

# OHRNET

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SHABBAT PARSHAT VAERA 28 TEVET 5783, JANUARY 21 2023

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Supersized Sacrifice

“And these are the names...” (1:1)

**T**his is a true story.

‘David’ was the owner and CEO of ‘The Supersized Kitchen,’ a company that sold commercial kitchen supplies. At great personal expense, he decided to attend a trade show in Las Vegas to boost his client base. He took out a \$50,000 loan to buy expensive radio ads in the Las Vegas area and rented a billboard to advertise his products. A day before his trip, he went to consult with his rabbi about the logistics of spending Shabbat in Vegas. “David,” said his Rabbi, “I wish you’d come to me earlier because I would have advised you not to go. But if I understand correctly, you already have tickets and a reservation at the show.” “More than that, Rabbi,” David stammered. “I took out a loan on my house to pay for advertising in the Las Vegas area. I put up a billboard with my business name and phone number. If I don’t go, I will lose a small fortune.”

“That makes things more difficult. However, I think this trip could be spiritually harmful for you.” David knew exactly what the rabbi was talking about. During more difficult years, David had gone through a spiritual challenge, but he had worked through it with the help of mussar sefarim (books of ethical improvement), lots of prayers, the

help of his rabbi and a large dollop of help from Heaven. But by spending time in Las Vegas, a place not known for its elevated morals, he knew he was putting himself in harm’s way.

“Think it over,” said the rabbi. “You’re stronger than you were a few years ago and I’m not telling you what to do. Sometimes when we make a great sacrifice for holiness, we are rewarded many times over from Above.”

David canceled his trip. The radio ads, however, were still running, and the large billboard was suspended over one of the major highways near the show. But with no physical presence in Las Vegas, it was a colossal waste of money.

Or so he thought. Two days passed. Here and there, a potential client called David, having seen the billboard in Las Vegas, but as soon as they heard he was not in Vegas at the show, they lost interest.

Then one morning, the phone rang. “Hello? Is this the Supersized Kitchen?” asked a polished voice. “It is,” David replied reluctantly, awaiting another disappointment. “This is Susan from NBC news, and we’re working on a project, highlighting small businesses across the United States. We would like

to highlight your niche and speak about where the business is heading, and how our team of experts can help you grow. In addition to our financial incentives, this will give your small business exposure and free advertising throughout the country. I have researched your business online and like what I saw. Your products are unique and well-made, and your prices are very competitive.”

David paused, thinking that this seemed too good to be true. “If I may ask, how did you get my number?” Susan replied, “Actually, it was just a coincidence. I was in Vegas on an assignment, and driving back to the airport, I noticed your billboard with its splashy logo. A few seconds later, I turned on the radio to hear the traffic and I heard a jingle, ‘Supersized Kitchen is the only way ...’ I thought, this is a really strange coincidence. Maybe it’s a sign which business to choose!”

Susan profiled the Supersized Kitchen on the show, highlighting the superior quality of their products. The effect was immediate. David hired two new office employees, who were busy with new

clients around the clock. Before long, his fledgling business doubled, both in size and profits.

In this week’s Torah portion, we begin reading of the exile in Egypt. Egypt was the most profligate immoral place in the ancient world at that time. The Jewish People were redeemed because through supersized sacrifice they held themselves aloof from the Egyptians and resisted the overwhelming impurity of the atmosphere of Egypt.

Sometimes, one of the most difficult tests we face regarding holiness involves situations to which we must expose ourselves in our pursuit of a livelihood. But we should ask ourselves every time: Do I really need to do this, do I really need to be there? Maybe there’s a different way? Maybe I could ‘zoom’ the meeting instead, and as effectively?

And if you have to go, say to yourself, “As I head out to work, I will be on guard and vigilant to the maximum to protect myself.” Give charity, say a Psalm, and Hashem will guard your way.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW SHEMOT

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**W**ith the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shemot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males.

Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to be his nursemaid.

Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mount Sinai), Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, the Land promised to their ancestors.

Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being G-d's agent, so G-d enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker, G-d tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but G-d assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews go.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW VAERA

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**H**ashem tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. Hashem punishes the Egyptians, sending plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only Hashem could be performing these miracles.

Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

# Q & A SHEMOT

## Questions

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt"?
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed, because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted G-d's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And Hashem was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) *nogsim* b) *shotrim*?
20. How were the *shotrim* rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Answers

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
15. 4:20 It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

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# Q & A VAERA

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## Questions

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "I am G-d"?
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel"?
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart"?
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation"?
13. What are "chamarim"?
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The dever killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

## Answers

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the Land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (pitem ) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (pitpet ) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague - shechin.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. (a) 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.  
(b) 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of dever only the cattle in the fields died. The plague of shechin affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Drawing Water

One of Moses' first heroic acts of kindness recorded in the Bible was his helping out the daughters of Jethro who were harassed by the local shepherds. Jethro's seven daughters had already arrived at the well and "drew" water from the well to give their father's sheep to drink, when the local shepherds came and chased them away. Then, Moses arrived on the scene to the girls' aid, and he saved them from the savage shepherds and helped them give water to their flock. The Hebrew verb used by the Bible in this story to denote the act of "drawing" water is *dalah* (Ex. 2:16-19). Another verb that denotes "drawing" water is *sho'ev*. This essay will investigate these two synonyms for the act of "drawing" water, explore their etymologies and show the nuances reflected in each specific term.

