

A PARASHA THOUGHT

Attention Deficit

IN HIS WRITINGS ON THIS WEEK'S *parasha*, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (*Da'as Torah*) tries to unravel an enigma: Why and how did Par'oh refuse to admit that Hashem is in charge and acquiesce to Moshe's demands?

By the time Moshe and Aharon unleashed the first of the *makkos* (plagues), Par'oh had already seen a bit of what they (and, by extension, Hashem) could do. As *Midrash Rabbah* puts it, the earlier demonstration of Moshe's staff turning into a snake and then eating the sorcerers' staffs hadn't been just "bringing grain to Afri'im, a city full of grain"—a waste of time, that is. The Egyptians were connoisseurs of conjuring, and they could tell a genuine miracle-worker when they saw one.

Par'oh was, in fact, apprehensive. Ramban points out (commentary to 7:16) that after seeing the miracle of the staffs and snakes, Par'oh hadn't openly refused to set the Hebrews free.

In fact, the Torah doesn't record any reply by Par'oh at all! The last time Par'oh had had the nerve to actually say that he wouldn't listen to Hashem was during Moshe and Aharon's first visit, back at the end of *parshas Shemos*.

So why did Par'oh persist in calling on his magicians to duplicate the plagues until they couldn't?



The Kollel will be on recess from January 23 until night seder of January 30

GUEST CONTRIBUTOR
ALTER RAUBVOGEL

As the plagues wore on, Moshe would keep reminding Par'oh, over (8:6) and over (8:18) and over (9:14-15), that this was all supposed to teach him one lesson: Hashem is in control. But somehow, Par'oh was able to harden his heart, over and over and over again, as the *makkos* got more and more severe. How?

Reb Yerucham says the answer is right there in the *Chumash*, immediately after the first plague begins:

"Par'oh turned around and went home. He didn't set his heart to this, as well." (7:23)

It's as if Par'oh didn't want to think about the consequences of ignoring the obvious—so he didn't. And as long as he didn't pay attention to the horrible things that were going on, they couldn't motivate him to change his mind.

(Cool fact: "Par'oh" has the same *gematria*, 355, as "harenanim—the ostrich," to borrow the term used by Iyov (39:13).)

In a sense, Par'oh epitomizes the phenomenon described in *parshas Nitzavim*:

...Lest there be among you [someone] whose heart turns away from Hashem... to worship the gods of the nations... And when he hears the words of this curse, he blesses himself in his heart, saying "All will be well with me if I do what my heart sees fit to do." (D'varim 17:17-18)

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

WITH
RABBI CHAIM HEINEMAN

Q: We will be traveling this week with the family since the children are off from school for mid-winter break. While staying over in a hotel, what does one need to know in dealing with the *kashrus* challenges that face the kosher traveler?

A: Obviously, if the hotel is certified kosher by a *kashrus* agency, most *kashrus* problems are alleviated. Assuming that you are staying at a regular non-kosher hotel/motel, here are some of the guidelines, many of which were covered by the Kollel *yungerlite* in their journey through *Yoreh Deah*, based on the final *psak* of Rav Moshe Heinemann, *shlita*

Continental Breakfast – Many hotels offer a variety of foods for breakfast. Prepared foods (e.g. pancakes, waffles, or bakery items) may not be eaten due to the ingredients and preparation utensils used; however, fresh whole fruit (providing that they do not need to be inspected for insects), or any sealed item bearing a reliable kosher symbol may be eaten. Plastic cutlery may be available upon request for guests to cut their produce. Pre-cut fruits or vegetables should be avoided, since they may have been cut with a knife that was used for non-kosher food. [If it is a large hotel or store where a lot of fruit is being cut up, there is room to be lenient (*Rema Y.D. 96:4*).] Cooked eggs, even in their shells (hard/medium/soft boiled), are forbidden due to *bishul akum* (food cooked by a non-Jew) (*Y.D. 113:14*). Unflavored coffee is acceptable, as is milk (for those who drink milk that is not *cholov Yisroel*). Hot water from an urn may be used. (At hotels in New York City,

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LEARNING WITH THE KOLLEL

CONTINUED

one should be aware that unfiltered water may contain copepods – small but visible crustaceans which many *Poskim* require one to be stringent about). Waffle mixes, even with a reliable certification, may not be used because the griddle may have been used with other mixes and rendered non-kosher.

