

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Power of Prayer

Parshas Bo begins with Hashem's command to Moshe to 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" (*Shemos* 10:1).

Many are troubled with the idea of Hashem's hardening of Pharaoh's heart, not allowing the Jews to leave. Isn't *bechira*, free will, a fundamental concept of Judaism? How could Hashem withhold *bechira* from Pharaoh? And, isn't *teshuva*, repentance, available to all, even the biggest sinner?

One answer given is that Pharaoh was indeed given many chances to listen to Hashem and let the Jews go, but he blew it. During the first few plagues, he hardened his own heart on his own volition. Eventually, *teshuva* was withheld from him. *Ramba*"m (*Hilchos Teshuva* 6:3) indeed brings Pharaoh as an example of one who sins so much that "teshuva is withheld from him and permission is not granted for him to repent from his wickedness, so he may then die and be lost through the sins he committed."

From the simple reading of the *Ramba*"m it appears that there's no hope for Pharaoh at all. *Teshuva* is impossible. However, Rav Shalom Schwadron explains that it's not hopeless. One thing that can help catapult such a sinner past the barrier of performing *teshuva* is *tefillah*, prayer. *Midrash (Shemos Rabbah* 11:1) tells us that Pharaoh awoke early in the morning to go to the Nile to pray to Hashem, so Hashem told Moshe to meet him there and stop him from praying. We see that had Pharaoh indeed prayed, he

would have been answered and spared from the plagues and the suffering! (The reason why Pharaoh was prevented from praying is beyond the scope of this *Dvar Torah* and can be found in Rav Schwadron's *sefer, Lev Shalom*).

Chofetz Chaim similarly explains that Pharaoh hardened his own heart many times, which resulted in a severe setback to his *teshuva*. However, this doesn't mean that he can't do *teshuva*; it just means he doesn't have the Heavenly assistance given to those who want to repent. *Teshuva* is possible, but it would be extremely hard and it must be aroused from within. This was Hashem's message that Moshe was to relate to Pharaoh.

Chofetz Chaim continues, this was the mistake of Elisha ben Avuya (Acher). He heard a *bas kol*, Heavenly proclamation, which said "Return wayward sons, except for Acher." He thought that his *teshuva* would never be accepted, but in reality, his *bechira* to arouse himself to repent was never withheld from him. The notification was just that he would not receive the usual assistance to repent.

We know as well that the wicked King Menashe was about to die and he prayed and was answered.

It is very encouraging to know that this powerful tool of prayer is available to all Jews, no matter where they are holding, and Hashem eagerly waits for us to use it! 🙏



RABBI
DOVID TZVI
MEISSNER

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

This week's *parasha*:

Q) What was so hard about what the new moon looks like that Hashem needed to show Moshe Himself?

A) Many commentators point out that according to the Talmud *Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashana* 2:4), there is a minimum size that the new moon must attain before it can be declared a new month – according to one possible reading of the text it would be the size of a barley. One can understand the difficulty in trying to precisely measure a distant object in respect to something as small as a barley seed.

In a more esoteric vein, the *Sefas Emes* and others explain that the concept of the new moon is symbolic of the uniquely Jewish power of renewal and rebirth. We might say that even when the Jewish people are in their darkest moments (Egyptian exile) the seeds of their salvation can still be seen. More so, the Satmar Rebbe explains that the words found in *Megilas Esther* (5:1), "and Mordechai knew all that was done..." hint to the notion that the great leaders of each generation know how future events will transpire, even before they actually unfold. They are nonetheless bound to conceal this knowledge, to allow people to react, decide, and respond to the step-by-step pace of world history. Perhaps it was this secret ability, couched in terms of the laws of the new moon, that Hashem was showing Moshe at this time.

Q) How did Pharaoh summon Moshe during the plague of darkness? Weren't his servants frozen in place?

A) The *meforshim* take different approaches here. The *Malbi*"m, for example, explains that Moshe initiated the encounter, and went to Pharaoh on his own. He notes that the wording in the *passuk* is *Vayikra Pharaoh el Moshe* instead of *Vayikra Pharaoh L'Moshe*,

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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which would have meant, in fact, that Pharaoh summoned Moshe. The *passuk*, as written, means something else, that Pharaoh opened the conversation after Moshe's arrival. The *Oznaim L'torah*, on the other hand, understands that Pharaoh did summon Moshe, but only after the plague of darkness had already ended on its own. He notes that this would be the only example where Pharaoh seems ready to capitulate even after the plague had ended. He offers several explanations as to why, including the fact that sitting in darkness for almost a week gave Pharaoh the taste of death and affected him in a completely different way than the other plagues.

