



Ohr Yerushalayim News

א ג שבת תשפ"א - שמות - 16th January 2021 - Volume 13 - Issue 27

News This Week

מזל טוב

Mazel tov to Dean and Susan Kaye on the birth of a grandson to Oshi and Chaya Kaye

Mazel Tov to Yoel Levine and his parents, David and Deborah, on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah this Shabbos. Mazel Tov also to grandparents Miles and Linda Levine

Chaim Aruchim

We wish Chaim Aruchim to Penina Wieder who has Yahrzeit for her mother this Thursday, 8th Shevat.

Thanking the River

Rabbi Naftali Reich (Torah.org)

From earliest childhood, we are taught to express our gratitude for anything we receive. Think back. What were the first things your parents taught you? "Say please" and "Say thank you." Appreciation and gratitude seem to be fundamental universal values. Why is this so? Is it only to give our benefactors a good feeling? Or is there some deeper purpose? What exactly do these words mean?

In this week's Torah portion, we find a rather strange form of gratitude. As the story unfolds, Pharaoh defiantly refuses to release the Jewish people from bondage. The Ten Plagues begin. First, the Nile River turns to blood. Pharaoh persists in his stubborn refusal, and the river spawns and disgorges myriad frogs that swarm over all of Egyptian. Pharaoh still resists, and the very dust of the earth is transformed into lice. But this, too, does not convince Pharaoh to release the Jewish people, and as the plagues continue, Egypt is overrun with beasts of prey. And so it continues until Pharaoh finally lets the Jewish people go.

If we look carefully, however, we notice an interesting distinction between the first three plagues and all the rest. Moses was the divine messenger to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and he personally administered the plagues. Nonetheless, Hashem chose his brother Aaron to administer the first three plagues. Why was this so?

The Sages tell us that for Moses to strike the river and turn it into blood or to generate a plague of frogs from its bowels would have been an act of ingratitude. During the decree of infanticide, Moses had been concealed among the bulrushes of the Nile, and in effect, the river had saved his life. How could he now afflict it with plagues? Furthermore, Moses had struck down an Egyptian taskmaster who had been tormenting a Jewish laborer and buried the body in the soil. Therefore, it would have been an act of ingratitude for him to transform the soil into lice.

But wait! What sort of gratitude was Hashem demanding from Moses? What is the point of being grateful to inanimate entities such as the river and the soil?

Clearly, the primary purpose of gratitude is for our own benefit. People sometimes have a tendency to avoid expressing their gratitude, because somehow doing so makes them feel diminished. Their egos do not allow them to acknowledge that they are beholden to others. In order to counteract this tendency, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes the importance of expressing thanks. Indeed, the Hebrew word for gratitude is hakaras hatov, acknowledgment of the favor. Acknowledgment is the key, regardless of whether the benefactor is another person or an inanimate river.

The tendency to ingratitude, the commentators explain, is one of the major obstacles to a close relationship with the Creator. A person whose ego does not allow him to acknowledge his own limitations and needs will

not recognize the limitless presence of the Creator in the world. Only by becoming conditioned to express gratitude at every appropriate occasion, to acknowledge dependency on others, can a person break out of the ego-driven illusions of self-sufficiency and gain a clear vision of the world. This knowledge and humble acceptance is the first step towards connecting with the Master of the Universe.

A great sage was having dinner with one of his young disciples in a hotel dining room.

"The owner of this hotel is a fine person," remarked the sage. "Look at this dinner he prepared for us. And the service!"

"Well, what do you expect?" said the young disciple. "He is getting paid very well for it."

"Naturally, he has to get paid," said the sage. "He has expenses, you know. That's the only reason he takes our money. But he is such a considerate, wonderful host."

"He takes more than to cover expenses," the young man persisted. "He make quite a tidy profit here."

"Of course, he makes a profit," said the sage. "Otherwise, how is he to support his family? Nonetheless, he is such a warm host. But you, my young friend, have thought of every which way to avoid being grateful to him. Do you why? Because you are afraid that acknowledging the good in others may make you indebted to them and thereby diminished. But the opposite is true. Recognizing the good in others makes you a better person."

In our own lives, we must never underestimate the importance of expressing gratitude and appreciation to others. We must recognize every good turn that is done for us, and we must declare our acknowledgement in no uncertain terms. We owe it not only to our benefactors but to ourselves even more. A person wise enough to thank the doorman for opening the door is exalted enough to be in touch with eternity.

