



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

SHEMOT > Va'eira

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Va'eira

Marketing 101: How to Stand
Out in a Saturated Market



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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a Saturated Market, January 28, 2017

ABSTRACT

What is the secret to great marketing? Demonstrating to people that your product or service fills their needs better than any other product or service out there.

As a rabbi, I deal with this challenge on an ongoing basis: How to make Judaism stand out and relevant in the large marketplace of ideas and offerings. With so many products and services being peddled to us, with so many advertisements and messages inundating us, seducing our senses, and competing for our attention, how do you present Judaism in a compelling way, as superior to all the other options out there?

It's one marketing challenge to create a new market where one doesn't exist; to show people that your product will improve their lives. But it's quite another challenge to stand out in an over-saturated market (as reflected in an anecdote starkly contrasting the marketing strategies of Nike and Reebok in attempting to expand into the African market).

There may have been a time when there was no competition; when people had only one option. But today that is not the case. Today we suffer from the opposite problem: too many options.

This same challenge applies to our personal lives, our professional lives, and our spiritual lives: how to choose and prioritize between a slew of prospects.

How do we present a superior product that can compete and dominate over all others? How can we find the strength and confidence necessary to stand out amongst the multitudes?

The first documented marketing secret – and the most important one – is found, surprisingly, in... this week's Torah portion.

A deceptively simple exchange between Moses and the chief Egyptian sorcerers teaches us the essence of true marketing. And the purpose of our lives: to market spirituality in a materialistic world.

MARKETING 101: HOW TO STAND OUT IN A SATURATED MARKET

1. No Market or a Huge Market? (Humor)

A while ago, Nike, trying to broaden its global sneaker reach, set its sights on the continent of Africa. Nike clandestinely sent its executive vice president for marketing to Africa for a week to report on the potential for new sneaker markets in countries like the Ivory Coast, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Cameroon.

After the week, the senior marketing executive for Nike submitted his report. The memo related how from Mauritania in the west to Kenya in the east, from Chad in the north to Botswana in the south, the majority of the peoples of Africa walk around barefoot. As such, because no one wears, never mind owns, shoes, there is absolutely ZERO market for cutting edge Nike sneakers in the vast majority of Africa, and Nike would do well to stay out of that continent.

Unbeknownst to Nike, an employee leaked to Reebok, Nike's biggest competitor, the top-secret news that Nike was exploring Africa as a potential market in which to market its sneakers. Not to be outdone by its rival, Reebok sent its own executive vice president for marketing to Africa for a week to report on the potential for new sneaker markets in countries like the Ivory Coast, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Cameroon.

After the week, the senior marketing executive for Reebok submitted his report. The memo related how from Mauritania in the west to Kenya in the east, from Chad in the north to Botswana in the south, the majority of the peoples of Africa walk around barefoot. As such, because no one wears, never mind owns, shoes, there is absolutely a MASSIVE mar-

ket for shoes, especially cutting-edge Reebok sneakers, in the vast majority of Africa, and it would therefore be a no-brainer to corner the shoe market in that continent before anyone else.

2. Market Share

What is the secret to great marketing? Demonstrating to people that your product or service fills their needs better than any other product or service out there.

As a rabbi, I deal with this challenge on an ongoing basis: How to make Judaism stand out and relevant in the large marketplace of ideas and offerings. With so many products and services being peddled to us, with so many advertisements and messages inundating us, seducing our senses, and competing for our attention, how do you present Judaism in a compelling way, as superior to all the other options out there?

A rabbi colleague of mine was once on a flight to Israel, when the plane struck an area of severe turbulence. The entire plane was shaking, knocking over food and drinks. One of the passengers, who was quite frightened, turns to the rabbi and says (pointing upward): “Rabbi, you’re supposed to have connections to heaven. Why don’t you intervene and have G-d stop this disturbance?” The rabbi replied with a smile: “I’m in sales, not management...”

It’s one marketing challenge to create a new market where one doesn’t exist, like Starbucks did with coffee and Apple did with smart devices (from iPods to iPhones to iPads). But it’s quite another challenge to stand out in an oversaturated market.

For example: I can open a synagogue in Chad and have very little competition, thus creating the market for my “product,” Judaism. Or I can open a synagogue in Boro Park or Jerusalem and have a massive market for my product, albeit with substantial competition as well.

The challenge in the former model is to start from scratch and introduce something new; the challenge in the latter is to dominate a glutted market.

There may have been a time when there was no competition; when people had only one option. But today that is not the case. Today we suffer from the opposite problem: too many options.

