



Ohr Yerushalayim News

ח שבט תשע"ז - בא - 20th January 2017 - Volume 10 - Issue 26

News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel Tov to Mr & Mrs Dov Black on the wedding this week of Motti to Miriam Frenkel in London. The Aufruf takes place this Shabbos in Shul followed by a kiddush in the Beis Yakov hall. Mazel Tov also to Motti's grandparents, Mr & Mrs Dovzi Lopian.

Mazel Tov to Mr & Mrs Malcolm Fagleman on the recent birth and bris of a grandson to Mr and Mrs Dudu Gabay in London.

Mazel Tov to Dr & Mrs Abrohom Meyer on birth of granddaughter to Mr & Mrs Sherer.

A Horse By Any Other Name

Dani Epstein

Note: if you read this article and learn something from it, please dedicate it to Josh for a רפואה שלמה.

Wont as I occasionally am to employing various creative epithets as descriptive references of my offspring - examples include "the kleine horrors" and "my little barbarians" - there is the odd occasion when they rise above my creative nomenclature and quite frankly astonish me. A particular incident occurred last Shabbos during an extended discussion addressing a fundamental concept: free will.

The topic is of course central to these two sedras, during which the Mitzriyim enjoy a pantheon of exquisite agonies, including the haematological conversion of their water supplies and a zoological balagan which wreaked havoc and mayhem, the descriptions thereof I take particular delight in illustrating during the seder at great length with much gusto and a selection of my finer sound effects.

The arguments at the table raged back and forth, and many splendid suggestions were raised, but more of that later.

Let us examine a few verses in order to get some background on the situation. Last week we read the following from somewhere near the beginning. Hashem is instructing Moshe on his up-coming mission:

"וָאֵלֶיךָ אֶתְּיָדְךָ אֶלְהִים לְפָרֹעַ" - I have appointed you as a judge of Pharaoh.

Now Rashi makes a very subtle observation and writes: "שׁוֹפֵט וְרוֹדֵף" - judge and executioner. Subtle, because if Moshe's job was merely to judge, then he would have been appointed a שׁוֹפֵט. The word אֶלְהִים implies considerably greater authority, which is the ability to execute the sentence as well.

Without knowing what the mission is, we can safely assume that the הארץ שׁוֹפֵט כל הארץ - the Judge of the Entire World - will exact a fair and reasonable sentence from Pharaoh with Moshe as his mouthpiece. What offence will Pharaoh be accused of?

"וְנִשְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ־מִצְרָיִם" - he will be required to send the Bnei Yisroel from his land.

So this is a straightforward proposition: Pharaoh will be required to undertake one task; verily, the release of the Bnei Yisroel from Egypt. Failure to comply to this Executive Order will result in punishment as implied by Moshe's appointment to the positions of both judge and executioner.

All is fine and dandy until we read this: "וַיִּכְזֵב אֶת־לֵב פְּרֹעֶה" - and I will harden the heart of Pharaoh. Now the issue is not that the playing field is slightly bumpy, but that it has been converted to a ski slope, and Pharaoh is starting from the bottom. This sort of situation is what we generally what we refer to as a "kangaroo court". The man hasn't even

לעלוי נשמת דוב יצחק ב"ר אפרים אלחנן ז"ל

No Wine For Kiddush?

1. If one does not have wine or grape juice for kiddush, then one should make kiddush in the evening over bread rather than over some beverage.

2. On Shabbos morning however, bread may not be used. One who does not have wine (or grape juice) should use "Chamar Hamedina" a drink which is customarily consumed in the locality as a beverage of consequence. This may be whisky, beer, pure undiluted natural fruit juice, coffee or tea. In all cases a cup containing a revi'is should be used and one should drink at least a cheekful.

been given the remotest chance of acquitting himself; the odds are stacked against him even before the case has started. He is doomed to failure. It isn't quite what we would call "fair".

Maybe, just maybe, you might think, Pharaoh had a smidgen of a chance to overcome this obstacle with a Herculean effort and acquiesce prematurely? Oh no, not at all.

"וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַע אֶלְכֶם פְּרֹעֶה" - Pharaoh won't listen to you. He literally will not stand a chance, because he won't be given a chance.

