



The Reason Behind Hardening Pharaoh's Heart

"Go to Pharaoh in the morning – behold! he goes out to the water – and you shall stand opposite him at the River's bank, and the staff that was turned into a snake you shall take in your hand"

(Shemot 7:15)

Rashi clarifies the words, "behold! he goes out to the water": "For his bodily functions, since he made himself out to be a god and said that he does not have human needs and he would arise early and go to the Nile and there he would relieve himself." Hashem commanded Moshe to meet Pharaoh by the river to show him that he knows that he does have human needs and he is deceiving people by declaring that he is a god. Really this should have caused Pharaoh embarrassment and been a catalyst for him to give up his stubborn stance of refusing to allow the Jewish people to leave Egypt. Even though Moshe Rabbeinu had clearly seen that he was lying, Pharaoh nevertheless hardened his heart and without any mortification, continued declaring that he was a god.

We can use this idea to explain another concept. I was asked by one of my friends why Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart during the last five plagues. Hashem only punishes if a person has the free will to choose between good or bad. So if Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart and he no longer had free choice, it seems that he shouldn't have been punished?

In the verse that talks about the Plague of Pestilence, we are told, "Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not heed them" (ibid 9:12), and the Ramban writes explicitly that until the Plague of Pestilence, the Torah uses expressions of, "so Pharaoh's heart was strong", "yet Pharaoh's heart became stubborn". But from the Plague of Pestilence onwards, the Torah writes "Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh". He explains that with the first plagues Pharaoh hardened his heart on his own initiative. But beginning with the Plague of Pestilence, Pharaoh already considered repenting and did not harden his heart. Instead, it was Hashem who hardened his heart at the end of each plague, until the Plague of the Firstborn. So, if indeed Hashem was the One who hardened his heart, why did he deserve to be punished?

According to what we explained above, we can answer as follows: Pharaoh during the first plagues hardened his heart time after time and brazenly pretended to be a god, even in front of Moshe Rabbeinu who caught him in his lies when he saw him from the banks of the Nile relieving himself. So when Hashem saw that Pharaoh was constantly choosing evil, with no thought of choosing good since evil was his only pleasure, Hashem punished him by taking away his power of free will. Then Pharaoh continued behaving according to the evil forces that were part of him, for

he had already set this way in his heart. The way that a person determines for himself a fixed way, heaven establishes that he continues in this path. His free will is taken from him and the path that he fixed for himself is the one on which he must continue.

Concerning the Plague of Hail, it says, "Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants and livestock in the field" (Shemot 9:20-21). Moshe warned Pharaoh and his servants that whoever wishes to save himself and his possessions, should bring everything inside. Whoever believed in Hashem, brought inside and was not harmed, while those who did not believe, did not bring inside and were harmed. It is hard to understand how they could not believe in Hashem, had the sorcerers not already said to Pharaoh, in the Plague of Lice, "It is a finger of G-d!" (ibid 8:15)?

The Gaon Rabbi Yeshayahu Pinto zya"a, in his sefer 'Kesef Mezuak' explains that indeed during the first plagues, Pharaoh and his servants were aroused to repent, but their repentance was only lip service. It was not accompanied by any inner feelings. This is why they did not bring their animals into their homes despite Moshe's warning. This means that when repentance is only an external expression the person retains his wickedness; he only imagines that he has repented and in truth, his repentance is not acceptable.

This is how the Rif zya"a explains the verse, "Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst" (ibid 10:1). Since Hashem saw that Pharaoh's repentance was only an external expression and did not come from his heart, Hashem hardened his heart so that he will receive the rest of the plagues, Locusts, Darkness and the Plague of the Firstborn, until he will be aroused to repent inwardly too.

However, Hashem once again hardened Pharaoh's heart after the Plague of the Firstborn, so that he would chase after Bnei Yisrael to the Yam Suf. The reason for this was because Pharaoh repented during the Plague of the Firstborn only out of fear of punishment and not because he chose to submit himself to Hashem. This teaches us the extent to which a person is indicted for his deeds.

