

Zera Shimshon



Profound Divrei Torah culled from the writings of the Gaon and Mekubal Rav Shimshon Chaim ben Rav Nachman Michael Nachmeni zy"o, author of Sefer Zera Shimshon on Chumash and Toldos Shimshon on Pirkei Avos, who promised that all who study his words will be blessed with an abundance of good, wealth and honor, and will merit to see children and grandchildren thriving around their table.

כא תש"פ 80

• Zera Shimshon - the Limud that brings Yeshuos •

גליון 73

What the Purpose Was in Strengthening the Heart of Pharaoh

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בֹּא אֶל פַּרְעֹה כִּי אֲנִי הִכְבַּדְתִּי אֶת לְבוֹ וְאֶת לֵב עַבְדָּיו לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתֵּן אֱלֹהִים בְּקִרְבּוֹ... וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל פַּרְעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִים עַד מָתַי מֵאַנְתָּ לַעֲנֹת מִפְּנֵי שְׁלַח עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדְנִי. כִּי אִם מֵאֵן אֶתָּה לְשַׁלַּח אֶת עַמִּי הֲנִנִּי מִבֵּיא מִחַר אֲרֶבֶה בְּנִגְלָךְ. (י א-ד) -

Hashem said to Moshe, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn so that I shall place these signs of Mine in his midst... Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh and said to him, "So said Hashem, God of the Hebrews: Until when will you refuse to be humbled before Me? Send out My people that they may serve Me! For if you refuse to send forth My people, behold, tomorrow I shall bring a locust-swarm into your border".

The Midrash in Parshas Va'eira (שמ"ד יא) discusses a transformation that occurred by the plague of 'Boils', which became the status quo throughout the remainder of the Plagues.. את לב פרעה ויחזק ה' את לב פרעה. כיון שראה הקב"ה שלא חזר בו מה' מכות ראשונות מכאן ואילך אמר הקב"ה אפילו אם ירצה לשוב אני מחזק לבו כדי שאפרע כל הדין ממנו, כאשר דבר ה' אל משה, שכן כתיב ואני אקשה את לב פרעה. **Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh.** Once Hashem saw that Pharaoh did not repent as a result of the first five plagues, Hashem said, "Even if he will want to repent, I am strengthening his heart in order to exact the full measure of justice from him".

We need to understand why even after strengthening Pharaoh's heart, Hashem still sent Moshe to warn Pharaoh that he must let the Jews go free; wasn't Pharaoh now actually incapable of setting them free out of his own free will, being that his heart was hardened? Was the forewarning nothing more than a laughing matter? Furthermore, it's hard to comprehend why indeed Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart and took away his voluntary ability to choose to do good; if someone sins many times, is he no longer given the chance and opportunity to repent?



The Gemara in Sanhedrin (ק ע"ב) tells us, כשם שנותן הקב"ה כח, ברשעים לקבל פורענותם כך נותן הקב"ה כח בצדיקים לקבל טובתם: *Just as Hashem gives the wicked the capacity to receive their punishment, however immense it might be, so does Hashem give the righteous the capacity to receive their reward, however enormous it may be.*

When Hashem punishes a sinner for his wrongdoings, it is only so that the sinner should realize that he did wrong, and consequently repent out of his own free will. Therefore, Hashem will only punish a sinner with a punishment that he can withstand, for if the punishment will be too harsh for him to endure, it would essentially be forcing the sinner to repent, and would thus defeat the purpose of the punishment, which is to get the sinner to repent out of his own free will.



Accordingly we can explain, that when the Passuk says, ויחזק ה' את לב פרעה - *Hashem strengthened the heart of Pharaoh*, it isn't referring to Hashem strengthening Pharaoh's heart in order to *take away* his ability to choose to do good, for Hashem never takes away the free will from a sinner, and no matter how much one sins he always retains the ability to choose to repent and do good. Rather, when Hashem *strengthened Pharaoh's heart*, it was only so that he should be able to deal with the harsh punishments that he would inevitably receive if he would not choose to do good.

The first five Plagues - Blood, Frogs, Lice, Wild Beasts and the Cattle Epidemic - were relatively lighter punishments, and thus Pharaoh was able to bear them even without any particular support; therefore, there was no need to strengthen his heart during that period. It was only at the onset of the last five Plagues - Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness and the Slaying of the Firstborn - which were a lot more severe, and would thus naturally be much harder for Pharaoh to bear, that Hashem needed to strengthen Pharaoh's heart so that he should be able to endure the Plagues, which were intended to bring him to his senses and generate within him feelings of repentance.

But certainly, even after strengthening Pharaoh's heart, Hashem did not take away his ability to choose to do good, and we can

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therefore understand why, even after strengthening his heart, Hashem still sent Moshe to warn Pharaoh to set the Jews free, so that he won't need to endure and suffer through the harsh Plagues.

