

LAMPLIGHTER

25 Teves
Va'era
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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

This week's Torah reading, Va'eira, narrates the dramatic first confrontation between Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh. G-d commanded Aaron that if Pharaoh were to ask for a miracle as proof that G-d had sent them, Aaron was to throw his staff upon the ground and it would turn into a serpent.

Indeed, Pharaoh asked for a sign, and Aaron did as G-d had instructed him. Pharaoh then called for his magicians and ordered them to do the same. "They cast down every man his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs."

While this whole incident demands further explanation, one of the most remarkable occurrences was the miracle of Aaron's staff swallowing up the other staffs. Why did this miracle take place and what was its significance?

To explain:

The miracles and plagues G-d inflicted on Egypt were not intended only as punishment; rather, their purpose was to break the Egyptians' opposition to G-d. The underlying belief in Egypt was that G-d has absolutely no effect on reality. They believed that after G-d created the world, He placed it under the sole control of natural forces.

This false notion was disproved by the Ten Plagues, each one of which refuted a different aspect of the Egyptians' world-view. The miracle of Aaron's staff swallowing the magicians' staffs laid the groundwork and prepared the Egyptians for the events that would follow.

Symbolically speaking, Aaron stood for the "side of holiness," while his staff was symbolic of the G-dly power of sanctity. The serpent was symbolic of Egypt, as the Prophet Ezekiel termed it, "Egypt, the great serpent that lies in the midst of its streams." When Aaron's staff turned into a serpent, it demonstrated to Pharaoh that Egypt, even against its will, is ultimately sustained from the forces of holiness. Not to be outdone, Pharaoh summoned his magicians and had them turn their staffs into serpents, thereby "proving" that Egypt has its own sources of power. But when "Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs," it showed, definitively and absolutely, that all of Egypt's unholy powers were only an illusion, without a true and independent existence of their own.

In this way, G-d demonstrated to Pharaoh and to all of Egypt that His influence and dominion extended even to them. It was, in effect, the first chink in the Egyptians' theological armour, and thus a precursor to the Ten Plagues, each of which negated a different level of Egypt's spiritual impurity.

(Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Vol. 26)

Why Didn't Pharaoh Release the Israelites?

By Naftali Silberberg

But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt." - Exodus 7:3

Free Choice is the essential component which justifies the concepts of reward and punishment. It would be inappropriate to punish a robot for performing an immoral act which it was programmed to do. Nor would one reward a stove for cooking a sumptuous meal, or a bee for producing delicious honey. Humans, on the other hand, are rewarded and punished for their actions because they choose to do good or evil. This is why this week's Torah portion has always puzzled Jewish philosophers: How could Pharaoh be punished for refusing to comply with G-d's demands to grant freedom to the Israelites, if G-d Himself "hardened his heart"? To borrow a line from our Patriarch Abraham: "Will the Judge of the entire earth not perform justice?!"

Many interesting answers are given to explain this seeming injustice. Nachmanides offers an answer which is as profound as it is astoundingly simple. Nachmanides argues that had G-d refrained from hardening Pharaoh's heart, he would have then been deprived of the ability to make a coherent and true choice. Indeed, the plagues would have compelled him to let the Israelites go - an option he most certainly would not have chosen in the absence of G-d's strong hand.

Pharaoh's freeing the Israelites after their G-d had ravaged his land with frogs, lice, wild beasts, pestilence, etc., can be compared to handing over one's wallet to an armed mugger - neither is an act of "free" choice.

Since the scale was so heavily weighted towards Pharaoh's sending the Jews out - after all, what would any normal sovereign choose to do when his country is slowly and systematically being destroyed - G-d steeled Pharaoh's resolve, causing that the plagues shouldn't interfere with his decision-making process, and allowing him to continue expressing his true desire. G-d hardened his heart so that he would have the strength and ability to freely choose his course of action - and he freely chose to retain the Israelites as slaves. Thus Pharaoh rightfully earned divine retribution for his shameful behaviour.

The extent to which G-d went to ensure the integrity of Pharaoh's free choice is nothing short of incredible. And the intended moral is equally compelling and uplifting.

If the benevolent and all-merciful Creator manipulated Pharaoh's psyche and cognitive abilities to guarantee his ability to choose evil, certainly He does anything necessary to ensure our ability to choose good!

