over Pharaoh," namely that G-d gave Moses G-d-like strength over Pharaoh. Despite the fact that Pharaoh was still feeding . . . from *tohu*, Moses—who stems from *tikun*—would still be able to rule over him with all-capable, G-d-like power.

At this point of the game, Moses informed G-d that not only was his speech impaired, it was nonexistent. It was as if Moses didn't exist at all, entirely and utterly devoted to G-d alone.



TEXT 13

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
16, p. 76*

דאס וואס משה איז געווען "כבד פה וכבד לשון" האט זיך עס גענומען מצד זיין ביטול צו אלקות — אז צוליב זיין גודל הביטול האט ער ניט געקענט משפיע זיין . . .

דערפון איז מובן, אז אויך דער ענין פון "ערל שפתים" ווייזט אויפן גודל הביטול של משה רבינו . . . ביטול בתכלית, וואס דערפאר קען ער אינגאנצן ניט ריידן.

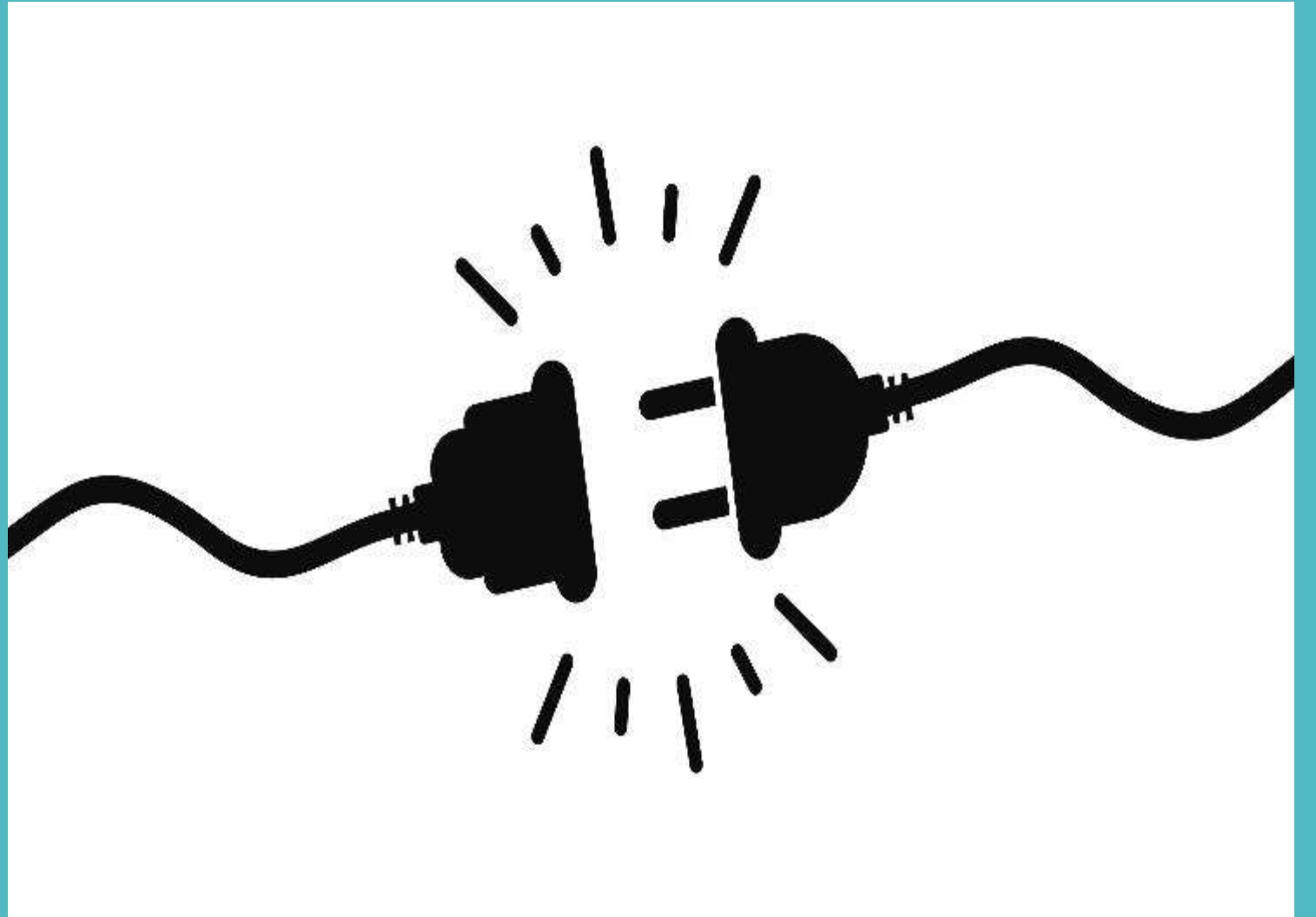
און דעריבער איז דוקא אט דער ביטול פון "ערל שפתים" געווען די אתערותא דלתתא, הכנה והקדמה צו "ראה נתתיך אלקים לפרעה גו" — דורכן ביטול אין אן אופן פון "בלי שום הרגש כלל" קען דערנאך זיין . . . "דבר ה' ממש" — וואס פאדערט זיך צו דער שבירה פון פרעה'ן.

The fact that Moses was “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” stemmed from his tremendous subservience to G-dliness. Because he was completely insignificant before G-d, he was unable to be effusive. . . .

It follows that the fact that Moses was of “closed lips” demonstrates an even greater level of subservience, a level of complete lack of self that made it impossible for him to even talk.

It is specifically this intense degree of lack of self that was the preparatory step to the next stage of, “I have made you a lord over Pharaoh.” A credit to Moses’s intense lack of self to the degree that he wasn’t conscious of himself whatsoever, he was able to be a conduit of G-d’s word [in a manner] that was necessary to crush Pharaoh.

