

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

REB MICHA BERGER

Bemachshvah Techilah

“**H**ashem said to Moshe, ‘Come to Par’oh, because I have made immobile his heart and the hearts of his servants so that I will show my signs before him’” (Shemos 10:1).¹

This verse raises a well-known problem: Is not free will of paramount importance? Furthermore, whatever the justification for violating Par’oh’s free will, what is the justice in Par’oh and the Egyptians suffering, caused by continuing on a path they could not choose to abandon?

Rav Ovadia Seforno writes² that actually this inability of Par’oh’s to change his mind was to *preserve* his free will. Had Hashem allowed Par’oh to be influenced by the miracles then Par’oh’s decisions would have been altered through supernatural means. Therefore, Hashem removed Par’oh’s ability to be moved by the miraculous events he witnessed. The means for doing so, this “*hichbadti*”, the immobilization, was to blind him to the awe, the *yir’as Hashem*, that the plagues would normally cause.

In comparison, there is a famous story of Rav Chanina ben Dosa, a miracle working *Tanna* who was so poor that he lived off a single carob from Shabbos to Shabbos. One week

his daughter filled the Shabbos lights with vinegar rather than oil. She was distressed by this mistake, perhaps because of their inability to afford wasted oil or vinegar. Rav Chanina answered her, “He Who made oil burn can make vinegar burn.” And

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the vinegar burned. Rav Chanina witnessed miracles because they would not violate his free will. He saw in the supernatural burning of vinegar no more proof of G-d’s existence than he saw everyday within nature.³

However, we do not witness only Hashem immobilizing Par’oh’s ability to experience *yir’ah*. If we look more closely, the terminology used for describing Par’oh’s stubbornness after each plague changes.

After *dam*, the plague of blood, Par’oh is not even asked if he would let the Jews go. But after the last of the frogs of *makkas tzefardei’ah* dies, the verb used is “*vehachbeid* – and it was immobilized”⁴, at the end of *kinim* it says, “*vayechezak* – and he strengthened”⁵, and after *arov* and *dever* – “*vayachbed es libo* – and he

immobilized his heart”⁶ and “*vayichbad lev Par’oh* – and Par’oh immobilized his heart”⁷. Notice two things: first, that it is Par’oh himself who is causing the stubbornness; and second, that his stubbornness came in two forms, *chazakah* and *kavod*.

In Par’oh’s reaction to the next 4 *makkos* and to the warning about the final one, it is Hashem who manipulates Par’oh’s open-mindedness and in only one way – “*vayechezak Hashem* – and Hashem immobilized”⁸. (After *makkas bechoros* Par’oh does let the Jews go, making a nice symmetry to the silence after the first *makkah*.)

How is *makkas kinim* different in that it engendered a different response from Par’oh? And what happened during *shechin* that would have broken Par’oh’s resistance had Hashem not intervened?

After *kinim*, “The magicians did the same with their spells, to bring forth lice, and they could not.... And the magicians said, ‘It is the Finger of G-d’; but Par’oh’s heart was immobilized and he did not listen to them.”⁹ The magicians knew that they were beaten, but Par’oh refused to recognize this fact. It was only after *shechin*, when “the magicians were

¹ The translation of “*hichbadti*” as “immobilizing” is in accordance with the root of the word */kbd/*, “heavy”. See last week’s “Bakeish Shalom” column.

² Commentary to Shemos 9:35

³ Ta’anis 25a

⁴ Shemos 8:11

⁵ Ibid v. 15.

⁶ Ibid. v. 28

⁷ Ibid. 9:7

⁸ Ibid 9:12, 35, 10:20, 27, 11:12

⁹ Ibid 8:15

unable to stand before Moshe because of the boils,"¹⁰ that Par'oh himself was convinced.

In last week's issue, Rabbi Gil Student explored the notion that good and evil must be in balance.¹¹ If the evidence for one or the other were overwhelming, choice between good and evil would be compromised. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky attributes the creation of magic to the need to balance the presence of miracles.¹²

When the miracles outpaced the best abilities of Egypt's magicians, this balance is broken. After the magicians were felled in *shechin*, Par'oh could no longer deny the power of miracles and worship of G-d as opposed to magic and idolatry. It is at this point, therefore, that Hashem

¹⁰ Ibid 9:12

¹¹ Bemachshavah Techilah
<<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/vaeira.pdf>>

¹² Emes LeYa'akov al HaTorah, Shemos 7:22

first blinds Par'oh to the influence of the miracles.

