

Echoes of the Ages

On the ליל הסדר, the Shpoler Zeide asked his youngest son to start by explaining the order of the סדר. The boy started with "קדוש" and in Yiddish explained, "when the father comes home from Shul on פסח night, he makes קדוש without delay." He turned to his father and inquisitively asked why קדוש had to be made in such a hurry. The Zeide explained the answer and proceeded with the סדר, but the Zeide made a mental note to speak to his son's teacher.

Next time the Shpoler Zeide saw the teacher, he scolded him, "How could you not explain to them that the father rushes home to make קדוש so that the young children will be awake for מה נשתנה." The teacher apologized, saying how he did not want to trouble the youngsters with long explanations.

"Listen to what our Sages hinted at in these words!" the Zeide exclaimed, loudly so that those nearby could hear (but of course stepping away from the teacher first so as not to embarrass him). "When the father, our Father in Heaven, comes home from Shul on פסח night and sees his children, the בני ישראל, who have separated themselves

from the secular, mundane and תמך, praising and honouring Him in Shul for delivering us from מצרים, then He must make a 'קדוש' at once. He must sanctify His people, renewing the covenant that He made with them in the desert and speed our redemption, because if He delays, we stand in danger of falling into a deep sleep in the depths of the גלות. They must remain alert enough to ask מה נשתנה הלילה, 'ה' - 'How is this night different from all the other nights?' Why is this exile longer than all others? Isn't the time ripe for משיח?"

Tears streaming down his face, lifting his hands into the air, he cried out "Father! Our Father in Heaven, redeem us quickly from our גלות while we are still in a state of 'I sleep, but my heart is awake.' Do not let us fall, Heaven forbid, into total slumber!"

Many of the Zeide's chassidim fell on their faces and wept bitter tears, until the Zeide roused them, saying "Now we must make our Father happy! We must show Him that a child can dance even in the dark!" And the Zeide began to dance and sing with his chassidim.

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THE LIVING TORAH

FROM HASMONEAN HIGH SCHOOL

לעלוי נשמת ר' אליהו רחמים בן מאיר דוד ע"ה ואחיו ר' עבדאללה פרג בן מאיר דוד ע"ה
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Fire and Ice

Despite the torture of the previous six plagues, פרעה is adamant in his refusal to let the Hebrew nation go. So, yet again, פרעה notifies משה of a further plague - hail. This time however, the plague is deemed so powerful, that even ה' Himself categorised it in a unique way. פרעה טו ה' quoted משה: "This time I shall send all my plagues against your heart..." - *Shemos 9:14*

Most commentators understand this to mean that the plague of hail was as powerful as the previous six put together! Even more troubling is פרעה's response. After the plague strikes Egypt he calls משה and אהרן and tells them "this time I have sinned, ה' is righteous and I and my people are the wicked ones" - *Shemos 9:27*. What caused פרעה to be so atypically submissive to G-d at that point and not at any other time?

In response to this, the אור החיים says that until this point פרעה dismissed the prior miracles suspecting that משה was a magician or that he had some superior knowledge of impending phenomena. During the hail however, he came to realise that not only was the Almighty at work now, but that He had also been at work

until now. The change of perception caused all the plagues to be as if they were inflicted at the same time.

But what was it about the hail that triggered the sudden change of perception? An insightful answer is given by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky through deeper understanding of the תורה's description of the plague - "There was hail, and flaming fire amid the hail..." - *Shemos 9:24*. פרעה previously understood his struggle with משה to be the conflict of two separate forces; משה's magic hand against his stubborn word. But during this plague פרעה witnessed fire and ice which are two conflicting forces in the world of nature working together in an attack against Egypt. No longer did he attribute the 'magic' of the plagues to משה, rather he came to slowly understand (albeit only for a short while) that he wasn't facing a mere opposing force but rather the highest source of all forces, the Almighty Himself. When even the worst of men see fire and ice dance together on one mission, there is nothing they can do but watch in amazement and admit, "ה' is the righteous one..."