Sour Milk

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky (Torah.org)

This week Hashem tells Moshe to inform the B'nai Yisrael, that the good times will soon come. "I shall rescue you, I shall redeem you with an out stretched hand, I shall bring you to the land which I have promised your fathers, Abraham Isaac and Jacob" (cf. Exodus 6:6-8).

It did not mean much. "The Children of Israel did not listen to Moshe from

Davening Times

פרשת וארא

Zman Shabbos & Lighting	4.05pm
Mincha	4.10pm
Shacharis - Hashkomo	7.45am
2nd Shacharis	9.30am
סוף זמן ק"ש	10.17am
1st Mincha	1.30pm
2nd Mincha	4.08pm
Motzei Shabbos	5.18pm
Ovos uBonim	6.18pm
Sun	7.15am / 8.20am / 9.30am
Mon / Thurs	6.45am / 7.10am / 8.00am
Tues / Wed / Fri	6.45am / 7.20am / 8.00am
Mincha	1.15pm
Mincha & Maariv	4.15pm
Late Maariv	8.00pm

shortness of breath and hard work" (ibid v.9).

Next Hashem tells Moshe to tell Pharaoh to let the Jews out. Moshe responds with a reply filled with deductive reasoning. "Behold the Children of Israel did not listen, so how will Pharaoh listen?" (ibid v.12).

Our sages explain that this is one of ten "kal v'chomer" instances in the Torah. It is an example of reasoning used to logically come to halachic conclusions. (eg. If a weightlifter can not lift the stone, surely a child can not!)

The problem is, that the reasoning seems flawed. "The Children of Israel did not listen to Moshe from shortness of breath and hard work." Pharaoh did not suffer from either of those shortcomings! If the weightlifter with a broken back, can't lift a stone, it plays no role in telling us whether or not a child can.)

So what was Moshe's logical refutation to G-d's command?

Last week, on Thursday 23 Teves, the great Gaon, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter z"l passed away. As a student at the Telshe Yeshiva in Europe he developed a strong relationship with one Europe's foremost scholars of that era, Rav Mordechai Pogranski z"l. He used to relate on a story Rav Pogranski would share with his students.

A disheveled man was touring the Louvre with a group of tourists. As they passed Rembrandt's works the man looked at everyone and yelled, "Sour milk!" Puzzled, everyone thought he was crazy. He repeated it again. "It looks like sour milk!"

They moved on and passed the Mona Lisa. Again he screamed, Sour milk!" This went on a few more times until a wise man looked at the fellow. "Let me see your glasses."

The critical man gave them to him. "What did you have for breakfast?" he asked.

"Why cereal and milk," he answered.

The wise man laughed. Look at your glasses! They are speckled with milk! No wonder everything you look at appears as sour milk!

Moshe knew that Jews inherently believe. However the suffering of hard work and the evil treatment of Egyptian masters tainted their faith. But hard work alone does not taint faith. It is only when it is exasperated by the torment of the taskmasters, and their cruel taunts. How much more so, he figured, would Pharaoh be inattentive of the command that Hashem is in charge, and the Jews should be let free. If hard work stains the thought process, blocking the beauty of Hashem's word to filter through, how much more so does the idolatry and heresy of Pharaoh impede them from penetrating!

We look at Hashem's creation. We go to synagogue. We hear mussar. We read the prophets. But somehow it does not get through. The words are beautiful. Those who hear them can be inspired. But so many impediments block our vision and our hearing. Our lifestyles. Our desires. Even our work. If we'd open our eyes we would see so much holiness! But only if their glasses are not tainted with sour milk.

The Making of an Evil Leader Rabbi Pinchas Winston (Torah.org)

IF PHARAOH had actually been the same king who did know Yosef, but who chose to ignore Yosef's contributions to Egypt, he sure went to the other extreme. He went from not wanting to turn against Yosef's family to being their greatest enemy. How did that happen?

The Torah answers:

But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. (Shemos 7: 22)

G-d did it. He tampered with Pharaoh's heart, making it harder than it might otherwise have been on its own. Had G-d stayed out of the picture, it seems from the Torah's own admission, Pharaoh might not have been as terrible the oppressor he ended up being to the Jewish people. Hmm.