For the first *makkos*, Par'oh was the source of his own stubbornness,

The magicians who had less to lose were not similarly stubborn. The impurities of Par'oh's heart kept him from admitting the truth.

for most of those miracles he did not see any proof of Hashem's existence. Except for *kinim*, which – as we noted above – should have been sufficient to prove Hashem's existence to the magicians. There, the dynamic was different. The balance was maintained not by the questioning of the proof of *hachbeid*, but rather the strengthening of resolve of *vayechazeik*.

The Vilna Gaon¹³ explains the distinction in terms of a *pasuk* in Tehillim, "A pure heart create for me, G-d, and a new spirit renew within me."¹⁴ There are two types of sin.

¹³ On Devarim 2:30

¹⁴ Tehillim 51:12

Impurity of the heart is when someone knows that there is a G-d, but nevertheless falls prey to his desires. Then there are sins where one's entire outlook is incorrect; he does not have the proper notion of G-d, and is lead until the point where he cannot distinguish good from bad.

When Par'oh immobilizes his heart, he refuses to see the Hand of G-d in the miracle. This is a failure of his *ru'ach*. However, with *shechin* the he could not err in this way. Rather, he refuses to part with his power. The magicians who had less to lose were not similarly stubborn. The impurities of Par'oh's heart kept him from admitting the truth.

This is why we say in the Shabbos *Shemoneh Esrei*, "*vetaheir libeinu le'ovdecha be'emes*". "Purify our hearts" from the desires that cloud our vision. "To serve You in truth", with an awareness of You, and the proper perspective on reality.

RABBI GIL STUDENT

Bakeish Shalom

After Par'oh was convinced by the horror of *Makas Bechoros* to let the Jews go, he traveled in the middle of the night to find Moshe and Aharon and instruct them, the nation of Israel and even their animals, to leave Egypt immediately.¹ After over two hundred years of exile, including agonizing enslavement, the Jewish people were given hurried instructions by the G-d-king of Egypt to immediately leave the country. But they did not. They waited until morning.

¹ Shemos 12:31; Rashi.

This is astounding. From tradition they had known about and eagerly awaited for centuries their redemption from slavery. When

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Moshe entered the picture, repeatedly performing miracles and besting Par'oh, the anticipation certainly started bubbling. With the increasing evidence of Moshe's mission from each subsequent plague the

excitement had surely risen to monumental proportions. They knew the end was near. They could see that their glorious future was about to begin. When Par'oh came, in the middle of the night, practically begging them to leave immediately, the Jews' patience seems inexplicable. How could they have held back their emotions and sat back in patience?

Furthermore, Par'oh had in the past given them permission to leave and then changed his mind. Perhaps he would change his mind again. Logic would instruct the Jews to

immediately take advantage of his benevolent disposition before it would, once again, evaporate. Yet, they waited until morning. Why?

R' Ya'akov Kamenetsky explained that the Jews had been instructed earlier by G-d to roast a lamb the prior day, eat it that night and stay in their homes until the morning. "As for you, not a man shall leave the entrance of his house until morning" (Shemos 12:22). Because G-d had commanded them not to leave they did not. Emotions and practical considerations notwithstanding, G-d's command was impassable. They could not set aside the word of G-d, even to take advantage of a unique historical opportunity.²

In giving this explanation, Reb Ya'akov was being very true to his brief but influential training in the Talmud Torah of Kelm. One of the primary teachings of Kelm mussar was of self control. Emotions are important and enthusiasm is vital. However, they can never take control over one's life; one must learn to rein in his emotions and only utilize them in the proper contexts. Emotions must be a tool of the mind and not vice-versa. The story is told that once when R' Elya Lopian was waiting for

² *Emes LeYa'akov*, Shemos 12:31. Cf. Mechilta ad loc.

a bus he looked up out of the book from which he was learning to see if the bus was coming. He immediately regretted this momentary glance, and not just because it was a wasted half-second during which he could learn. Rather, his remorse was because his

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anticipation for the bus took control over him. Looking for the bus is illogical because it will not make the bus come any quicker. The glance was a sign of his emotions' control over his mind.³

Similarly, the story is told of how Reb Ya'akov reacted when, after an unusually busy Friday, he had to quickly bathe before Shabbos. Rather than rushing his actions, he acted slowly and with thought. He did not allow the anxiety of the approaching Shabbos to overwhelm him and force him to rush. Rather, he controlled his emotions and prepared for Shabbos in a respectful, proper mode. R' Avraham Grodzinski, Reb Ya'akov's

³ R' Yonason Rosenblum, *Rav Dessler*, p. 88

brother-in-law and the mashgiach in Slabodka, would say that *zerizus* is in thought, not in action. It is a frame of mind, not a bid to act in a rushed flurry of activity. Rather, *menuchas hanefesh*, contentment and calmness, must reign even in the most hurried of times.⁴

Anxious anticipation for the ultimate redemption is critical. But just like for the Jews in Egypt, our emotional desire for this watershed event in history can never overpower our requirements as Jews. We must never let our avid hopes overpower our minds.