This same challenge applies to our personal lives, our professional lives, and our spiritual lives: how to choose and prioritize between a slew of prospects.

How do we present a superior product that can compete and dominate over all others? How can we find the strength and confidence necessary to stand out amongst the multitudes?

Which – believe it or not – brings us to this week's Torah reading.

The first documented marketing secret – and the most important one – is found, surprisingly, in... this week's Torah portion.

A deceptively simple exchange between Moses and the chief Egyptian sorcerers teaches us the essence of true marketing. And the purpose of our lives: to market spirituality in a materialistic world.

3. Parshat Va'eira

In this week's Torah reading, *Parshat Va'eira*, we learn about the first seven of the ten plagues that G-d inflicted upon Egypt, in order to set the people of Israel free.

We read how Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and introduced themselves with a big flashy statement.

Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh, and they did so, as the Lord had commanded. Aaron cast his staff before Pharaoh and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Pharaoh then summoned his wise men and magicians, and the necromancers of Egypt who also did likewise with their magic.¹

After Moses and Aaron made their supernatural statement, turning a wooden staff into a living snake, the sorcerers of Egypt countered with

¹Exodus 7:10-11.

a magical demonstration of their own, stating in effect that it will take a little more than a magic trick to impress them.

The Torah verses do not reveal to us the conversation between Moses and Aaron and the wizards of Egypt. However, the Talmud does.

4. The Talmud: Dominating the Market

There is a short two-line segment in the Talmud that relates an interesting tête-à-tête between Moses and the sorcerers of Egypt.

Said [the chief sorcerers of Egypt] Yochana and Mamrei² to Moses: “Are you bringing straw to Aforayim?!” [Meaning, are you bringing straw to a place where they make straw?”]

Said Moses to them: “People say, to a place of vegetables, take your vegetables.”³

When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh to tell him to “let my people go” – in branding language bringing a new message to a rather, one can say, hostile market – they knew that they had to make a powerful first impression if their divine message were to break through the decadence of Egypt.

So, to catch Pharaoh’s attention, they spoke the language of Egypt – magic.

The Egyptian wizards, led by their chiefs Yochana and Mamrei, said: “What? Is magic supposed to impress us? Here, magic is commonplace.” “Are you bringing sorcery to a place where sorcery is plentiful?”

Using our sneaker analogy, imagine magic were sneakers. Egypt would then be a county where every person was a sneaker manufacturer, where magic was commonplace.

So is your small magic trick supposed to impress us?

To which Moses responded: “When you want to sell vegetables, you go to where they sell vegetables.”

² According to Rashi.

³ Menachot 85a.

That is to say, if someone wants to sell vegetables, the best place to do that is the place where vegetables are found, since that is where the buyers will come.⁴

Moses was saying that yes indeed, we have come to a place filled with sorcery, “where the buyers come,” and we will demonstrate how our “product” – our vegetables” – is far superior to anything you have here. The place where the awesomeness of the Israelite God will be appreciated through magic, is specifically in Egypt where sorcery is commonplace.

How indeed did Moses stand out? If you’re the only magician in town, then any small magic trick is very impressive. But if everyone is a magician, then it takes a little more than a magic trick to impress the market.

It’s like in Israel: everyone is a politician so it takes more than a politician to impress the people. To paraphrase the famous quote attributed to Golda Meir: “It is much easier to be the president of 200 million citizens, than it is to be the prime minister of 2 million prime ministers.”

The wizards of Egypt challenged Moses and Aaron by showing them that they, too, could turn their staffs into snakes. But then Aaron’s staff swallowed their staffs, showing them clearly that you don’t mess with someone who is on a mission from G-d.⁵ That their “product,” their miracle, was far superior to the Egyptian version.

That’s what you call standing out.

Moses demonstrated the power and awe of G-d even in a language that the Egyptians and their sorcerers could understand. That even on their own terms – the terms of magic and sorcery – G-d’s messengers are far superior. That even in their rife “vegetable” market G-d stands out.

⁴See Rashi ad loc: “Just as the sorcerers of Egypt were being facetious, so Moses was being facetious in return.” Some understand this as another way of understanding Moses’ reply.

⁵Exodus 7:12-13.

5. Performing Magic in This World

This offers us an extraordinary lesson for our lives today.

Each one of our souls was sent to this earth to “market” and “sell” G-dliness.

We enter into a hostile and even decadent world – mitzrayim from the word constraints – filled with glitzy “magic,” sleight of hand or otherwise. So many forces inundate and overstimulate our senses. Especially in our highly technological age – which is only accelerating – information is streaming at us incessantly. Who of us does not feel at times overwhelmed and overloaded?

