



# אור בישראל

A LIGHT FROM WITHIN ISRAEL פרשת וזרח

כ"ה טבת תשפ"ה 25.1.25

**1** This week's parsha is "Va'era," the second parsha in the Book of Exodus. The parsha includes the first 7 of the 10 plagues of Egypt - blood, frogs, lice, wild beasts, cattle disease, boils, and hail. Next week will cover the remaining 3 plagues, followed by the Exodus from Egypt.

The plagues are not just miracles; they are an "educational workshop." These are ten

**2** lessons against idolatry and paganism, and in favor of faith in God and the journey from slavery to freedom.

Moshe mentions that he has a speech impediment twice in this parsha. In an age of publicity and social media, this is an important reminder: God chooses him for leadership despite his speech impediment **3** (and perhaps because of it?). Impressive and captivating speaking ability is not the most important thing in life. What matters most is what's on the inside, personality, faith, and good deeds.

In contrast to Moshe, Pharaoh the wicked king, displays obstinate and arrogant leadership. He stubbornly refuses to learn from reality, and each time, facing the ten plagues, he becomes filled with obstinacy and pride. This contrast between him and Moshe is evident in every encounter. **4**

**5** When Moshe comes to deliver the news of redemption to the people, they don't listen. They were so troubled and worried that they simply couldn't hear that their enslavement was ending. Our commentators explain that we too, today, can miss messages of redemption due to being overwhelmed. Our story this week also deals with this theme: that we shouldn't miss out on great dreams because of small matters.

## A STORY FOR SHABBAT

### Just a Sandwich?

You know how fairy tales usually open with the words: "Once upon time...?" So... once upon a time, there was a king who lived with his family in a palace. The king's son, the prince, behaved in such a shameful way that finally the king had no choice but to banish him from the palace. The prince wandered around in the streets, and his situation deteriorated until he became miserably poor. One day, when the king was overwhelmed with longing for his beloved son, he asked his servant to search for him, to find out how his son was managing and how he could help him. The servant set out on his way and looked around the streets of the kingdom. He began his search by looking in the large cities and richer neighborhoods until he finally reached the poorest area of the kingdom, far away from the palace. There, in a dark street corner he found the prince, hungry and dirty. He was sitting on the sidewalk tattered and barefoot, collecting donations from passersby. The servant was heartbroken to find the prince in such desperate circumstances. He recalled former days when he had lived as a spoiled prince in the palace. He approached the prince and said, "My dear prince, the king has sent me to look for you. He misses you and wants to know what he can give you and how he can help you." The poor prince thought for a minute, and then he said: "Are you asking me what I want? Well, I would be very happy if I could receive a new pair of shoes and a tasty sandwich." The servant looked at the prince with great disappointment and exclaimed: "Is that all that you want? Have you forgotten that you are the son of the king? You could have requested to be brought back to the palace, or anything else in the world, but instead you chose to ask for just these two basic things?!"

### Food for Thought

This fairy tale is meant to teach us about ourselves. If the king's servant had offered us anything in the world, what would we have asked for? What are our dreams, and can we dream bigger?





## FROM THE DIARY OF A CHEMED STUDENT

### Learning to Listen and Respect: The True Value of Diplomacy

I am Reut Horowitz, a student at Amit Hallel School and I am majoring in diplomacy. The atmosphere in this class is very different from regular lessons, where the teacher talks and the students listen. In our Diplomacy classes, I feel there is room for my opinions and feelings and that people truly want to listen to me and hear what I have to say. In this class, we learn from each other's stories and perspectives, which is so important in life. Most people think that majoring in diplomacy won't be useful unless I plan to become a politician or diplomat, but that's exactly the beauty of it - the lessons learned in diplomacy classes are relevant to all of us in every aspect of life. In this class, we learn to listen and respect each other's opinions, even when we don't agree. Respect is the foundation in all relationships. How can I demand that others listen to me if I'm not willing to listen to opinions different from mine? You don't always have to agree with the other person, but learning to respect others, different populations, and diverse opinions is, in my view, what makes the Diplomacy major so important.

In Parashat Va'era, Moshe Rabeinu becomes the first diplomat of Am Israel by his own modesty. His example teaches us the power of listening and respect in building unity among our nation.

**Reut Horowitz, 11th Grade, Amit Hallel, Rehovot**

## FROM THE DIARY OF A SHLICHA

**Noa Nagan-Nussbaum, an educational shlicha at the Ida Crown Jewish Academy in Chicago, writes to us:**

"We had the privilege of hosting Meirav Berger, the mother of Agam Berger, a heroic soldier who was kidnapped to Gaza, via zoom. Meirav shared that Agam chose to attend a pre-military preparatory program out of a sense of mission, to be well-prepared for meaningful military service. Agam was kidnapped on her first day of arriving at the base. Friends who were in captivity with her tell of her special character and her concern for others. Agam took care of the young girls who were with her in captivity: she did their hair before they were released so they would feel well-groomed. She served as a big sister to them, had many conversations with them, and even advised them to attend a pre-military preparatory program upon their return home, to continue contributing through meaningful military service. Agam has a twin sister, Lee-Yam, who is currently completing an officers' course in the IDF. Despite the difficulty of waiting for Agam's return, Lee-Yam chooses

to serve the people of Israel.

Their younger sister, Bar, also recently decided to enlist in the IDF, thinking this is what Agam would have advised her to do - to give to the nation. Meirav taught us that Agam is a woman of gratitude, who is thankful for everything and takes nothing for granted. Even in this difficult time, Meirav expresses gratitude for what exists and teaches us to see the good and add light. The Berger family is an



example and role model for choosing good and helping others - leadership that continues the Jewish tradition we encounter in the pages of our Torah portions in the Book of Exodus.

## Around the Shabbat Table

- What helps people stay optimistic and full of hope even in very difficult situations? Do you have examples from stories or from life?
- Why do you think learning to listen and respect others and their opinions is important in everyday life, even outside of diplomacy?