The lesson we can derive from the above is that it is not enough to repent superficially but repentance must be felt deep in one's heart. This requires a penetrating searching of the soul to examine whether ones' repentance is heartfelt or not. If a person's repentance does not stem from a broken heart, his bad ways remain part of him. Since his repentance is not considered as true repentance, he will never show true fear of G-d.

Paris • Orh 'Haïm Ve Moché

32, rue du Plateau • 75019 Paris • France
Tel: 01 42 08 25 40 • Fax: 01 42 06 00 33
hevratpinto@aol.com

Jérusalem • Pninei David

Rehov Bayit Va Gan 8 • Jérusalem • Israël
Tel: +972 2643 3605 • Fax: +972 2643 3570
p@hpinto.org.il

Ashdod • Orh 'Haïm Ve Moshe

Rehov Ha-Admour Mi-Belz 43 • Ashdod • Israël
Tel: +972 88 566 233 • Fax: +972 88 521 527
orothaim@gmail.com

Ra'anana • Kol 'Haïm

Rehov Ha'ahouza 98 • Ra'anana • Israël
Tel: +972 98 828 078 • Fax: +972 58 792 9003
kolhaim@hpinto.org.il



Hilula

28 – Rabbi Channanel Nippi, author of 'Livyat Chen'

29 – Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri

1 – Rabbi Moshe Shik, the Maharam Shik

2 – Rabbi Meshulam Zusha of Anapoli

3 – Rabbi Yosef of Amshinov

4 – Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov

5 – Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya HaCohen, author of 'Misgeret HaShulchan'



Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

What Did I Learn from Following an Ant?

From an incident that happened in our home, I merited witnessing a live demonstration of Hashem Yitbarach's Divine intervention over all His creations, even the very smallest of them.

It was Erev Shabbat and in the early hours of the afternoon I set aside my involvement in public affairs and turned to help my household with the Shabbat preparations.

During these preparations, I suddenly noticed a small ant making its way towards the lower floor of our home.

I stood still and observed it and when our assistant noticed my preoccupation with this small ant, he wanted to kill it and remove it from our premises. But I stopped him and continued observing the ant's path.

Since it was Friday and I was in the middle of the Shabbat preparations, I asked our assistant to continue tracking its steps.

Two hours later, the assistant called out to me from the basement. He told me that the ant had slowly made its way down to the basement, where a spider was waiting for it. When the spider noticed the ant coming towards it, it hurried across, caught it and ate it with great gusto.

I was astounded at this display of Hashem's mighty wisdom with which He runs the world.

Hashem knew that during the winter this spider will find shelter in our basement, and on one Friday he will be hungry with nothing to eat. Therefore, Hashem summoned this ant that was possibly created a few months before in the summer and brought it over a great distance until the exact location of the spider, all so that it should serve as food for the spider, at the exact moment when it would need it.

David Hamelech sings the praises of the One who conducts the world in this fashion, "All of them look to You with hope, to provide their food in its proper time. You give to them, they gather it in; You open Your hand, they are sated with good" (Tehillim 104:27-28).

Hashem prepares the sustenance for each and every creature and takes care of the nourishment of all His creations in a remarkable way. Therefore, we must place our trust only in Him, and ask only from Him that He nourish and support us, with favor, kindness and mercy, with abundance and with honor.

The Haftarah

"Thus said the Lord Hashem/Elokim"

(Yechezkel 28)

The connection to the Parsha: The Haftarah speaks about the prophecies of the expulsion of the Egyptians and desolation of the land, and in the Parsha we read about the punishments that the Egyptians received from Hashem, in the form of the ten Plagues.