It would seem to me that Pharaoh's choice of words supports the understanding of the *Oznaim L'torah*. Pharaoh says, "Beware – do not see my face anymore, for on the day you see my face you shall die." If Pharaoh was still sitting in the darkness, speaking of seeing his face seems somewhat awkward, even if he believed Moshe, that he would suggest Moshe could see him. 🤖

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

As the Czar's army was seen as a tool to wrest Jewish boys away from their Jewish roots, understandably much effort was put into procuring deferments from the Russian army. One boy in the *yeshiva* of the renowned expert in *halacha*, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, was waiting for his letter from the government to find out if he had been exempted or not. The day the letter came, Rabbi Spektor had been sitting for several hours already with two other Rabbis while deciding a money matter between two litigants, and had been wrestling with finding a satisfactory compromise to settle the disagreement. In the middle of this knotty episode, a young man stuck his head in the room and said to Rabbi Spektor, "Yitzchak received his letter today. He's exempt!" Rabbi Spektor's face lit up, warmly thanked the boy for the news, and went back to the issue at hand. One of the other Rabbis later told over that no less than six different boys popped their



The Kollel is currently on recess. There will be no Cincinnati Torah next week- Parshas Beshalach.

A BA'AL HATURIM FOR YOU

Hashem informed Moshe that *Nissan* would be the "head" of the months. The verse which contains this message contains the word *chodesh*, or month, three times. Each of these three times that the word *chodesh* is mentioned is part of a phrase of three words and as well there are three words in between each time the word *chodesh* is used in the verse. This, says *Ba'al Haturim*, signifies the three things for which *Nissan* is considered the start of the year, which are the first in counting the months, the beginning of the year towards counting the years of a reign of a Jewish king, and the beginning of the cycle of the *chagim*, the Jewish holidays. 🤖

Yaakov ben Asher, known as the *Ba'al Haturim*, was a scholar and biblical commentator who lived most of his life in Spain from approximately 1275 to approximately 1340. His classic commentary is printed in many editions of the *Chumash*.

heads into the room to share the same news, and each time Rabbi Spektor did not say a word about the interruption but on the contrary greeted each person with the same enthusiastic response and the same warm thank you, not letting on at all that he had already heard the news several times! "Ah!" exclaimed the Rabbi, "where else can you find such love of fellow Jews!" 🤖

THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

SHABBTAI TZVI (PART V)

Recap: Anticipation for the redemption is mounting as Nathan's letters reach Jewish communities across Europe. Meanwhile, Shabbtai Tzvi has returned to Izmir where he hopes to continue his Messianic efforts.

Shabbtai Tzvi arrived in Izmir in September of 1665, but remained secluded from the public eye for approximately four months. During that time, rumors of Shabbtai Tzvi's alleged Messianic identity floated throughout the neighborhoods of Izmir and became the subject of just about every conversation in town. However, while the public sphere was enthusiastically debating the hot topic, the rabbinic sphere was overwhelmed with stress as it attempted to uncover the truth about Shabbtai Tzvi. Almost daily, couriers would arrive and deliver letters to the rabbinate of Izmir from supporters and detractors alike. Despite persuasive letters promoting the false Messiah, the rabbinate of Izmir, headed by the renowned and respected Torah scholar Rabbi Chayim Benveniste (author of the acclaimed *halachic* work *Knesses Ha-gedolah*), released a statement conveying the rabbinate's strong opposition to Shabbtai Tzvi. The rabbinate's position only caused tension to rise between different factions within the Jewish community, and police were employed to maintain order throughout the city's neighborhoods. The conflict escalated into an outright war when, on Shabbos morning December 12, 1665, Shabbtai Tzvi and a ring of supporters charged into the Portuguese synagogue where Rabbi Benveniste prayed. Shabbtai Tzvi interrupted the prayer service and began to read the weekly Torah portion from a printed book instead of the Torah scroll. Shabbtai Tzvi then climbed the steps to the podium, and, after the congregation grew silent, announced that he was appointing one of his brothers as the new sultan of Turkey and his other brother as the new emperor of Rome. Next, in a bout of rage, Shabbtai Tzvi began hurling insults and curses at Rabbi Benveniste and other local rabbis. In defense of Rabbi Benveniste, the crowd in the synagogue began pushing and yelling at the intruders. When some semblance of peace was restored, Shabbtai Tzvi again took the podium and proclaimed the precise date of redemption: the 15th of Sivan, 5426 (June 1666). The crowd broke out in hysteria as Rabbi Benveniste confronted Shabbtai Tzvi and demanded that he demonstrate his authenticity as the Messiah. A second round of insults followed until Shabbtai Tzvi and his followers were physically removed from the synagogue.

In the context of such a vehement outbreak between Shabbtai Tzvi and Rabbi Benveniste, the events which were about to unfold during the following week were so incredibly shocking and inconceivable and can certainly be considered the turning point in Shabbtai Tzvi's Messianic mission. 🤖