It is very popular to blame a plethora of external factors for one's shortcomings. But the Torah teaches us that even the most awesome and devastating circumstances don't affect a person's G-d-given freedom of choice.

We must never become discouraged. No matter what is written in the pages of our private history books, no matter our current personal situation, we always have the moral strength to choose the proper path.

Slice of LIFE

This story started on a Shabbat which was a few days before Chanukah in the year 1973 in Brooklyn. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was speaking in his large synagogue to a group of almost a thousand Chassidim who were standing crowded on makeshift pyramids of tables and chairs to see this holy Jew and hear every word he spoke.

The speeches were long, deep and interesting and were separated by joyous song and occasional 'L'Chiams'. Then suddenly the Rebbe announced something and everyone fell silent to hear.

"Where is Glick from London?!" People began looking around, asking each other if they had seen him. Again the Rebbe announced "Where is Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Glick?"

But he was nowhere to be found. In fact Rabbi Glick wasn't even there! He was in Spain, and the Rebbe knew it!!

But only a month later did it become clear what had happened.

Rabbi Glick was a successful businessman; his whole life had been devoted to business, until he met the Lubavitcher Rebbe ten years ago. At this first meeting the Rebbe said to him:

"You manufacture light bulbs, correct? A bulb lights only when one turns it on. Similarly, everywhere you happen to be you must 'turn on' Jewish souls."

And since then his life became 'turning on Jews' and his business transformed into a means of spreading Judaism where and whenever possible.

Back to our story. While the Rebbe was asking about him in Brooklyn, Rabbi Glick was on a business trip together with his wife in Barcelona, Spain. His plan was to travel from there to Madrid and then to Lisbon, Portugal. But the next day the phone in his hotel room rang; it was one of the Rebbe's secretaries. The Rebbe wanted him to travel to the isle of Majorca.

Because the message did not sound urgent, Rabbi Glick thought that he could put off Majorca until after he finished the circuit he had planned - but it wasn't so.

When he and his wife arrived in the airport for their Madrid flight on Thursday they

discovered that mysteriously all the flights to that destination had been cancelled. So, seeing this as a sign from above, they bought two tickets to Majorca and boarded the next flight. Instead of spending Chanukah in Madrid and Portugal they would be in Majorca.

Only moments after the plane took off they began to understand why the Rebbe sent them. The skies suddenly blackened and severe storm winds began tossing the plane back and forth, up and down like a toothpick. The end was near! The passengers, even grown men, began screaming and weeping hysterically like children and pandemonium reigned.

But he and especially his wife were calm. They were sure that if the Rebbe sent them there was ABSOLUTELY nothing to worry about, and their calmness was the only thing that literally kept everyone sane.

When they miraculously landed in Majorca the pilots and passengers could not thank the Glicks enough. And meanwhile they discovered what happened to their Madrid flight; the Prime Minister of Spain had been assassinated by a terrorist bomb, Madrid had been closed off and the country was in an upheaval. They immediately headed for the largest hotel.

No sooner had they arrived then they received another call from the Rebbe's office. It was Rabbi Leibel Groner, the Rebbe's secretary, on the other end. The Rebbe had just finished writing two very long and interesting 'general letters' to be sent to all his Chassidim and he wanted Rabbi Glick to have both translated into Spanish and read them to all the Jews in the Hotel he was staying.

Rabbi Glick knew that this would be no small task. First of all, he was very tired from his trying journey and in those days there were no fax machines, it would take hours to properly dictate and copy the letters over the phone. Secondly, it would take most of the night to translate such a thing - providing he found a translator who would be willing and able to do the job. Thirdly, who knows if the people in the hotel were Jews? And even so, if they would be willing to listen to such a long religious speech from an unknown Rabbi in New York!

But a Chassid follows orders joyously! That night Rabbi Glick didn't sleep. He copied the letters, found a translator and early the next morning went to have it copied.

The next evening was Shabbat Chanukah. After the meal in the hotel, Rabbi Glick who had already discovered that most of the guests were Jewish, stood on one of the chairs, yelled out a cheerful "Good Shabbos everyone!" made a L'chiam and announced, in broken Spanish, that he had stayed up the entire previous night preparing a special treat for everyone - a letter to the world from the Lubavitcher Rebbe!! And now he wanted to read it to them.

To his pleasant surprise the people were interested. Some of them had been on that flight from Barcelona and the word got around that he was a different sort of Rabbi.