Guard Your Tongue

Even the Truth

Just as it is forbidden to accept lashon hara if one hears the information from one person, so too if one hears this lashon hara from two people or more, he is still not allowed to believe them. If they tell you that so and so did something inappropriate, they have transgressed the prohibition of "You shall not be a gossipmonger", for this also includes true statements.



Words of our Sages

The Trait of Mercy Demands its Right

"And as for you and your servants, I know that you are not afraid of Hashem, G-d"

(Shemot 9:30)

Rabbi Shmuel di Modena, in his responsa (Maharshdam, Orach Chaim 3), tells us that he has a precious explanation:

We only find the name 'Hashem, G-d' at the beginning of Parshat Bereishit, where it says, "These are the products of the heaven and the earth when they were created on the day that Hashem G-d made earth and heaven" (Bereishit 2:4). Following this, we do not find these two holy names written together, until this Parsha. What is the reason for this?

The Maharshdam answers that when Hashem judged Mitzrayim with the attribute of strict justice (signified by the name 'Elokim', G-d), He nevertheless preceded the attribute of justice with the attribute of mercy (signified by the name 'Hashem'), which we can see from the fact that "the wheat and the spelt were not struck, for they ripen later".

Why did Hashem perform this miracle, saving these foods from being destroyed by the Hail? Because these foods are basic sustenance, and in His abundant mercy and kindness, the Creator had pity even on the lives of these wicked people, despite their evil ways.

The Gaon Rabbi Massoud ben Shimon shlita asks: Water is also a basic human requirement. If so, why with the Plague of Blood, did Hashem not show mercy? And with the other plagues too, the Egyptians came close to a situation of life and death, yet the verse does not hint to us about Hashem combining justice with mercy. Why was this unique to the Plague of Hail?

Rabbi Massoud answers with a beautiful explanation:

In this plague, the Egyptians proved that they have some small measure of fear of G-d, for those who feared the word of Hashem chased their servants and possessions inside. Since this was the case, Hashem combined His abundant mercy together with the harsh judgement.

In my humble opinion, I would like to suggest another reason why Hashem showed His specifically with this plague. In this Plague of Hail, fire and water made peace with each other, to the extent that the water became flammable and formed a flame of fire.

Since they made peace in order to fulfill the wish of Hashem and sanctify His Name in the world, the attribute of mercy came and demanded its rights too...

Wherever there is sanctification of Hashem's Name, the attribute of mercy flourishes.



Pearls of the Parsha

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita



For Heaven's Sake

"Moshe was eighty years old and Ahron was eighty-three years old" (Shemot 7:7)

The Ktav Sofer wonders why it is important for us to be told their age?

He explains that the Torah is testifying that Moshe and Ahron fulfilled their mission only because Hashem commanded them to, and not because chalila they wished to feel important and superior in being Hashem's messengers.

We know that Moshe Rabbeinu did not do it for his own honor since he tried to refuse the mission several times and finally agreed against his wish. But we could think that maybe Ahron did do it for his honor, therefore the Torah tells us, "Moshe was eighty years old and Ahron was eighty-three years old". This being the case, the mission diminished Ahron's honor, for he acted as a 'mouth' and translator for his younger brother. Were his intentions not for the sake of Heaven, he would not have agreed to go. The fact that he accompanied his younger brother shows that his sole desire was to fulfill Hashem's will.

Ask Clearly for Your Needs

"Moshe cried out to Hashem concerning the frogs that he had inflicted upon Pharaoh" (Shemot 8:8)

The holy Ohr Hachaim zya" a adds a short note to this verse: "From here we learn that one's prayer must be specific".

The Ohr Hachaim wishes to explain why Moshe Rabbeinu mentioned Pharaoh's name as part of his prayer. Certainly, Hashem knows he is praying for the frogs that he had inflicted on Pharaoh? The addition of the obvious teaches us that one's prayer must be explicit.