Ice Maker – One is allowed to use the ice in the hotel, as the ice machines are dedicated to making ice. (However, one may not remove ice on Shabbos if this requires activation of the machine.)

Refrigerator – One may use a clean refrigerator in which to store kosher food. Meat, fish, and non-*mevushal* wine require a proper seal if they are left alone while the guest is away and the room is to be cleaned. Otherwise, one can get into issues of *basar shenisa'lem min ha'ayin* and *stam yeinam*.

Coffee Maker in Room – Hotel rooms provide a coffee maker and kosher coffee. Many of the coffeemakers use individual hot cups into which the coffee drips. The machine is used for coffee only and, therefore, one may make coffee in this type of machine.

Kosher Meals – Hotels may be able to order kosher frozen “airline meals” upon request. Some hotels keep them in their inventory, should the need arise. The hotel must leave the wrapping intact for the guest. 🕎

A PARASHA THOUGHT

CONTINUED

How can a person think such a thing, in the face of everything the generation of the wilderness experienced, after everything we've learned from the Torah and our forefathers? The only possible way is by simply refusing to think about those experiences and those lessons—just like Par'oh.

The remedy, of course, is to start paying attention—to the signs Hashem places all around us that speak of His existence and His wisdom, and to the guidance of the Torah—to learn *mussar* and “set it to heart.” 🕎



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HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

Last week we discussed, based on the Ramban's introduction, that *sefer Shemos* is the book of redemption. *Shemos* includes our journey from slaves in Egypt until our proper status as an independent nation. In *parshas Va'era* this process is underway, as the plagues hit the Egyptian people, setting the stage for the exodus. There are many sources that teach us that the exodus from Egypt was the prototype for the ultimate redemption. For this reason, the *Haftorah* for this week begins with Hashem telling Yechezkel how He will collect the Jewish people from wherever they are scattered among the nations of the world.

The Chida, in his commentary to Yechezkel, references the Gemara (*Pesachim* 87b), “Reb Elizer said the Jewish people only went into exile between the nations in order that converts should join on to them.” The Chida continues that the Gemara does not only refer to actual converts, but it refers to the *kedusha* (holiness) located all over the world, all of which needed to be soaked up by the Jewish people, and channeled for its proper and holy purpose. Rav Gedaliah Schorr writes that if we look at the history of the Jewish people, areas that for many generations had been the centers of Jewish life with large communities, synagogues and yeshivos now are almost devoid of Jews. The reason for this is that once we collected all the converts and holiness saturated in a location, Hashem orchestrates that the Jewish people move to a new spot. Our hope and *tefillah* is that America is the last stop in our long exile and Hashem should bring us to Eretz Yisrael very soon! 🕎

TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI YEHUDAH LEVI

Some call it cholent and some call it chamin; either way, the steamy dish has been a Shabbos staple for ages. The name cholent, probably of French origin and possibly a derivative of the French *Chaud-Lente*, which means slow cook, or *chalant*, hot, appears in the 13th century *Ohr Zarua* (Rabbi Yitzchak ben Moshe of Vienna). The significance of cholent is that as a hot dish it is enjoyable to eat, which is befitting of our focus on making Shabbos a pleasurable experience. The *Mishna Berura* even classifies having hot foods on Shabbos as a *minhag* Yisrael. Eating hot foods on Shabbos also has a *halachic* implication, in that it demonstrates an allegiance to the Talmud's permission of maintaining and heating food on a fire on Shabbos within certain guidelines. This is in contrast to certain groups who heretically denied the Oral Tradition's Divinity and claimed that fire and its uses were entirely forbidden on Shabbos. The Baal HaMeor, paraphrased by the Rema, harshly writes that someone who does not have a hot food on Shabbos is suspect of heresy (for why else would a person not follow the pleasurable guidance of the Talmud and enjoy a hot dish if not for a blasphemously held belief). On the other other hand, the Baal HaMeor also extends a blessing to those who do honor the Shabbos with hot foods. It is important to note that there is no significance to cholent specifically; rather, any hot food or drink satisfies this custom. For example, where I come from people would serve a dish called greunkern instead of cholent. As a fun fact, Irving Naxon, the inventor and first patent holder of the original slow cooker, apparently cited his grandmother's cholent as an inspiration for his invention. 🕎

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