

The Pardes Center for Jewish Educators presents

An Interactive PARSHA EXPERIENCE



Sponsored by Michelle and JJ Berney in memory of Tomi Deutsch Berney

Parsha: Va'era

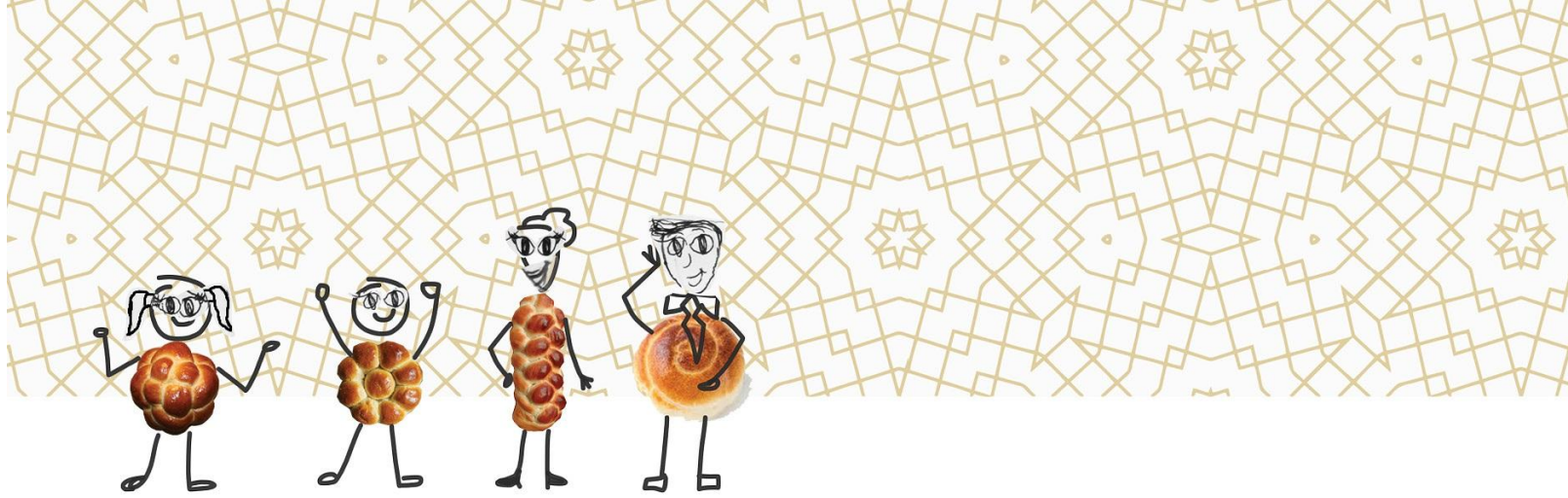
Title: Do Humans Have Free Will?

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The Parsha at First Glance

Spotlight on the Parsha:

In this *parsha* God continues to speak to Moshe through the burning thornbush. God tells him the plan for how Moshe will go with Aharon to Pharaoh to ask for *Bnei Yisrael* to be freed. Moshe is still feeling a bit insecure about his ability to stand up to Pharaoh and be a leader to Bnei Yisrael. Aharon is told that he will help do the talking. In the instructions to Moshe, God says that God will “harden Pharaoh’s heart, in order for God’s many signs and marvels to be seen in the



land.” Moshe and Aharon go off to the palace and the marvels begin. The first one is that the staff that Moshe is holding turns into a snake! This is followed by the start of the plagues.

Zooming In:

I can't read this parsha without thinking about the idea of free will. Moshe doesn't have a choice in following God's orders, even when he insists he is not fit for the job. Pharaoh has his heart hardened so we don't know what he would have decided on his own. Even Aharon is told exactly what words he is supposed to say. We also hear about the destiny of the whole Jewish people in the start of this parsha with the four expressions of redemption: God promises to take us out of Egypt, deliver us from enslavement, redeem us and acquire us as the chosen people at Mt Sinai.

Questions for Consideration:

- Is our whole life planned out for us? If so, what is our role?
- Do we have free will to change the course of our life in some or all aspects?
- Does everything good or bad happen for a reason?
- The plagues happened so Bnei Israel could see all of God's many wonders. Have you ever been able to take a difficult moment in your life and appreciate some good or learning that has come from it?
- How does believing or not believing in free will affect the way you look at life?



The Parsha Through Another Lens

Getting Dramatic about Free Will:

Use the following text from this parsha, Shemot 7:1-4, to guide a discussion with your family and friends. I bolded the words that most connect to the topic of **free will**.

1. Answer the question first in first person as the character in the text. How would the character feel about this question according to what s/he is experiencing?
2. Next, answer it as yourself. How do you feel personally about the questions? How do you see this in your own life?

Questions	Are we just put places at the right time? As in the saying, "Right time right place"? Or are we making changes in our destiny depending on where we put ourselves?
Moshe	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, רְאֵה נִתְּתִיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעֹה; וְאַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ יְהִיֶה נְבִיאֲךָ.</p> <p>God replied to Moses, "See, I place/give you in the role of God to Pharaoh, with your brother Aharon as your prophet."</p>

Questions	Do ideas ever just come to you? Do you feel compelled to say things? Do we have free will over our speech?
Moshe and Aaron	<p>אָתָּה תְּדַבֵּר, אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶךָ; וְאַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ יְדַבֵּר אֶל-פָּרְעֹה,</p>



	<p>וְשַׁלַּח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרְצוֹ. You will repeat all that I command you, and your brother Aharon will speak to Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from his land.</p>
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<p>Questions</p>	<p>Are you ever fundamentally opposed to something and you can't figure out exactly why? Do we harden our own hearts to things or are we created with that predetermined? Are some things just harder for us to accept?</p>
<p>Pharaoh</p>	<p>וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה, אֶת-לֵב פַּרְעֹה; וְהִרְבֵּיתִי אֶת-אוֹתוֹתַי וּמוֹפְתָי, בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt.</p>

<p>Questions</p>	<p>God is saying that even if Pharaoh doesn't listen to you it will be ok because I'll step in and fix it. Do some problems just solve themselves? Do we have control over that or is there a set plan?</p>
<p>Moshe</p>	<p>וְלֹא-יִשְׁמַע אֲלֵיכֶם פַּרְעֹה, וְנִתְּתִי אֶת-יָדֵי בְּמִצְרַיִם; וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת-צְבָאוֹתַי אֶת-עַמִּי בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, בְּשִׁפְטִים, גְּדֹלִים. When Pharaoh does not heed you, I will lay My hand upon Egypt and deliver My ranks, My people the Israelites, from the land of Egypt, with extraordinary chastisements.</p>

Shabbat Shalom!