He handed out the letters and then sat with the guests for several hours reading and discussing each idea late into the Shabbos night. The impression it made on them was awesome beyond words! Many announced they would begin to do commandments and some actually began to dance and sing with joy after hearing so many meaningful and positive Jewish ideas.

The rest of the week his work was made easy. He and his wife contacted other Jews in Majorca from a list that they were given and the news of that miraculous Shabbos went before them.

The excitement was great. Jews that had become almost completely estranged from Judaism suddenly became interested.

Even the wealthiest Jew (and perhaps most assimilated) on the island not only took on himself to begin to put on Tefillin daily but actually ordered a huge Chanukah Menorah to be built and immediately installed on the top of his penthouse where the entire island would see it burn for the remaining nights of the holiday!

Several weeks later, after they returned home, Rabbi Glick and his wife received a long letter of thanks from the Lubavitcher Rebbe in English (so as to advertise it more widely) that promised; "This success will serve as an inspiration and encouragement for even greater successes in the future!"

And shortly thereafter, Rabbi Hodokov the Rebbe's personal secretary called him and explained why the Rebbe had strangely called his name that Shabbos.

"The Rebbe said to tell you that he knew you weren't in the room. He just wanted to give you powers to succeed in your Chanukah mission in Europe. The Rebbe was with you all the time."

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ISSUE 1018

MOSHIACH MATTERS

In Exodus (6:6) we read: "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." The Jewish people possess an extra measure of patience, a special capacity for enduring the trials and tribulations of exile. And yet, when the exact time for redemption comes, they find it impossible to continue. This in itself is a sign that the redemption is imminent. (Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop)



INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

The Miracle of Entebbe

5736 [1976]

Mr. ...
Cleveland, Oh.

Greeting and Blessing:

I just received your letter with enclosure. It was gratifying to read the good news that you succeeded in inducing the Federation to make an initial grant to the Chabad House in your city, thus breaking the ice, as it were, towards moving it to begin supporting Torah-true Chinuch.

I agree with you, of course, that it was advisable to accept its initial commitment, although by far too inadequate, as you also indicate in your letter. However, under the circumstances, the important thing is to have induced it to move in the right direction, and it is to be hoped that before too long, the Federation will gain momentum and increase its support for the vital programs of the Chabad House. There is also the weighty consideration, as you rightly point out, that this move will serve as a pilot program and model for other communities and organizations to emulate.

There is no need to emphasize to you the great Zechut that is yours in bringing about this initial step. I am certain that you will continue to promote and develop it into a more substantial effort. No less effective is your personal commitment and dedication, which must surely inspire others. This is reflected also in the note accompanying your generous check to Machne Israel, to assist in our educational programs. It is very timely indeed in this Year of Chinuch, when we have embarked on a series of new and intensified activities and programs in this vital area. Here, too, I trust that the above is the forerunner of greater things. I have earmarked the check -- hopefully with your approval -- for the new educational program begun by our Chabad people in Eretz Yisrael.

Here my thoughts turn to the recent miraculous rescue of the hostages from Uganda. One cannot fail to note the extraordinary aspects at both ends of the hijacking. On the one hand, the ease with which the four terrorists hijacked the airbus in Athens, and on the other hand, the extraordinary success of the rescue operation. In other words, both the initial tragedy and eventual deliverance clearly point to the Hand of G-d. And while every Jew is grateful to, and admires the Mesirat Nefesh (self-sacrifice) of the brave rescuers, we must not lose sight for a moment of the warning and lesson at the bottom of it all -- not just in regard to the danger of hijacking in the ordinary sense, but even more importantly, in regard to the "spiritual hijacking" of so many of our young generation by alien and freak cultures which, unfortunately, capture so many of our innocent boys and girls in Eretz Yisrael as in the Diaspora. With all the anxiety and love which filled every Jewish heart for those unfortunate hostages at Entebbe Airport -- surely no less concern should be shown to the spiritual hostages that are abducted daily, and no less Mesirat Nefesh to save them. It is also particularly painful to contemplate the secularized education of considerable segments of Jewish youth in the land which even the nations of the world recognize as the Holy Land, where one would have reason to expect that all Jewish children would be brought up in an atmosphere of holiness befitting the Holy Land. It is for this reason that our Chabad people in Eretz Yisrael and everywhere else have undertaken special rescue operations in the area of Jewish education.