This same attitude must remain primary in our daily lives but also in our response to life-altering experiences. The Kelm approach is to never react surprisedly or without thought. Rather, one must digest the happenings and thoroughly analyze the events, reacting based on proper reflection rather than emotional instinct. Whether it is a minor daily event or a drastic change in world affairs, we must respond in a proper, logical fashion. Nothing less should be expected of rational people.

⁴ R' Yonason Rosenblum, *Reb Ya'akov*, p. 68

REB JONATHAN BAKER

Sefasai Tiftach

The Story So Far: We sanctify the mundane through berachos. We thank G-d for simple existence, status as *metzuvim* – those commanded by G-d, physical ability to function during the day and good relations with other people, mirroring growth of consciousness in the morning.

Now we come to what I think of as Early Morning Tachanun. We begin to position ourselves in relation to G-d, as we have just asked for good relations with people. This section is essentially drawn from the *Tanna DeVei Eliyahu*, and from the Gemara in Yoma 87b. It is structured as a short berachah,

with the blessing at the end, even with a lot of prose.

The Rema adds the introductory "when a person wakes up, he should say..." so that it becomes a kiyum of limud Torah, as a long quote from the Baraisa, rather than an actual berachah, since we do not say berachos that are not attested in

the Gemara. Why is this addressed to the one who “fears Heaven in secret”? True *yiras Shamayim* is internal, as the verse says, “*hatznei’a leches*” (Micha 6:8). This is hinted at in the structure of the *Mishkan*, where the beautiful tapestries of the *heichal* were hidden under dull goat-hair.

The first part of the passage certainly reminds one of Tachanun – what are we? What our lives? What our deeds? All are as nothing before You, great men, etc. The whole paragraph resounds with the feeling of Yom Kippur, and is in fact also recited in slichot of that day. The *Shlah Hakadosh* notes that the seven questions “What” in this paragraph reflect the 7 vanities (*havalim* = twice *havel*) in Koheles 1:2. R’ Schwab notes further that there are also seven praises of G-d in the following paragraph, all the sevens symbolizing the perfection of the natural world.

Then it turns around, speaking to our greatness as Jews. We are the seed of Avraham, G-d’s beloved (Divrei HaYamim II 20:7); of Yitzchak, the only son, who was ready to sacrifice himself; of Yaakov/Yeshurun, who outgrew his status as usurper to father only Torah-observant children. Therefore, we must have *hakaras hatov*, rejoicing in our lot, in this world (*goraleinu*) and our heritage (*yerushaseinu*) in the next. R’ Schwab notes that the *Goral*, our lottery-winning, is entered by conscious choice, as is choosing the goats on Yom Kippur. On the other hand, our *Yerushah* is the whole Torah which we received, oral and written.

Therefore we say always, not just morning and night, but also as the first prayer we learn, and as our last prayer before death, *Shema!*

We raise our consciousness to the level of *mosrei nefesh* in the wars and persecutions of history – the martyrs of Jewish history recited *Shema al kiddush Hashem*.

Atah Hu – You are He, not just the remote, eternal transcendent

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G-d, but the revealed Creator, whose Existence is not in doubt, for Whom we would be *moser nefesh*. All Torah is His names; we pray to understand His revealed Will for us, *because* that is what He revealed.

We ask that He “raise our horns,” a metaphor for peace. A charging bull lowers his horns as weapons. A happy bull holds his head high.

What does this sharp contrast, between the abject nullification of the first paragraph, and the celebration and elevation of the rest of the passage, mean for our relationship with G-d? Based on an article by Micha Berger, I submit that this tension expresses the dialectic of anivut, humility.

I bring Micha’s words:

Anochi afar va'eifer is a statement that one realizes how much one could and ought to be -- and yet isn't. One can't maintain a sense of entitlement, one already recieved more than one is using.

Bishvili nivra ha'olam speaks about the magnitude of that potential. Yes, one person could cure the world – if he were fully using his abilities. One can't shirk the duty claiming the tools aren't there; they're there, but neglected.

The Alter of Slabodka stresses something that can be seen as a different aspect of the same underlying idea. Untapped potential never reaches the world of shared experience. In that world, I'm measured by what I am, not by what I could be. Within the experiences of my own mind, I know – or ought to know – I have the power to change the world. The world I experience is therefore tailored bishvili, to bring that out.

This passage thus begins to place us in relation to G-d. We humble ourselves before Him, contemplating our status and our potential. We have found our place with respect to ourselves, and with people, now we enter into a relationship with G-d and His Will.

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