זרע שמשון פרשתנו אות א

What the Jews Gained By Pharaoh Knowing That the Dogs Won't Bark At Them

וְלֹכֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִחַרֵץ כָּלֵב לְשָׁנוֹ לְמֵאִישׁ וְעַד בְּהֵמָה לְמַעַן תִּדְרֹעוּן אֲשֶׁר יִפְלֶה ה' בֵּין מִצְרַיִם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל' (יא ז):
And to all of Bnai Yisroel, no dog shall sharpen its tongue to bark against them.

What need was there for Pharaoh to know that the dogs would remain silent while the Jews would be leaving Egypt; what message was Hashem trying to convey to Pharaoh by telling this to him?

Additionally, we need to understand why indeed the dogs didn't bark at the Jews when they left Egypt. After all, the Midrash (שמר"א ל') clearly says that the Jews were enslaved in Egypt due to their sin of Loshon Horah, and the Gemara in Makkos (כ"ג ע"א) teaches us that *הרע וכל המקבל לשון – הרע וכו' ראוי להשליכו לכלבים* – *Anyone who speaks derogatorily of another, and anyone who accepts derogatory utterance as true deserves to be thrown to the dogs.* Accordingly it would seem that, on the contrary, the dogs should have been very harsh with the Jews, as the Jews were even deserving of being thrown to them. We can answer that truthfully, in any case, we must say that the Jews obviously repented from their sin of Loshon Horah, for otherwise this sin would have withheld their redemption. As such, because they repented and were no longer liable for the sin of Loshon Horah, the dogs no longer had any control over them, and were unable to even bark at them.

According to this we can understand what message Hashem wished to convey to Pharaoh. Hashem was advising Pharaoh, that just as the Jews were completely forgiven after they repented, and thereby became worthy of being redeemed and of being absolved from the dogs having any power over them, even from being able to bark at them, so too can he repent and have his sins and due punishments forgiven.



Yet, we still need to understand why Hashem would want to suggest the idea of repentance to Pharaoh. Firstly, what would the Jewish people, who have suffered so much at the hands of Pharaoh, gain by his repentance, and hence his being absolved from any due punishment? Additionally, Hashem clearly told Avraham Avinu at the ברית בין הבתרים, the covenant that Hashem

made with him, *כי גר יהיה זרעך וכי ועבדום וענו אותם ארבע מאות שנה. "Your offspring shall be aliens... and they will enslave and oppress them for four hundred years... and the nation that will enslave them I shall judge..."* Now, if Pharaoh would repent, then Hashem would need to forgive him and would no longer be able to mete out his just punishment, and thus that which Hashem decreed that *'they would enslave and oppress them'*, would have been fulfilled, while the retribution which Hashem clearly stated, *'and the nation that will enslave them I shall judge'*, which is specifically referring to the final plague of death to the firstborns, would no longer be able to be fulfilled.



At that covenant, before Hashem told Avraham Avinu about the enslavement that was decreed upon his offspring, we find that Avraham went through the following experience; *ויהי השמש לבוא, ותרדמה נפלה על אברם, והנה אימה חשכה גדלה נפלת עלי. (שם פסוק י"ב) - And it happened, as the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Avram, and behold, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.* The Midrash (ב"ר מ"ד י"ז) says that this dread and darkness that befell Avraham, was alluding to an additional decree that was decreed upon his descendants, in which they were to be suppressed to the 'Four Monarchies'. It would seem that this additional decree, which wasn't clearly mentioned to Avraham, was in truth not a decree in its own right, rather was a pending order, applicable only if the primary decree of 'oppression in Egypt' would not be fulfilled in its entirety. As such, because Hashem told Avraham that the Jews were meant to be enslaved in Egypt for four hundred years and yet were there for only two hundred and ten years, there was no choice but for the Jews to supplement the decree of 'oppression in Egypt', by their being subjugated to the 'Four Monarchies'.



We can explain, that if Pharaoh would have repented and would therefore have been absolved of his sins and its due punishments, it's true that he would no longer be able to receive the full and just punishment that he truly deserved, but at the same time, because there wouldn't be a complete fulfillment of *'the nation that will enslave them I shall judge'*, the Attribute of Justice would no longer have any right to insist that there be a complete fulfillment of *'they will enslave and oppress them for four hundred years'* either. Therefore, Hashem sent a message to Pharaoh, hinting to him about the power of repentance, hoping that it would prompt him to repent, thereby absolving *him* of his sins and punishments, which would cause the Jewish Nation to be pardoned from *them* needing to be further oppressed by the 'Four Monarchies'.
(זרע שמשון פרשתנו אות ד)

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