The Ohr Hachaim brings a more detailed explanation in Parshat Va'etchanan. The Midrash tells us that a person was going on his way carrying heavy burdens, and he prayed to Hashem "Send along a donkey". Immediately a non-Jew appeared with a young donkey and commanded him to carry his donkey in addition to his other packages. This Jew came to the Sages and asked them why his prayer wasn't answered?

They explained that he should have been more explicit and asked Hashem to send him a donkey to help him carry his load. Since he did not detail his request, the accusers interpret his prayer as they wish. Indeed, his prayer was answered and a donkey appeared, but it was not to his benefit since he now had to carry the donkey too.

This idea is derived from the verse, "I implored Hashem at that time, saying" (Devarim 3:23), which shows us that one's prayer must be explicit and clear.

Grant Honor to Every Person

"He commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (Shemot 6:13)

Rashi tells us that these words contain a special ruling: "To accord him honor with their words". Rabbi Ahron ben Shimon zt"l, in his sefer 'Nehar Mitzryaim', points out: "There was a basic practice in Egypt to accompany the nations' dead, if they were invited, no matter which nation they came from. This was in order to keep the peace. And most certainly for the royalty, which is also diplomatic etiquette."

"And especially concerning the royalty of Egypt which contains all the religions and languages, their honor is equal, and it is our honor to honor each person."

But the Kindness of Regimes is a Sin

The following question is brought in one of the sefarim: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu show gratitude to the water and sand but did not show gratitude to Pharaoh who brought him up in his palace and made him into a prince? If he showed appreciation to an inanimate object, all the more so must he show gratitude to a human being! Yet we find that not only did Moshe not show gratitude to Pharaoh for all that he did for him, but he was the one responsible for smiting him with the Ten Plagues.

This difficulty can be answered with a personal anecdote: Somebody once approached me and said that we should be grateful to Hitler ym"sh since in his merit the Land of Israel was established. If not for Hitler ym"sh trying to annihilate the Jewish people, nobody would have felt the need to establish a Jewish land. I was shocked by his words! How can one feel grateful to someone who murdered six million Jews?? This is like the absurd joke that we must be grateful to Haman, for if not for his evil intentions of destroying the Jews, we would have missed out on the celebration of Purim! A person's intellect cannot tolerate these types of thoughts.

With can use this to answer why Moshe did not show gratitude to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was a hater of the Jewish people and considered completely wicked, and even though he behaved kindly towards the young Moshe, this mercy was an expression of, "the kindness of regimes is a sin" (Mishlei 14:34). This is why there was no need to feel gratitude towards him. On the contrary, he must be punished in double measure for all the suffering that he caused the Jewish people, under the yoke of his bondage. Besides, showing gratitude to a wicked person, is an expression of agreement with his evil ways and he becomes a partner with this impurity. Had Moshe expressed gratitude to Pharaoh, it would have been considered chalila as if he agreed with him and his wicked deeds and showing support for one who sins.

I testify that I try very hard not to benefit from the money of people who do not observe Shabbat, since by using this money I would be supporting their ways and as if offering my approval for them to continue profaning the Shabbat.

It happens many times that a person profanes the Shabbat by keeping his business open on this holy day. How does he quiet his conscience? By donating money to charities. But one must strengthen oneself and realize that using money that was acquired in a forbidden way, does not bring any blessing. Besides, accepting this money can be taken as approval for the business owner to continue in his bad ways.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA



The talmidim of the Chozeh of Lublin zt"l posed the following question to their Rebbe: How can it be that Moshe and Ahron were considered equal, as Rashi tells us, (Shemot 6:26) "There are verses where the Torah puts Ahron before Moshe and verses where Moshe is put before Ahron, to tell us that they were equal." There is a well-known Chazal, that just as no two faces are alike, so too their opinions are not the same.

This is how the Chozeh answered them:

"This Chazal is said concerning people who attach importance to themselves and their opinions. In these cases, they will certainly not agree with someone else's view. However, Moshe and Ahron said about themselves, "for what are we". They did not consider themselves as honorable, admirable people, therefore it was possible for them to agree with each other and have the same opinions."

