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maskil Le'David

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).

On the words, "Behold! he goes out to the water" Rashi cites the Midrash that since Pharaoh had proclaimed himself to be a god who had no need to perform normal bodily functions, he would go to the Nile every morning to relieve himself unobserved. Hashem now commanded Moshe to meet Pharaoh while he was doing so. In truth, this should have caused Pharaoh great embarrassment and been a catalyst for him to give up his stubborn stance of refusing to allow the Jewish people to leave Egypt. But this was not the case. Even though Moshe Rabbeinu had clearly shown Pharaoh that he was lying and deceiving the people, Pharaoh nevertheless hardened his heart, and without any shame he 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 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). The Ramban writes that until the plague of pestilence, the Torah uses expressions of, "So Pharaoh's heart was strong," and "Yet Pharaoh's heart became stubborn." But from the plague of pestilence onward, the Torah writes, "Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh." The Ramban 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 Pharaoh's heart at the end of each plague, until the

Plague of the Firstborn. So, why indeed Hashem did Pharaoh deserve to be punished?

During the first plagues, Pharaoh hardened his heart time after time and brazenly pretended to be a god, even in front of Moshe Rabbeinu who witnessed Pharaoh relieving himself at the banks of the Nile. So when Hashem saw that Pharaoh was constantly choosing evil with no thought of choosing good, Hashem punished Pharaoh 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 his heart to behave in this way. Heaven directs a person on the path he establishes for himself. 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, followed this instruction and was not harmed, while those who did not believe, did not obey 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, *zy"ta*, in his sefer *Kesef Mezukak*, 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 he has repented, but in truth his repentance is not acceptable.

This is how the Rif, *zy"ta*, 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 Pharaoh's heart so he would receive the rest of the plagues – locusts, darkness and the Plague of the Firstborn, until he would be aroused to repent inwardly too.

cont. p. 2.>>>

25 Tevet 5785
25 January 2025

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Ya'eira

Mevarchin Hachodesh



Hilula

25 Tevet
Rabbi Yaakov Halevi
of Chassidei Beit El

26 Tevet
Rabbi Shalom Yitzchak
Mizrachi

27 Tevet
Rabbi Yitzchak of Krakow,
author of *Siach Yitzchak*

28 Tevet
Rabbi Channanel Nippi,
author of *Livyat Chen*

29 Tevet
Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri

1 Shevat
Rabbi Moshe Shik,
the Maharam Shik

2 Shevat
Rabbi Meshulam Zusha
of Anapoli





PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

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 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, *zy”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 Moshe 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 the Jew to carry his donkey in addition to his other packages. He later went to the Sages and asked 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 Heavenly accusers interpreted his prayer as they wished. 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.



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust
penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu
Hagaon 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 early afternoon on Erev Shabbat, and I set aside my involvement in public affairs to help my family with the Shabbat preparations.

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

I stood still and observed it. 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 I had to get back to my tasks, I asked our assistant to continue tracking its steps.

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

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

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 would find shelter in our basement, and on one Friday he would be hungry. Therefore, Hashem summoned this ant, that was possibly created a few months before, and brought it over a great distance until the exact location of the spider, all so it should serve as food for the spider at the exact moment when the spider 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 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 Him that He nourish and support us – with favor, kindness, mercy, abundance, and honor.

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

WORDS OF THE 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 (*Maharashdam*, Orach Chaim 3), explains this verse beautifully:

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 Maharashdam answers that even though Hashem judged the Egyptians with the attribute of strict justice (signified by the name “Elokim – G-d”), He nevertheless preceded this 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.

The Gaon Rabbi Massoud ben Shimon 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 that Hashem combined 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 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 harsh judgement.

In my humble opinion, I would like to suggest another reason why Hashem showed His mercy specifically with this plague. In the plague, 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 to fulfill the wish of Hashem and sanctify His Name in the world, the attribute of mercy came and demanded its rights too. Because, wherever there is sanctification of Hashem’s Name, the attribute of mercy flourishes.



FROM THE TREASURY

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

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 he should show gratitude to a human being! Yet we find that not only did Moshe not do this, but he was the one responsible for smiting Pharaoh with the Ten Plagues.

This difficulty can be answered with a personal anecdote: Someone once approached me and said, “We should be grateful to Hitler *ym”sh* since in his merit the Land of Israel was established. If not for Hitler 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.

We can use this anecdote to answer why Moshe did not show gratitude to Pharaoh. Pharaoh hated the Jewish people and was completely wicked. And even though he behaved kindly toward 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 toward Pharaoh. On the contrary, he must be punished in double measure for all the suffering he caused the Jewish people under the yoke of his bondage. Moreover, showing gratitude to a wicked person is an expression of agreement with his evil ways, and one who shows agreement 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.

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 so to speak 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. Furthermore, accepting this money can be taken as approval for the business owner to continue in his bad ways.

A NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Equal Opinions



The students of the Chozeh of Lublin, *zt"l*, posed the following question to their Rebbe: There is a well-known Chazal that just as no two faces are alike, so too their opinions differ. If so, how can it be that Moshe and Ahron were considered equal, as Rashi tells us that 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 (see *Shemot* 6:26)?

The Chozeh answered as follows:

“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.”

Gratitude

In this week’s *parsha* we learn about the importance of gratitude. Moshe did not instigate the first three plagues because he had gratitude to both the water for hiding him when he was a baby, and to the earth for assisting him in burying the Egyptian he had killed.

When a person recognizes the good he receives from Hashem, he can achieve perfection of his conduct between himself and Hashem. Similarly, he can achieve perfection of conduct between himself and his fellow man, for if someone does a favor for him, he understands 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. In those days the *bachurim* used to learn in the *beit kneset* and eat lunch in

the homes of the local *ba’alei batim*, each day at a different home. Sometimes, the *bachurim* did not receive an invitation and they simply went hungry. They slept in the *beit kneset* 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. He suffered during the day too, since his lack of sleep made it difficult for him to stay awake during the hours set aside for learning.

One day this *bachur* received a letter from his uncle, who was a blacksmith and locksmith. His uncle was inviting him to come 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 he decided to do so only the following day. “This is the last night I will have to sleep on the icy floor,” he consoled himself.

Suddenly in the middle of the night, a woman appeared at the entrance to the *beit kneset*. The only *bachur* who was still awake that 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,” the *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 Mann 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 turned to his grandson and asked him to call a car to take them to a funeral in the Haifa cemetery. All attempts at persuading Rav Shach 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 funeral of a great person where there would be many people. To his surprise, it was the funeral of a lonely widow, with barely a *minyan* of people accompanying her to her final resting place.

Harav Shach stood in the pouring rain throughout the funeral, 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 begged him to enter the car, but only after some long minutes did the Rav approach the car, 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 having changed his wet clothes and warming himself up, he 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 funeral.”

When his grandson asked him why he had stood still for a few moments in the pouring rain after the funeral, the Rav replied: **“I wanted to feel and remember the bitter cold and terrible suffering which was my lot during those difficult days, so I would fully appreciate the debt I owe this woman.”**



“Contemplate and see that Hashem is good”

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