And yet, in this deluge we are asked, charged – and empowered – with the powerful mission to compete with all these voices, and “market” the divine and dominate the market, by demonstrating the superiority of spirituality.

We all come into this world to perform the ultimate “magic” – a magic which is greater than all the magic of the world – to turn matter into spirit, wax into candles, darkness into light, vegetables into, well, soulful vegetables.

Our calling is to take the material world, and – on its terms – recognize how materialism is not an end to itself, but a means to knowing G-d (in the worlds of Maimonides:⁶ “the business of the entire world will be solely to now G-d”).

Thereby transforming the physical world into a divine home – a *dirah b'tachtonim*,⁷ a world filled with Divine knowledge as the waters cover the sea.⁸

6. The Challenge

The challenge is a great one, yet therein lies the purpose of our existence:

Egypt, exile, slavery – the material world as a whole – is full of magicians, people who convince themselves that they are doing supernatural

⁶ Mishne Torah, Laws of Kings 12:5.

⁷ See Tanya chapter 36.

⁸ Isaiah 11:9. Maimonides ibid.

things. Why then enter an already flooded market, one may ask?

G-d says you have something unique: You aren't coming as a magician; you are coming as a representative of G-d, the Creator of the Universe.

If you were a magician, would you come to an arena that has ten magicians, or a city that is full of magicians?

Put more generally: Should you enter a saturated market?

Yes, if you know your market. And you have the confidence that you can dominate the market.

7. Know Your Market and Have Confidence

The first thing you must know is who your market is. Then you can decide if it's an oversaturated or under-saturated one. And then you can market accordingly.

Moses knew who he was dealing with when he came to Pharaoh and his wizards. And he knew he was coming to market his "product" with a very wise marketing strategy, one informed and guided by G-d Himself. Moses was therefore completely confident in his "product" vanquishing all others.

One of the major obstacles to our goals is lacking confidence and being wary of entering a new market – either because the market is already bursting with competing products, or because there seems to be no market for our product.

In real life terms:

Say you know that you have to start a new job because the one you are in is simply dragging you down, or because it doesn't provide you with what you need to cover your basic expenses. But it's scary to enter a hostile environment...

Or say there is a relationship in your life that really needs addressing. But it's just scary to go there, who knows how the other person will react...

8. Super Natural, Naturally Super

But know:

You have supernatural abilities – but not because you are a magician. You have supernatural – or better said: supra-natural – abilities because you were created in the Divine Image, and are connected to and a representative of the Creator of all supernatural and natural elements of existence.

Therefore, you can enter into an oversaturated market and still stand out. You have something unique, a unique message to share, a unique product to bring to market.

A divine product.

Armed with this awareness and confidence we are empowered in all aspects of our lives – our personal lives, our professional lives, and our spiritual lives.

How to market your personal divinity into the world? By building a spiritual home, which will shine and illuminate everyone that enters it.

A couple of ideas:

- Evaluate your relationships with your family. What are you doing right? What can you do better? Maybe spend more time with your spouse or children? Perhaps institute a weekly/monthly family get together?
- Do you have a good friend or mentor you can talk to? If you do, leverage that relationship to help your personal gifts come to fruition. If not, look for one.

The same with your professional life. Here are a couple of ideas how to market your professional divinity into the world:

- Which parts of your job make you happy, which sad? Is your work meaningful? How can you make it more so? Designate time each day to say a short prayer reminding yourself why you are here in this world in general and why you work specifically. Implement a

weekly/monthly gathering in the office when you discuss a meaningful topic.

- In addition to your regular job take on a pet project that helps people, that brings light into the world. Maybe visiting the sick, donating books to a local school, anything positive.

The same with your spiritual life. Here are a couple of ideas how to market your spiritual divinity into the world:

- How often do you interact with your soul? Asking that question alone is interacting with your soul. How often do you do that? Set aside designated times to do so. Especially in the morning upon awakening recite the Modeh Ani, acknowledging the return of your soul and its renewed mission in the world.
- One way is take upon a specific mitzvah that you never before really committed to. Another way is to learn a daily portion of Torah, even if it's for five minutes a day. Another idea to enhance your spiritual life is by committing to sharing a spiritual insight with at least three people a week.

The ideas are endless. All you have to do is begin by committing to one and running with it.

This is how you enter a new market with a bang, bringing magic, real holy divine magic into this (oft-seeming Egyptian) world.

My dear friends, let us each create magic!

And, as then, it will all lead to redemption – this time to an everlasting and eternal redemption.

Shabbat Shalom!