The trilateral lexicographers in the mold of Ibn Chayyuj, Ibn Janach, and Radak trace the word *dalah* to the trilateral root DALET-LAMMED-HEY. They see the word *dalah* in the sense of "drawing water" as just another permutation of *dalah* in the sense of "lifting [something] up." For example, in the verse "I will exalt You O Hashem, for You have lifted me up (*dilitani*)" (Ps. 30:2), an inflection of *dalah* is used in the general sense of "lifting up" and not to denote "drawing water." As you might imagine, the link between these two acts is quite intuitive: In order to "draw water" from a well, one must somehow "lift up" the waters that have pooled down below in the well. In fact, the name for the very instrument used for "lifting up" these waters

also relates to *dalah*, as the Hebrew word *d'li* means "pail/bucket" (see Num. 24:7, Isa. 40:15) and is also derived from this root.

Similarly, the aforementioned lexicographers also explain that the Hebrew word *daliyot* – which appears eight times in the Bible: Jer. 11:16, Ezek. 17:6-7, 17:23, 19:11, 31:7, 31:9, 31:12 – refers to the "branches at the top of a tree." Those branches also intuitively relate back to the core meaning of this root as "lifting up" because their placement at the top of the tree gives the appearance as though someone lifted them up and placed them there. The singular form of that word (which never appears in the Bible) would be *dalia*, which is likely the basis of the feminine Jewish Name *Dalia*.

In line with the biliteralist tradition with which he is identified, Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) sees the core root of *dalah* as the two-letter string DALET-LAMMED. The way he understands it, there are three distinct derivatives of this root: *dalah* ("drawing water"), *dalah* ("lifting up"), and *dal* ("poor/destitute"). This is quite different from what we've seen above: Whereas the lexicographers mentioned earlier see the first two of these as essentially one category, Menachem splits them in twain. Moreover, whereas those lexicographers trace the word *dal* to the root DALET-LAMMED-LAMMED, Menachem traces them to DALET-LAMMED. Additionally, Menachem never offers an inkling as to how he understood the etymology of *daliyot*, even though the other lexicographers traced that term to the same root as *dalah*.

\*To read the rest of this article, visit us online at: [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## The Amidah (Part 33) – The Final Paragraph: Personally Speaking

*“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”*  
(Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer)

“**M**ay Hashem, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act for Your Name’s sake, act for Your right hand’s sake, act for Your sanctity’s sake, act for Your Torah’s sake. That Your beloved may be given rest, let Your right hand save and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.”

The final paragraph of the Amidah continues, “As for those who want to do evil to me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design.” Rabbi Shimon Schwab explains that after having worked on ourselves to reach a higher level of humility, and after having strived to reach a point where we are able to downplay our own egos and remain humble, we might find ourselves vulnerable to those who wish to do us harm. All of the requests we have asked for up until now may have left us unsuspecting that others may be trying to harm us. Therefore, we ask Hashem to protect us from both the evil designs that we are aware of, and also of those that we are not. It is as if we are internalizing the idea that if we focus on pursuing the mitzvahs, we will not be pursued by those who want to harm us.

In Tehillim (136:4) King David writes, “To Him Who alone performs great wonders, for His kindness endures forever.” Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer (1698-1760) from the Ukraine (The Baal Shem Tov, which literally means: The one with a good name) introduced the

concept of Chassidut, a synthesizing of the spiritual and the physical realms in a way that made it accessible to every Jew through warmth and love. He taught that everything that Hashem does is with “great wonders.” But the most wondrous of all wonders are those of which Hashem alone is aware of! Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro (1726-1791) from Koretz, Ukraine, was one of the most preeminent disciples of the Baal Shem Tov. His piety was so exceptional that the Baal Shem Tov reportedly said of him that such an exalted soul descends into the physical world only once every five hundred years. Rabbi Pinchas said that we need faith to know that Hashem is concealed within the universe. But once we know that He is hidden here, He is no longer disguised!

In the penetratingly mystical and beautiful prayer called “Anah Bekoach,” generally attributed to Rabbi Nechunya ben haKanah who lived in Mishnaic times, we say, “And hear our scream, You [Hashem] Who knows hidden recesses.” Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel (1849-1927), commonly known as the Alter [literally, ‘elder’ but actually a title given to someone who is a uniquely revered spiritual mentor] of Slabodka, which is where his Yeshivah was located, was one of the most influential influencers and educators of his generation. He was a disciple of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv Broide (the Alter of Kelm) who, in turn, was one of the closest disciples of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the “mussar movement.” Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel asks why Hashem needs to know the hidden recesses to hear our prayers? He answers that a Jew’s cry is not always audible. Sometimes, deep inside his heart, there is a piercing scream that is so profound that he cannot give it audible expression. Only Hashem, Who knows the hidden recesses of a person’s heart, can hear – and understand – such a cry.