May the Zechut of your participation in this work stand you in good stead in all your affairs, particularly to have ever more true Nachat from all your near and dear ones.

Last but not least, I was gratified to note that you commemorated your late wife, of blessed memory, by publishing one of our Holy Scriptures, the Book of Ruth, with a commentary, in a way that makes it accessible to those who need Chinuch and inspiration, with selected Midrashim of our Rabbis, our teachers for all generations.

With blessing,
[Sign.]

CUSTOMS CORNER

CUSTOMS REGARDING THE GENERAL PRAYERS

1. In the 'Ashrei' prayer when one reaches the verse 'Pose'ach es yadecha...' (you open your hands...) he should intend the meaning of the words [that G-d sustains every living creation]. If he did not intend so, when he remembers later on in prayers he should recite this verse.
2. By the 'Shma' one should intend G-ds kingship and unity in the 7 heavens and earth [altogether eight - the numerical value of the letter 'Chet' in the last word of the 2st verse.] and to all 4 directions too.
3. The 2nd verse in the 'Shma' is recited silently, for when Jacob was about to pass on he was afraid that not all twelve of his sons believed completely in the unity of G-d, immediately they all announced the 'Shma', Jacob answered 'Baruch shaim k'vod...' (Blessed is the name...), but since it does not state it explicitly in the Torah we say it silently.

A WORD

from the Director

This past Thursday (the 24th of Tevet) we commemorated the yahrzeit (passing day) of the "Alter Rebbe," Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chasidut and the Chabad-Lubavitch Dynasty.

We have discussed many times the significance of the Alter Rebbe's name and that "Shneur" indicates the two lights ("shnei ohr") of Chasidut and the "revealed" Torah that the Alter Rebbe brought into the world.

The Alter Rebbe was considered one of the great luminaries of his and future generations. It is no coincidence, then, that he was born on a Wednesday -- the fourth day of creation -- the day on which G-d placed the two luminaries (the sun and the moon) in the sky.

The Rebbe once explained the significance of a momentous event occurring on a Wednesday:

"This provides every Jew with a twofold lesson in his service of G-d. Firstly, he must appreciate that he is a 'luminary,' that he can and he must, shine forth and provide others with light. Secondly, the mention of the two luminaries, the sun and the moon, teaches one that he must be both a great luminary and a small luminary.

"Being a 'great luminary' implies that a person realizes that he possesses important potential which he wants to use in a contributory fashion.

"Being a 'small luminary' implies that a person must appreciate and radiate to others that other individuals can contribute to him as our Sages comment, 'Who is a wise man? One who learns from every person.' As a small luminary, one reflects the positive virtues that others possess.

"A person must know how to express both of these dimensions in his life and must have the sensitivity to appreciate which quality is demanded at each particular time."

May we all experience the insight and sensitivity necessary to accomplish the above.

J. I. Gutnick

IT HAPPENED *Once...*

The third Rebbe of Chabad the 'Tzemach Tzedik' often visited the 'Kantonistim' (Jewish soldiers who as young children were snatched away from their homes and despite the many years of brainwashing remained strong in their beliefs) and in one of his speeches he included the words, "One must sacrifice one's life rather than one's Judaism. Even if the Czar himself personally tells you to change your religion."

These words, spoken from the soul, had a deep effect on one sailor by the name of Shimon Levin.

Shimon was an excellent and devoted soldier of the Czar. He loved his job and was one of the best sailors in the Czar's royal navy to the point that he was called by his compatriots called him Semion Bodri (Shimon the brave).

He had been promoted to the rank of officer and served at the naval base in Svastopol on the Black sea. Then, one glorious day, the base received notice that the Czar was to personally make a visit. The very thought filled the sailors with trepidation and trembling.

When the glorious day arrived the base had been scrubbed and polished for the visit and the sailors had a grand reception prepared. But the highlight of the day was something very special.

The commander of the base climbed to a platform, stood to his full height and announced before the Czar that in honour of his royal Majesty, one of the officers would perform an act of unmatched skill and unequalled bravery. The commander swung his finger majestically up pointing to the highest ship mast in the harbour some twenty meters high.

Shimon Levin, in full battle gear, stood at the foot of the mast, saluted and bowed to the Czar and then, without hesitating climbed briskly up the mast, stood erect on its very point and, as the crowd gasped in amazement, jumped into thin air, arched his back and dived gracefully into the sea.

