

Pardes Yehuda

← Weekly Torah Journal By Yehuda Z. Klitnick →

Parshas Bo 5778

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פרשת בא תשע"ח

Why did Hashem harden Pharaoh's heart?

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי-אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת-לִבּוֹ וְאֶת-לֵב עֲבָדָיו לְמַעַן שְׂתִי אֶתְנִי אֱלֹה בְּקִרְבּוֹ:

And Hashem said to Moshe: Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, in order that I might place these, My signs, in his midst. (10:1) The question is, why did Hashem harden Pharaoh's heart in order to force him to continue to disobey Him? The answer could be that when one wants to sin, Hashem gives him an opening to do so, but we don't find that Hashem actually helps a person to sin absent that prior willingness!

Pharaoh hardened his heart of his own choice, and so continued to refuse to release Klal Yisrael from bondage. So why then did Pharaoh stubbornly continue to refuse to obey Hashem? Was he not afraid of being killed by epidemic disease, by the sword or some other punishment? Surely he had already seen how many of his people had been harmed by the plagues! A main reason for his refusal was that he erred in his assessment of Hashem's abilities. He witnessed Hashem's sending first the plague of blood and then the plague of frogs. However he also observed that if Hashem really wanted to redeem Klal Yisrael from Egypt, He could have simply killed off all of the Egyptians through a epidemic plague. Then Hashem could have liberated Klal Yisrael immediately, without the need for multiple plagues. Why then did Hashem not follow this course of action from the start?

The truth is that Hashem always repays measure for measure, and as the Midrash explains, every plague was a targeted, calculated punishment for the Egyptian mistreatment of Klal Yisrael. Pharaoh, mistakenly thought that Hashem's mastery was not uniform and consistent in all matters and times, and consequently believed that Hashem did not have the power to decimate Egypt completely, and thus he hardened his own heart and refused to release the Jews.

This is the meaning of Hashem's words: "Come to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart." The multiplicity of plagues unleashed upon Mitzrayim caused Pharaoh to harden his own heart, because he mistakenly thought that Hashem was unable to do whatever He wants, whenever He wishes. In a self-contradictory way, Pharaoh unreasonably viewed the multiplicity of Plagues as proof that Hashem was not supreme and that His power to punish was limited. In the face of Pharaoh's willfully-imposed ignorance and defiance, Hashem explained the true reason why he had sent the various plagues: "in order that I might place these, My signs, in his midst." I want to punish him specifically with these targeted miracles,

because they are a measure for measure punishment for their numerous crimes against Klal Yisrael [Everything Hashem does is very calculated to a tee. Every punishment is for something done wrong. The fool always seems to find answers and rightfulness to his misdoings.] (Imrei Shefer, Reb Shlome Kluger)

Moshe did not have to respect Pharaoh!

וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל-פַּרְעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כַּהֲאָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים וַיִּפְּן וַיֵּצֵא: So Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh and said to him, "So said Hashem, the G-d of the Hebrews, How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? ... (10:3) Moshe and Aharon were a two-man team. They acted in tandem in the face of the Egyptian oppression, both in confronting and disengaging from Pharaoh. Yet at the close of this same episode (10:6), there are singular verbs of action used, which would seem to point to one single actor:

וַיִּפְּן וַיֵּצֵא: he turned and left Pharaoh. How can we explain this unexpected shift in grammatical number from plural to singular? Was Moshe the only one who concluded the interview with Pharaoh? The answer lies in the fact that Moshe and Aaron left Pharaoh's throne room in different ways. The customary, deferential way of taking one's leave from a monarch is to step backwards, thereby not turning one's back to the throne. But the moment Hashem informed Moshe לַפְּרֹעִה לְאֱלֹהִים לְרָאָה נְתַתִּיךָ לְפָרְעֹה See! I have made you a lord over Pharaoh, (7:1) his status became superior to Pharaoh's, and he was no longer obliged to show him any deference or respect, king or not king. Hence, posuk 6 is only informing about one person: Moshe, and how he fearlessly turned his back to Pharaoh. Therefore it says וַיִּפְּן וַיֵּצֵא: he turned and left -singular. Moshe was exempt from that constraint, and the posuk describes only his action, and not Aharon's, to underline the point: Aaron withdrew from Pharaoh while showing the customary deference to a king. (Shir Ma'ona Reb Shimon Sofer of Erlau)

Why was the exodus in the spring?

הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב:

This day you go forth in the month of Aviv (spring)." (13:4) Rashi comments that in His kindness, Hashem took the Yidden out of Egypt during a pleasant season – when it is not too hot or cold, and there is no rain to assure a comfortable exodus from Egypt. The Meshech Chochmah explains that the exodus took place in the spring because this season, strongly depicts the force and vitality of the laws of "nature." After a long, bleak winter, the powers of nature burst forth with great vitality, demonstrating their ability to rejuvenate. It was Hashem's Will to make it clear to all that Hashem is the true Source of power, the Master of the world. Everyday is a new beginning and a new source of energy. It is never late to begin serving Hashem.