Is there a connection between the above and the following?

One of the most important attributes is that of gratitude. When a person recognizes the good in something that he receives, he can achieve perfection of his conduct between himself and Hashem for he appreciates the many good things that Hashem does for him. Similarly, he can achieve perfection of conduct between himself and his fellow man, for if someone does a favor for him, he understands that he must repay them to the same degree.

The greatness of one who appreciates a kindness performed for him can be seen clearly from the following story, brought in the sefer 'Bedidi Havei Uvdah'.

There was once a young bachur of about thirteen years old, who learned in

one of the best yeshivot in Europe. The bachurim used to learn in the Beit Knesset and ate lunch with the local ba'alei batim who used to invite them to eat in their homes, each day at a different home. Sometimes, when the bachurim did not receive an invitation, they simply went hungry. They slept in the Beit Knesset too. The older bachurim had the privilege of sleeping on the benches, while the younger boys had to sleep on the floor for lack of space.

In the summer it was somewhat bearable, but in the freezing winter nights, when snowstorms raged outside and the bitter cold penetrated their bones, the situation was unbearable. With no means of warming himself, this bachur was unable to fall asleep at night. During the day too, he suffered, since his lack of sleep made staying awake during the hours set aside for learning almost unachievable.

One day this bachur received a letter from his uncle, his mother's brother, who was a blacksmith and a locksmith. His uncle was inviting him to come to stay with him and study his trade. Since this uncle had no children, he promised his nephew that if he enters his business, he will bequeath all his possessions to him after his death. A difficult inner battle raged in the boy's heart. In the end, he decided to accept his uncle's offer and leave the yeshiva but decided to do so only the following day. "This is the last night that I will have to sleep on this icy floor," he consoled himself.

Suddenly in the middle of the night, a woman appeared at the entrance to the Beit Knesset. The only bachur that was still awake this night was this young boy who always found it hard to fall asleep. The woman approached the bachur and told him: "I just now got up from sitting shiva for my husband. I have no children and have been left on my own. My husband owned a factory that produced blankets and since there are a few blankets left, I would like to donate them to a yeshiva bachur."

"From then on", that bachur told over, "the nights were no longer a hindrance to my learning". He stayed in yeshiva

where he continued to learn and strive, all in the merit of those blankets...

Years later, this bachur became the Gadol Hador, Maran Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach zt"l, who benefitted the world over with his Torah.

This is not the end of the story. In the year 5736, on an especially wintery, bitterly cold and rainy day, Harav Shach zt"l turned to his grandson and asked him to call a car to take him to a levaya in the Haifa cemetery. All attempts at persuading him not to leave the house due to the weather conditions were to no avail. The Rav's grandson assumed that if the Rav was going to so much trouble, it must be a levaya of a great person where there would be many people. To his surprise, the levaya was of a solitary lonely widow, with barely a minyan of people accompanying her to her final resting place.

Harav Shach stood in the pouring rain throughout the levaya, after which he recited kaddish. On their return to the car, the Rav stopped and stood still for a few moments, while the rain continued pouring down and the cold wind penetrated their very bones. His grandson's efforts to persuade him to enter the car were of no avail. After some long minutes, the Rav continued towards the car, entering it drenched and dripping with water.

All the way back to Bnei Brak, the Rav was quiet and did not answer his grandson's questions. Once home, after changing his wet clothes and warming himself up, he answered his grandson's request and explained himself: "This woman saved my life with her blankets. In her merit, I remained in yeshiva... For years I followed up on her, and when I was informed of her passing, I felt a great obligation to take part in her levaya."

When his grandson asked him why after the levaya he had stood still for a few moments in the pouring rain, the Rav replied: "I wanted to feel and remember the bitter cold and the terrible suffering which was my lot during those difficult days, so that I will fully appreciate the recognition of good that I owe to this woman"...