And when he refuses, well we all know what happens.

This is really a tough one, since it's not a case of loaded dice, but judging the accused and sentencing him before the case has even started and not allowing him a defence, something which are are unfortunately all too familiar with in our long history and recently revisited in the Rubashkin case.

How can we possibly justify this?

One might argue that Pharaoh always had a choice and that Hashem was merely giving him a degree of assistance to resist the instructions of Moshe. This would imply that at no point was Pharaoh willing to concede his position were he to have an even set of odds, and all Hashem was doing every time was levelling the field.

The Week Ahead

שבת פרשת בא

Candle Lighting	4.12pm
Mincha & Kabbolas Shabbos	4.17pm
Seder HaLimud	8.40am
Shacharis	9.00am
סוף זמן ק"ש	10.15am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
Rov's Shiur	3.34pm
2nd Mincha	4.04pm
Shalosh Seudas	Following
Maariv & Motzei Shabbos	5.24pm
Ovos uBonim	6.24pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha & Maariv	4.20pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

Consider this, however. Supposing I take 1,000 regular children, and by that I mean kids who do not have allergies, strange diseases or parents who feed them only macrobiotic food, vegetable protein and algae. Now I place inside a windowless room two bowls: one filled with three flavours of milchige ice cream with chocolate sauce artistically dribbled over the servings and finally topped with multi-coloured sprinkles, the other filled almost to the top with steaming, gleaming minced spinach. I tell the children that they may eat from one bowl or the other, but not from both. Of those 1,000 children, how many will opt for the spinach? If one of them actually does choose the latter, surely we would rush them off to the nearest A&E with blues-and-twos twanging.

Now, do those children have a choice? You might argue they do; after all, no-one is coercing them in any way. They are not forced to choose one over the other. They do not get rewarded in any way, no indications were made prior to their entry to the room that might influence them one way or another, yet all things being equal we can safely predict that every single child will go for the ice cream with 99.9% accuracy at the very least.

This kind of predictive accuracy in science would generally raise a great deal of suspicion. Any experiment whose initiators claim that their prediction was 99.9% accurate would immediately cause their peers to call "foul". Yet I'm pretty confident mine won't fail me, and most parents would agree.

So, do these children really have a choice? If I can predict their choice with this degree of accuracy, then even though they have a semblance of choice, surely I have removed the choice from them. An ability to choose must inherently have a degree of uncertainty on the part of an observer, otherwise we have no way of determining whether or not an individual does in fact have a choice.

For example, if two qualified witnesses are about to witness a murder, then they are required to inform the potential murderer that he or she will be put to death if they go ahead with their dastardly plan. The reason for this warning is to allow Beis Din to conclude that the individual was fully aware of their actions. The implication being that we can only assume an individual has a choice if we have evidence to support that assumption.

In the case of the children in my experiment, we clearly do not have any evidence of that kind, since the results do not vary at all with the prediction.

Then we have the lovely Thomas Hobson, who owned a livery stable in Cambridge several centuries ago. A shrewd operator who would have made Michael O'Leary proud, he offered his customers an apparent selection of 40 horses when they entered his stables, but they were required to take the horse nearest to the door irrespective of their preference. In this way, his horses were by and large used in an even fashion. This slick marketing method led to the coining of the phrase "Hobson's choice".

In effect, you can choose the horse offered, or choose not to have a horse. Whilst it is a theoretical choice, the odds are heavily weighted in favour of one side, reducing the viability of the choice considerably if not negating it entirely.

Likewise Pharaoh, since Hashem told Moshe: וְנִאֲמַר אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה - "and I will harden Pharaoh's heart" and more importantly וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַע אֶלְכֶם - "Pharaoh will not listen to you", every choice he makes is already predicted, and therefore we can safely conclude that no choice is actually being made here.

Aha, you might argue, Hashem is the one doing the predicting, so this really takes the wind out of your sails. Hashem will anyway know up front what Pharaoh will predict because He is above space-time. Accuracy in predictions are really His Forte.

All this is very well and true; however since the predictions were foretold to Moshe who jolly well was subject to space-time, then the whole thing is reduced to our level of play and that makes it a choice-free result again, at least by our standards.