STORY OF THE WEEK (By Yehuda Z. Klitnick)

*** *Bringing a Holy Neshama to Yiddishkeit* ***

The Rebbe Reb Moshe Yehuda Leib of Sassov - הרב"ק רבי משה ליב מסאסוב - was born in 1745 to his holy father Reb Yakov from Brodi and his mother Rifka. He studied for 13 years with Reb Shmelka of Nikelshburg and later by Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk. His Ahavas Yisrael and love for all creatures was second to none. He was also a great giant in Torah too. He authored the following seforim: תורת הרמ"ל, ליקוטי הרמ"ל, חידושי הרמ"ל. He was the Rebbe of Reb Tzvi Hersh of Ziditchov, Reb Mendel of Kosov, The Yehudi Hakadosh, and The Butchache Rav.

His Yahrtzeit is ד' שבט תקס"ז.

Reb Moshe Leib Sassover was traveling with his student Reb Yisroel of Pikov the son of Reb Levi Yitzchok of Barditchev. Reb Moshe Leib told Reb Yisroel, "I have many fine chassidim who own inns and I would like you too meet some of them." Reb Yisroel agreed and they both journeyed together when suddenly a heavy rain downpour fell upon them that they were soaked through and through.

Reb Moshe Leib knew of a chossid that lived close by and they went to his house. The chossid was glad to see Reb Moshe Leib and with open arms invited the Rebbe to stay until the rain subsided. The chossid was very poor and his home consisted of one large room where his large all slept there. In the corner of the room they made space for their cow to sleep.

The chossid, needing room for his special guests, took out the cow and prepared that area for his guests. Meanwhile Reb Moshe Leib prepared himself to daven Mincha and Maariv. The chossid's wife was busy in the meantime preparing some food for dinner.

Reb Moshe Leib was pacing back and forth mumbling to himself "Hashem please do not disturb the simcha that will happen soon". Reb Yisrael didn't understand what his Rebbe meant but he knew that something very unusual was about to happen in this inn.

After dinner the guests were tired and went to rest. Reb Moshe Leib was always early to rise and prepared himself for davening with learning. He waited until Reb Yisrael awoke and then they both davened Shachris. Meanwhile the hostess was now busy preparing breakfast. The aroma from the kitchen was very soothing to Reb Moshe Leib. After Shachris Reb Moshe Leib asked "what she was cooking which smelled so good?" She answered "a very special rice flour with milk". Reb Moshe Leib was enthusiastic at the hospitality of the chossid and his wife that even though they were poor, they did everything with Simcha and with love.

Reb Moshe Leib ate the rice flour dish and told Reb Yisrael

"I am tasting here a taste of Gan Eden" and gave some to Reb Yisrael to taste. Reb Moshe Leib was curious to know where she picked up such great rice flour. She answered "I have a neighbor, a Goy, who's husband has a mill and she loaned me the special rice that her husband had grinded in his mill. Reb Moshe Leib asked "what kind of person is the lady and she answered "a brilliant Neshama" And what type is the the husband? She answered "He is a wicked person. Always looking to hurt his wife, and when he gets mean she runs away from him and hides in our house till her husband calms down." Reb Moshe Leib wanted to know if the neighbor had more of the rice flour? She answered "she gave me all she had for my special guests" Reb Moshe Leib asked "what will happen now when her husband will find out that the rice flour is missing?" She answered "The husband will definitely try to beat his wife."

Reb Moshe Leib spoke to the chossid's wife and said "The husband will come home and ask for the rice flour and she will say that she loaned it to the neighbor. She will see that he will try to hurt her and she will run away and come to your house. Then she will tell you she wants to convert and become a Yid," You shall accept her decision, and as soon as she comes to you, you shall convince her to come to my house in Sassov.

Reb Moshe Leib thanked his hostesses very warmly and gave them his blessings. He traveled back to Sassov. It didn't take long for the prophecy of the Rebbe to happen. Very soon after, lo and behold the neighbor knocked on the door terrified from her husband just as the Rebbe has predicted, When the neighbor calmed down she said "I want to become a Yid!" The chossid and his wife felt elated at the Ruach Hakodesh from the Rebbe. They sat the neighbor down and told her they will try to help her but she must travel to Sassov to meet the Rebbe. She agreed. That night the Rebbe spoke to her at length and saw that her neshama was at a highly spiritual and holy level and she was fit to become a Yid. He wrote a letter to a Rav who should do the conversion stating that this lady has a special neshama. She did as was told and that Rav converted her. She worked hard and became a Aishes Chayil, a Woman of Valor and married a Talmid Chochom and her children became great Rabbanim.

By now Reb Yisroel of Pikov understood what the Rebbe had meant "do not disturb the simcha that will happen soon"! The Rebbe was working diligently to bring a Holy Neshama to Yiddishkeit. All went smooth as planned.

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