By Netanel Amar

Pharaoh and Free Will

”ואני אקשה את לב פרעה” - שמות ז : ג

”And I will harden the heart of Pharaoh” - Exodus 7:3

Many commentators ask the obvious and fundamental question on this passage – surely we all have free will, and can do what we want? But it seems here as if ה' is negating פרעה's free will, and denying him the opportunity to capitulate and let בני ישראל out of Egypt. It seems therefore unfair to punish פרעה on the basis of not having let us out, if ה' had stopped him from doing so!

Furthermore, we are told that the gates of repentance are permanently open, even to the most horrific sinners, and that no-one who wants to is held back from doing תשובה. This seems to reinforce the question here. Why did ה' block פרעה from doing תשובה?

The חפץ חיים gives a very interesting answer. He says that though the gates of repentance are never closed, they are more inaccessible for some people. ה' actively helps people who want to

repent, and indeed we pray for this every day in the עמידה, in the ברכה where we say החזירנו בתשובה שלמה” לפניך. But for the truly wicked this special help is removed and they must rely on their own incentive to repent, making it harder for them. So when ה' hardened פרעה's heart, he did not remove the ability to repent but rather the special help available to do so.

The חפץ חיים points out that this may have been the mistake made by אלישע בן אבויה, a very learned man (and the teacher of ר' מאיר) who was also a heretic and who gave up the idea of repenting when he heard a heavenly voice calling out, “repent, my sons, repent, except for אבויה.” His mistake was to think that there was no hope for him. But, says the חפץ חיים, he still could have repented, just like פרעה although it would have been without heavenly assistance, and therefore much harder. However, no-one can ever have their free will taken away from them. We can all do תשובה if we really want to.

By Yisroel Greenberg

Halocho Bite

The שולחן ערוך only permits drinking water before davening, since it is tasteless and therefore drinking it cannot be considered an act of self-indulgence. The Mishnah Berurah also allows coffee or tea in a place where it is the custom to drink these simply to settle the stomach or clear the head. He limits this to the coffee or tea itself and prohibits the addition of milk or sugar. However, modern-day poskim such as Rav Ovadia Yosef and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach permit the addition of milk and sugar to these beverages, since nowadays almost everyone drinks them in this fashion and there is no גאווה in such a mode of consumption.

Rebuking with love

”וידבר אלקים אל משה ויאמר אליו אני יי-הו-ה” - שמות 2 : 6

The Sedra begins with an interesting פסוק on which Rashi and many other מפרשים comment. Two names are used for ה' and also two expressions of speech. The first expression is that of דיבור – which is a harsher form than the one which follows – namely, that of אמירה. (There is a third – הגדה – which is harder still.)

What exactly is going on here? The Izbica Rebbe in his awesome ספר השלוח, gives us an incredible insight. As רש”י himself points out, משה had just seemingly spoken against ה' when he said למה למה – “why have You dealt evil to this people?” – and ה' had to rebuke him for these words. Therefore, it uses the term דיבור. This is also why it uses the word אלקים which is the name which indicates strictness, דין.

Immediately afterwards though, it uses the word ויאמר which is a gentler expression. This is precisely akin to one who tells off a close friend and, seeing that his friend is rather taken aback by the words, quickly assures him that there was no real anger intended and it was

only an external appearance of annoyance.

This fits in perfectly with the final words of the פסוק, אני יי-הו-ה. This name indicates רחמים or compassion. ה' whispered into משה's ears not to be afraid as the rebuke was only external.

We can certainly learn some amazing lessons from the words of the Izbica Rebbe. There are times that one has to stand up and make a point, perhaps a rebuke. It is certainly not made any easier if the one on the receiving end is someone close to you. At the same time, we can also see that there is a way of going about the act. Doing it in a sensitive way, being aware of another's feelings will accomplish more than one thing – firstly the other person is more likely to accept it if it is done in a polite and calm manner. Secondly, since you have done it in a sensitive way, the fact that the other sees that you are genuine will ensure that the friendship remains.

By Rabbi A Landau

Quote of the Week

”רשב”א - א - “Truth needs no ally”

Riddle of the Week

Which people in Tanach are called after their mother's name i.e. So and So ben (his mother's name)?

Last week's riddle: What ברכה is only ever recited on a Wednesday?

Answer: ברכת החמה - blessing of the sun. This ברכה is only recited once in twenty eight years.