The first question that arises from this exposé has been asked by many throughout the millennia: How could G-d interfere with Pharaoh's free will? The answer: Why not? G-d gave man free will, so He can take it away from him as well.

As the expression goes, "Abuse it, lose it," a warning not just to Pharaoh, but to all of mankind. Free will is a merit, not a right, something you may grow into but which you can lose over time, if you do not appreciate its worth. It is frightening to think how billions of people over history have gone to their graves thinking they enjoyed free will when in fact, they lost it long ago.

What does it even mean to lose free will?

That will depend upon what actually enslaves a person's will. Surprisingly, not enough people know the answer to this question. Consequently, they do not have much access to their most prized attribute, with which they can earn their reward in Olam HaBa—the World-to-Come. That is tragic.

To begin with, we have all noticed at some time how we can feel like doing something different than we should do. It's because we have a soul that wants to do the moral thing, and a body that feels like doing the comfortable thing. The body is not immoral or amoral per se; it is not even able to think for itself. It just resists "uncomfortable" activities, which moral behavior tends to promote.

Who cares, you might ask, as long as life is "good," and you can live it with a smile on your face? But that's like saying, "Who cares if we study for the exams or not, as long as we have a good time on the way to them!" or, "Who cares if we have money to retire with, as long as we can live freely today!"

The answer of course is, though you may not care now, you will care later. And later, after you have failed your exams, or run out of money once you've retired, you will suffer so much that you will forget the good times you had. It will add regret to your misery as well. The wise person lives today with the future in mind, as it says:

This world is like a corridor before the World-to-Come. Rectify yourself in the "corridor" in order to be able to enter the "banquet hall." (Pirkei Avos 4:16)

Who doesn't want to follow this advice? But how many people actually feel like following it? So instead, they end up capitulating to their feelings, and then rationalize how they are really executing their wants when in fact they are executing their yetzer hara's desires.

Free will is only free when it is free of the influence of the yetzer hara, the "evil inclination."

THERE IS a story told of a dialogue between the Chofetz Chaim and his yetzer hara in his later years. Upon rising early one morning as he had done his entire life, his yetzer hara asked him,

"Old man, why do you rise so early? Surely at your age you're entitled to sleep later!"

But, without skipping a beat, the Chofetz Chaim answered his yetzer hara, "If you're up this early, then why shouldn't I be up this early!"

It can be assumed that this dialogue did not actually take place as if he was speaking to another person. More than likely, the Chofetz Chaim woke up early, for the first time felt an inclination to sleep later, and identified his yetzer hara as the source of it. So, rather than listen to it, he used it as an example for his inspiration to get up early.

It's an adorable story but with a profound message. Most people only know they have been duped by their yetzer hara after the damage has been done. They are only able to recognize their yetzer hara in their "rear-view mirror," if at all... if they even believe they have one in the first place.

Learning to recognize your yetzer hara, and then going the next great step to harnessing its energy for good, is a life's work, even many life's work. We reincarnate, and probably many times already, to finish rectifying the part of our yetzer hara we failed to fix up in previous lifetimes. And we certainly can't do it on our own:

The Holy One, Blessed Is He, says to the Jewish people: "I created the yetzer hara, and I created Torah as its spice. If you involve yourselves in Torah, then you will not fall prey to it...and if you don't involve yourselves with Torah, then you will fall prey to it." (Kiddushin 30b)

This is the whole point of Torah. By teaching us wrong from right, it tells what to look for to recognize our yetzer hara. By commanding morality, it gives us the means to bring the yetzer hara to the surface. By directing our actions, Torah gives us the means to harness the energy of the yetzer hara in the most ultimately meaningful ways, as the Chofetz Chaim was able to do.

But if a person does not believe in the idea of a yetzer hara, then they can only believe that every voice emanating from within them is their own voice, even if it results in regretful consequences. If a person does not believe in Torah, then they cannot believe in an objective right and wrong, and they will reduce everything to opinion only. Good is what they personally buy into, and evil becomes only that which they personally despise.

And if they don't believe in G-d altogether, then they have nothing to guide or oversee their actions. They can be despicable and not feel too bad about it, believing that they will not have to answer for it. And that's when society, ANY society can begin its slippery descent into very unG-dly behavior. So, when Pharaoh asked, "Who is Hashem?" he basically indicated in which direction he was moving. He was a man driven by the yetzer hara.