The crowd broke into applause as Shimon swam to shore, walked up to the Czar and bowed deeply.

The Czar was ecstatic. "Who is this man!?" he asked excitedly.

"His name is Semion Bodri the commander proudly replied.

The Czar was to the point. He stood proudly and announced "Semion Bodri, you are a true soldier, a credit to the Royal Navy, and a Jewel in the crown of Mother Russia. Because of your act of power and splendour that you demonstrated I hereby promote you to the rank of General! Congratulations!" The crowd broke into wild applause.

But when it all ended Shimon just stood there without a smile on his face. "Your majesty" he replied. "I am truly grateful but according to the laws which your highness has made it is forbidden for me to accept your magnificent gift." Silence reigned, only the wind could be heard whistling through the masts. "I am a Jew, your majesty and it is forbidden for a Jew to rise above the rank of petty officer."

"Then you will change your religion!" He announced angrily. "Do you hear me officer Bodri?! You will change your religion and become a general! NOW!"

"Your majesty!" answered Shimon. "With your majesty's permission, first I would like to repeat the feat that I performed for your royal highness."

Without waiting for an answer and before anyone knew what was happening, Shimon ran in the direction of the mast. Even more swiftly than yesterday he climbed to the peak, stood there proudly, the wind blowing through his hair and announced loudly enough for all to hear.

"Your majesty, Twelve years I have been serving in the Russian navy and I love my service with all my soul. But know, my King, that above all I am a Jew. Through my entire service I have kept the Sabbath and never eaten forbidden foods. I will never leave the G-d of Israel. 'Shma Yisroel HaShem Elokenu HaShem Echaud!!"

Again he gracefully dived from the mast arching in the air like a javelin before plunging down into the blue sea. But this time he did not come up.

Three days later his body washed up on shore. The Czar was asked what to do and ordered that the body should be kept in a coffin under military guard for three days and then buried in the State cemetery.

But in Shimon's camp were two other Cantonists that had different plans. They could not bear the idea that a fellow Jew, especially their friend Shimon, should not have a Jewish burial.

They came up with a bold plan. Late the next night they managed to convince the guards to have a few drinks. When the guards were dead drunk, they whisked Shimon to his rest in grave they had dug earlier in a distant part of the forest.

But somehow their daring feat was discovered, they were arrested and tortured to make them reveal the grave but their lips remained sealed.

One died under torture and the other was killed by firing squad but to this day the location of Shimon's grave is unknown.

Thoughts THAT COUNT

And I appeared (va'eira) (Exodus 6:3)

The word "va'eira" is in both the past and present tense, indicating that the revelation of G-dliness that existed in the times of our forefathers continues to exist today as well.

Every Jew possesses the quality of Abraham (love of G-d), the quality of Isaac (awe of G-d), and the quality of Jacob (mercy); the revelation of these inner traits is akin to G-d's revelation to the Patriarchs. (*Ohr HaTorah*)

CANDLE LIGHTING: 20 JANUARY 2012

BEGINS	ENDS
8:24MELBOURNE	9:27
8:13ADELAIDE	9:13
6:29BRISBANE	7:25
7:02DARWIN	7:54
6:29GOLD COAST	7:25
7:07PERTH	8:05
7:50SYDNEY	8:49
8:02CANBERRA	9:02
8:25LAUNCESTON	9:31
8:23AUCKLAND	9:25
8:35WELLINGTON	9:40
8:29HOBART	9:36
7:29BYRON BAY	8:26



CHABAD HOUSE OF CAULFIELD LUBAVITCH

439 INKERMAN STREET, CAULFIELD

PARSHAS VA'ERAH 26 TEVES • 21 JANUARY

FRIDAY NIGHT:	CANDLE LIGHTING:	8:24 PM
	MINCHA:	8:35 PM
	KABBOLAS SHABBOS:	9:10 PM
SHABBOS MORNING:	SHACHARIS:	10:00 AM
	LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA:	9:56 AM
	THE MOLAD OF THE MONTH OF TEVET IS	
	SUNDAY DECEMBER 25	7:20 AND 17 CHALAKIM AM
	MINCHA:	8:20 PM
WEEKDAYS:	SHABBOS ENDS:	9:27 PM
	SHACHARIS SUN-FRI:	9:15 AM
	MINCHA:	8:30 PM
	MAARIV:	9:20 PM