You remain a pristine,
perfectly committed
Jew who wants to do
the right thing—and
you can plug right
back into that at any
moment.



TEXT 14

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei
Amarim, ch. 29*

דְּהֵינּוּ, לְרַגֹּז עַל נַפְשׁ הַבְּהֵמִית, שֶׁהִיא יִצְרוֹ הָרַע, בְּקוֹל
רַעַשׁ וְרוֹגֵז בְּמַחְשַׁבָתוֹ, לֹמֵר לוֹ: . . . עַד מָתִי תִסְתַּיֵּר
לְפָנַי אֹרֶךְ אֵין סוֹף בְּרוּךְ הוּא . . . מְכַחֵשׁ הָאֱמֶת הַנִּרְאָה
לְעֵינַיִם . . . וְהִנֵּה עַל יְדֵי זֶה יוֹעִיל לְנַפְשׁוֹ הָאֱלֹקִית,
לְהֵאִיר עֵינָיָהּ בְּאֵמֶת יְחִוּד אֹרֶךְ אֵין סוֹף בְּרֵאֵיָה חוֹשֵׁיית,
וְלֹא בְּחֵיבֻת שְׂמִיעָה וְהִבְנָה לְבַדָּה . . . מְפָנֵי שְׂיִשְׂרָאֵל
עֲצָמָן הֵם "מֵאֲמִינִים בְּנֵי מֵאֲמִינִים".

Grow angry with your animal soul—your evil inclination—and thunder against it indignantly in your mind. . . . “How long will you hide G-d’s infinite light from me . . . denying the self-evident truth? . . .” This will help your G-dly soul see the truth of G-d’s endless unity with the clarity of sensory vision and not just by the power of deduction and logic, . . . for the Jewish people are “believers, children of believers” (Shabbat 97a).

Doubts are like shadows. They seem larger than life, but they have no substance.



When our inner Paroh is starting up and making trouble, sometimes we have to evoke our inner Moshe and scream at him, “Get lost!” And you know what? We all have an inner Moses.



TEXT 15

*Rabbi Shneur Zalman of
Liadi, Tanya, Likutei
Amarim, ch. 42*

כָּל נַפְשׁ וְנַפְשׁ מִבֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בָּהּ מִבְּחִינַת מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ
עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם.

Every Jewish soul has an element of Moses
our teacher.

By connecting with the *Rebbe*, we are granted the power and strength to overcome these obstacles.



TEXT 16

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
16, p. 78*

כשם ווי משה רבינו אין זיין צייט האט געהאט דעם כח
צו רודה זיין פרעה "במכות ויסורין" אפילו ווען
"השעה משחקת לו", אזוי איז עס בכל דור ודור, אז
דער נשיא הדור, דער "אתפשטותא דמשה בכל דרא
ודרא", האט דעם כח דורכצוברעכן אלע העלמות
והסתרים וואס זיינען דא אויף קדושה, אויך ווען זיי
און דורכדעם וואס מ'פארבינד זיך זיינען בתקפם . . .
מיטן נשיא הדור, כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדוננו
מורנו ורבינו, האט מען ניט וואס צו נתפעל ווערן פון
די העלמות והסתרים, ווארום מ'האט דעם כח פון משה
רבינו זיי צו צעברעכן — "לרדותו במכות ויסורין".
— אוודאי דארף מען גיין בדרכי נועם ובדרכי שלום,
אזוי איז דער רצון פון כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדוננו
מורנו ורבינו . . . אבער וויסן דארף מען, אז בשעת
מען איז צוגעבונדן צום נשיא הדור — וואס די
התקשרות איז דורך לימוד תורתו, היטן זיינע תקנות
והליכה באורחותיו נצח סלה ועד — דעמאלט האט
מען ניט וואס צו נתפעל ווערן פון קיינע העלמות
והסתרים.

Moses in his generation possessed the power to subdue evil with suffering and plagues, even when the evil was peaking. And so it is in every generation: the leader of the generation, the “extension of Moses in each generation” (*Tikunei Zohar* 114a), possesses the power to break through all opposition to holiness—even when it is peaking. By connecting with the leader of the generation, the Rebbe, we have nothing to fear or worry about, for we are equipped with Moses’s power to break all opposition with “plagues and suffering.” Of course, we must behave in appropriate and peaceful ways, which is what the Rebbe wants. . . . But we must know that when we are connected with the Rebbe of the generation, then we have nothing to be afraid of. We connect by learning his Torah and following his guidance. When we do, we will overcome all opposition.

That's the beauty of being connected to something greater than yourself, of having a mentor, a spiritual plug that is both close and yet very high.



KEY POINTS

1. Moses first assumed his speech was impaired, so Aaron accompanying him to talk to Pharaoh was sufficient. Later, he learned that he was entirely unable to speak, so he resisted G-d's request to approach Pharaoh.
2. G-d not only instructed but empowered Moses to speak to Pharaoh—exactly as he heard it. Aaron's role, then, was also to translate from Hebrew to Pharaoh's language.
3. The purpose of Moses delivering G-d's word was not to reason with or persuade Pharaoh, rather to simply crush him under G-d's will.
4. Pharaoh and Egypt represented a spiritual supervillain that was impossible to vanquish while it was peaking. Only G-d could overcome it.
5. Moses's role, then, was to be completely subservient to G-d and deliver that G-dly power to Egypt and crush it underfoot.

KEY POINTS

6. We can summon our own inner Moses to crush internal opposition to G-dly things.
7. Our internal resistance to the right thing is not who we really are, rather a foreign voice gaslighting us into doubting our own truth.
8. By being connected to the Moses of our generation, the Rebbe, we plug into extra strength to overcome Pharaoh.