To be continued...

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# PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## The Song of the Fish

The Fish say:

“The voice of Hashem was upon the waters, the G-d of glory thundered – Hashem – upon many waters.”  
(Tehillim 29:3)

Some three and a half trillion fish fill the vast oceans in a kaleidoscope of colors, shapes, and sizes, displayed in all their beauty through the transparent waters. They sing how Hashem’s voice blessed them to be fruitful and multiply, in order to express His glory within the oceanic kingdom, and His kindness in feeding its myriad of creatures.

On a deeper level of understanding, the fish’s song speaks in praise of the Torah. The verse of their song is excerpted from a description of the Giving of the Torah, which was accompanied with thunder and rain that symbolize the water-like nature of the Torah. The fish sing of this voice since they are like Torah scholars who swim within the life-giving waters of the Torah and whose blissful lifestyle is unfathomable to those on land. The more Torah a person knows, the more he can appreciate the beauty and the awesomeness of the Creator’s voice upon the waters.

Sources: Tehillim 68:9; Mechilta D’Rashbi 19:16; Midrash Shir HaShirim 1:3; Rav Hirsch to Bereishis 48:16; Malbim; Nishmas Shir; Mibriosav Echkam; Zimras HaShamayim V’Haaretz

\*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Nedarim 65-78

### The Rule of All or Nothing

“Until Rabbi Akiva came and taught: A neder that is partially permitted is completely permitted.”

**T**his teaching, in the first mishna on our daf, changed the way that earlier authorities taught and ruled. Previously, if a person made a neder to forbid something, he would be asked if he would have still made the neder if he had known that sorrow was forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov, which would lead to permitting his neder on those days but not on the rest of the days of the week. Rabbi Akiva came along and ruled that “since the neder was partially permitted, it was totally permitted.” (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah 129:1)

One explanation for Rabbi Akiva’s rule is that it is logical that the person who made the neder wanted it to be valid only if all aspects of it would be valid. (Rabbeinu Asher) The Yerushalmi Talmud derives the rule in our mishna from the verse, “as all that goes out from his mouth (his neder that he spoke) he will do.” (Bamidbar 30:3) This implies that the neder exists only if all of the neder exists. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

Nedarim 66

### An Agent of a Person

“But he (the husband) didn’t hear the vow!”

The gemara asks this question regarding a scenario where the husband appointed a guardian agent to annul his wife’s vows. However, this question seems difficult to understand since the agent did, in fact, hear the vow, and there is an accepted rule that “the agent of a person is like the person.” Therefore, it would seem to be clear that the agent’s hearing should suffice. So, why is it a question in our sugya?

One approach to understanding the question is that it is not logical that the agent should have the ability to do something that that husband who appointed him cannot do. If this were true, the agent would be “greater” than the one who appointed him and not merely “like” that person. (Harav Rav Yossi in Tosefot as cited by Rabbeinu Nissim)

Nedarim 72b

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## The Staff-Serpent Sign

Even though Moshe was told by G-d that his mission would succeed, he was also told that before the dawning of success, there would be repeated failures. Therefore, he understood that doubts would arise in the minds of the people and asked for a sign to reassure them that it was indeed G-d who sent him.

In the first of these signs, G-d told Moshe to throw his *mateh*, his staff, on the ground. Once on the ground, it turned into a serpent, whereupon Moshe fled from it. Then, upon G-d's instruction, he took hold of the tail of the serpent and it turned back into a staff in his hand. How was this a sign to the people that the G-d of their forefathers sent Moshe?

On a simple level, it is a sign because any act that evidences the power to set aside the natural order is a sign of a Higher Power — a Power Who establishes and operates the laws of nature.

A more penetrating analysis, however, should also explain why G-d chose this particular sign instead of some other one. The staff — *mateh* — is a most natural symbol of man's mastery over nature. It has a dual function, corresponding to the dual meaning of its root, *nateh*. One meaning is to lean or incline, and the other meaning is to stretch one's hand over something.

Correspondingly, *mateh* denotes an extension of the hand, upon which man can lean for support as he stands on the ground, as in a cane, and an extension of man's sphere of power, as in a scepter — a symbol of his authority.

This sign in Moshe's hand will show the people that if G-d so desires, the thing on which a person leans for support and with which he wields authority can turn into the very opposite — a serpent which causes man to recoil.

The message to Moshe is: You have been sent by G-d, Who, if He so desires, can cause the very thing on which man relies for support, and which serves him as an instrument of his authority, to turn against him. Conversely, if He so desires, G-d can take a hostile form that is feared and shunned by man and place it into his hand as an accommodating support and tractable tool. He can make Pharaoh a slave and you are the ruler. He can turn Pharaoh's staff into a whip for his own back. For nothing inherently supports or inhibits man — it is only G-d Who assigns such roles as staff and serpent.

- Sources: Commentary Bereishet 4:2-5