

Parashat Vaera 5777, 2017:

*The Purpose of the Makkot (Plagues)*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the refuah shlaimah of Devorah bat Chana and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains the four instances in *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* (the Five Books of the Torah) wherein the phrases “*l’ma’an teida*” (“in order that you should know”) and “*ba’avur teida*” (“in order that you know”) are deployed:

And he [Pharaoh] said, “For tomorrow.” And he [Moses] said, “As you say, in order that you should know that there is none like the L-rd, our G-d.” (*Sefer Shemot* 8:6, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

And I will separate on that day the land of Goshen, upon which My people stand, that there will be no mixture of noxious creatures there, in order that you should know that I am the L-rd in the midst of the earth. (8:18)

Because this time, I am sending all My plagues into your heart and into your servants and into your people, in order that you know that there is none like Me in the entire earth. (9:14)

And Moses said to him [Pharaoh], “When I leave the city, I will spread my hands to the L-rd. The thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, in order that you should know that the land is the L-rd’s. (9:29)

These *pasukim* (verses) portray Moses in one of two ways, either as Hashem’s faithful messenger to Pharaoh, or as directly responding (i.e., in his own words) to the Egyptian monarch’s challenges to the Almighty. As such, they play a major conceptual role in setting the stage for the Exodus from Egypt. In addition, a close reading of these verses seems to suggest that they have additional holistic import within the wider world of Jewish theology. It is fascinating that this was precisely the approach followed by the Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-

1270) in his *Commentary on the Torah*, wherein he utilizes the Torah's presentation of the *mitzvah* of Tefillin (*Sefer Shemot* 13:16) to discuss "a general principle (*klal*) regarding the reason [inherent] in many commandments."

The Ramban opines that with the rise of *avodah zarah* (idol worship), many of the *ikkarei emunah* (essential principles of faith) became corrupted or were outright denied:

Beginning with the days of Enoch when idol worship came into existence, opinions in the matter of faith fell into error. Some people denied the root of faith by saying that the Universe has always existed; they denied the Eternal[’s role in Creation], and said; "It is not He [who created the Universe]." Others denied His knowledge of individual matters, and said, "How does G-d know?" and "Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Some admit His knowledge but deny the principle of Divine Providence (*hashgacha pratit*) and make men as the fishes of the sea, [believing] that G-d does not watch over them, and that there is no punishment or reward for their deeds, for they say "the Eternal has forsaken the world." (This and the following Ramban translations, <http://www.mesora.org/Ramban-Exod-13-16.htm>, with my emendations.)

The Ramban maintains that the underlying rationale as to why the Torah employs the terms, "l'ma'an teida" and "ba'avur teida," in reference to the wonders and miracles (*moftim*) preceding the Exodus, is to prove the veracity of the theological principles of the Creation of the Universe, G-d's Omnipotence and Divine Providence:

This is why the Torah states regarding the wonders [in Egypt]: "in order that you should know that I am the L-rd in the midst of the earth" (8:18) which teaches us the principle of Providence, i.e., that G-d has not abandoned the world to chance, as they [the heretics] would have it. "In order that you should know that the land is the L-rd's (9:29) which informs us of the principle of Creation, for everything is His since He created all out of nothing. "In order that you know that there is none like Me in the entire earth," (9:14) which indicates His might (Omnipotence), i.e., that He rules over everything and that there is nothing withheld from Him.

In sum, the Ramban asserts, "The Egyptians either denied or doubted all of these principles. Accordingly, it follows that the great signs and wonders constitute faithful witnesses to the truth of the belief in the existence of the Creator and the truth of the entire Torah." Thus for the

Ramban, “*l’ma’an teida*” and “*ba’avur teida*” emerge as prologues to some of the most essential theological constructs in Judaism.

The Ramban’s analysis and explication of “*l’ma’an teida*” and “*ba’avur teida*” is congruent with the notion of the Torah as a book of instruction, since the word “Torah” derives from the infinitive, “*l’horot*,” which may be translated as “to instruct” or “to teach.” Little wonder, then, that *Shlomo HaMelech* famously declared, “For I gave you good teaching; forsake not My instruction,” wherein the Hebrew word for “My instruction” is “*torahti*.” (*Sefer Mishle* 4:2) When viewed from this perspective, “*l’ma’an teida*” and “*ba’avur teida*” serve as introductions to the definitive teachable moments of the *Eser Makkot* (the Ten Plagues).

While the ultimate goal of the Torah is *l’horot*, I believe one of the major roles of the Jewish people is *l’harot* (to show) the nations of the world the truth and majesty of Hashem. This concept is exemplified in the second paragraph of the *Aleinu*:

Therefore we put our hope in You, Hashem, our G-d, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor...to perfect the world through the kingdom of the Almighty. Then all humanity will call upon Your Name, to turn all the earth’s wicked toward You. All the world’s inhabitants will recognize and know that to You every knee should bend, every tongue should swear...And it is said: “Hashem will be King over all the world – on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One.” (*Sefer Zechariah* 14:9, *Aleinu* translations, *The Artscroll Siddur* with my emendations)

With the Almighty’s help, may this time come soon and in our days. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://YUTorah.org) using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Megillat Esther*, may be found at:  
<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.