Returning to my Shabbos table, as arguments flew back and forth, Chavoh Chayah (she being my fourth daughter) raised a crucial issue in all this. "If Pharaoh was the one who was supposed to be punished for not listening to Hashem, why did all the Mitzriyim have to suffer?"

This erudite question was really a light-bulb moment for us all at the table. Clearly the issue was not really Pharaoh, he was the conductor through which the Rod of Justice would impart its lightning (Lightning rod, geddit? Oh, why do I bother). If all the Mitzriyim had to suffer, then Pharaoh was merely the excuse.

So, what was really going on then? Great question, and amazingly enough the answers are staring us in the face. Well, not exactly, they are scattered across this and last week's sidros, but you get the idea. Last week, during the introduction to the whole saga, Hashem says to Moshe: וְנִתְּנִי אֶת־יָדִי בְּמִצְרַיִם וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־צְבָאוֹתַי אֶתְעַמִּי בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם - "I will put my hand to Mitzrayim and I will take out my legions, my people the Children of Yisroel, from the Land of Egypt with great judgements."

This is the first clue. There will be "great judgements". No matter what, there will be great judgements. How that comes about is merely a technicality.

Then he instructs Moshe to inform Pharaoh that He is striking them with plagues בְּעִבּוֹר תֵּדַע כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹנִי בְּכָל־הָאָרֶץ - "in order that you should know that there is none like Me".

This does not sound like a punishment at all, but more like a marketing campaign.

Right in the first verse of this sedrah comes: כִּי־אֶנִּי הַכְבִּדְתִּי אֶת־לִבּוֹ וְאֶת־לִבּוֹ הַכְבִּדְתִּי אֶת־לִבִּי לְמַעַן שְׁתִּי אֶתְנֶה אֶלֶּה בְּקִרְבּוֹ - "since I will make his heart heavy, and the hearts of his servants, in order to set these signs amongst them".

Then a little further on we see: לֹא־יִשְׁמַע אֶלְיֶיכֶם פַּרְעֹה לְמַעַן רַבּוֹת מוֹפְתָי - בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם - "Pharaoh will not listen to you in order to magnify my wonders in the Land of Egypt".

That sounds again more like advertising, and less like justice and retribution.

Isn't this just a little surprising? Moshe's job description at the very start was all about Judgement Day (well, more like Judgement Year, but you get my drift) and then Great Punishments, and in fact most of the missives to Pharaoh involves nothing of the kind.

The truth lies somewhere between the two, in fact. Yes, of course the Mitzriyim were going to be punished for what they did. After all, one of the promises Hashem made to Avrohom was: וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ - דָן אֲנִי - "...and the nation that will enslave them I will judge".

So in effect this really was Judgement Day; Moshe was the judge, jury and executioner. The Mitzriyim, however, were guilty already prior to the commencement of the plagues, no judging required. They were guilty, their punishment had been decided already.

There was one element missing though: the Mitzriyim themselves were unaware that they were deserving of punishment. This is something they had to understand first.

Now, anti-slavery liberals were few on the ground at the time. The entire concept of slavery as an institution being evil was simply beyond humanity in its totality. Even the Bnei Yisroel themselves were unable to grasp this concept, and therefore at the time slavery was an acceptable institution for everyone.

The evil the Mitzriyim perpetrated, however, was the sheer cruelty and viciousness that they perpetrated against the Bnei Yisroel; the ceaseless screaming agonies they brutally inflicted with physical and mental torture. Those excesses went well beyond the very pale of humanity, but they were so morally degenerate, corrupted by their hedonistic excesses and steeped in gory mythology that explaining anything to them would have left them totally baffled.

Some semblance of guilt had to be inflicted upon them in order for them to realise they were being punished. Granted they would fail to associate the punishment with the crime, but they had to understand that punishment was what they were receiving.

Given all that, the whole charade with Pharaoh being given a choice was just that: a charade. It was window-dressing for the punishments that were to follow. Now if you re-read all the pertinent verses within the current and previous sedrah, you will see why it was not Pharaoh who was not being given a choice, but Pharaoh who was being manipulated in order to for him and his people to understand that the calamities that were about to be inflicted upon them were not natural disasters or great magic, but something that went far beyond that. Sitting down and trying to explain that to