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נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,
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Parashat Va'era

World Events are Meant to Bring us to Self Introspection

Questions:

1 – Our *parasha* teaches us that Hashem told Moshe that He would harden Pharaoh's heart and that he would nevertheless not listen to him. The *pasuk* states (7:3), "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and increase My signs and wonders in the land of Egypt." In *pasuk* 5, Hashem tells Moshe, "And Egypt will know that I am Hashem ..." According to the simple meaning of the *pesukim*, it sounds like Hashem was hardening Pharaoh's heart so that He could perform miracles, as it were, making Egypt aware of the fact the He is G-d. This must be understood, for by hardening Pharaoh's heart, the Jews were required to endure suffering and crushing labor. Yet this was all for the sake of bringing the Egyptians to recognize Hashem. But this is puzzling – why do the Jews have to suffer if the Egyptians were the ones who sinned? **2** – Later on in the *parasha* (14:18), before the splitting of the Red Sea, Hashem states, "And the Egyptians will know that I am Hashem when I will be honored through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen." This indicates that the Egyptians mainly became aware that Hashem is G-d at the splitting of the sea and not through the wonders that He performed in Egypt. Therefore, why did Hashem have to perform so many wonders in Egypt? Even if He would have taken the Jews out of Egypt immediately, by splitting the sea and drowning the Egyptians, the Egyptians still would have gained knowledge of Him.

Present Day Tragedies and Man's Perspective

We will begin by saying that when we think about the tragedies that have occurred with terrifying frequency recently – a family was burned; another one crushed; three generations die together in one accident; children falling to their deaths, and other tragedies, leaving widows and orphans in their wake – they make one's hair stand on end and tear one's heart to pieces. Yet we must realize that the reason that one is able to hear about these episodes and carry on with life serenely, is because he feels that these incidents happened to others and are not truly relevant to him. Apart from the initial burst of emotion that one experiences after hearing about it, shortly thereafter, man carries on living as if nothing happened. One tragedy follows the next, and people do not think about them or why they occurred. However, the Torah and our Sages teach us that every incident and tragedy that occurs in the world is relevant to each and every member of the Jewish Nation. It is meant to stir him to self-introspection, so that he will improve his ways, as we will explain.

The Many Wonders Were for the Jewish Nation

According to what we have asked, we can understand why Rashi chose to give a different explanation as to why Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart to perform wonders. Rashi does not write that the wonders were intended for Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Rather, he explains that they were for the Jews. Rashi writes (*Shemot* 7:3), "I will harden [his heart]. Hashem was saying, 'Since he [-Pharaoh] has acted wickedly and blasphemously against Me, and I see that the idol worshippers of the gentile nations will not repent, it is better for Me to harden his heart so that I can increase My signs. This way, you [-the Jews] will recognize them, as well My might.' So is the way of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, he brings retribution upon the gentile idol-worshippers so that the Jews will hear and fear Him. This is as the *pasuk* states (*Tzefania* 3:6-7), 'I have eliminated nations, their towers have become desolate ... I said, 'Just fear Me, accept reproach.'" Commenting on this *pasuk* from *Tzefania*, the Gemara (*Yevamot* 63a) teaches, "Said R' Elazer son of Ravina: Retribution comes to the world only for the Jews. This is as it states, 'I have



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eliminated nations, their towers have become desolate ... I said, 'Just fear Me, accept reproach.'" Rashi explains there that the reproach was intended for the Jews, so that they would fear Hashem and repent [see the *Meiri* ibid., who states similarly]. You see then, that everything which takes place in the world is for the sake of the Jews and meant to stir them to repentance.

Everything Hashem Does is Good

In his *Chiddushei Aggadot* on *Yevamot* (62b), the *Maharal* explains the Sages' words as follows: We cannot say that Hashem brings retributions upon the gentile nations because of their own sins. This cannot be, because from Hashem comes only good. Therefore, if someone suggests that retribution comes to the world to destroy the gentile nations, it cannot be, because this is something bad, and only good comes from Hashem. If you will suggest that that the retribution comes to the world to stir the gentiles to repentance, this also cannot be, because suffering only causes the gentiles to speak blasphemies, as the Midrash teaches. If so, why does retribution come? It is all for the sake of the Jews, that they should accept reproach and return to the upright path. Therefore, everything that comes from Hashem is good, even retribution. This is as stated in the Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 9), "And G-d saw everything that He made, and it was very good" – our Sages teach that this even includes suffering. This is because suffering atones for sin and removes it. This is not something that applies to gentiles, as stated above. Therefore, the only reason that retribution could have come to the world, is for the Jews to receive reproach; this way, we see that everything Hashem does is good.

The Chafetz Chayim's Letter

The *sefer Siach Yitzchak* (discourses of the great *Mashgiach*, Rav Yechezkel Levenstein zt"l) mentions that in the time of the Chafetz Chayim, there was an earthquake and floods in Russia. The Chafetz Chayim made a declaration, stating that we know that Hashem does not want the deaths of the wicked; for Hashem is merciful, and He takes mercy on all His creations. How, then, could Hashem bring about such a terrible and cruel occurrence? In truth, it is an explicit *pasuk* in *Yona*, where Hashem asks how He could not have mercy upon Ninveh, a city in which lived so many human beings and animals. Ninveh was a city of gentiles, and our Sages teach us that the *pasuk's* reference to animals is actually a reference to the wicked gentiles of Ninveh, who lived their lives like animals. Additionally, their destruction was already decreed, nevertheless, they still repented (despite the fact that their repentance was short lived, as our Sages teach that they ultimately returned to their evil ways). Yona wondered why Hashem would have mercy on them, and so Hashem asked him, "You take mercy on the *kikayon* tree, which provided you with shade, should I not take mercy on Ninveh?" Hashem always takes pity on the gentiles, for they are His handiwork, and the *pasuk* states, "And His mercy extends to all of His handiwork." Rather, everything that is happening is certainly only to arouse the Jewish people. This is as our Sages teach us (*Yevamot* 63b) that retribution only comes to the world for the Jews. This is as the *pasuk* states (*Tzefania* 3:6-7), 'I have eliminated nations, their towers have become desolate ... I said, 'Just fear Me; accept reproach.'" It is also mentioned by Rashi in *Parashat Va'era* (7:3), that this is the way of Hashem, and for this reason, He brought the plagues upon Pharaoh. Therefore, if something happens in the world, one cannot simply ignore it. When an earthquake takes place, the blessing recited upon it is, "For His strength and might fill the world." Therefore, even if we did not actually see this display of might and power, we must, nevertheless, increase the Heavenly fear in our hearts.

Story About the Chafetz Chayim



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A Jewish merchant from faraway China who travelled around the world on business matters met the Chafetz Chayim. The Chafetz Chayim asked him what was happening in China. The merchant answered that all was well and things were as they usually were. But the Chafetz Chayim asked him if there had not recently been a tragedy in China. He responded that there indeed had been. In China, he said, there is a large dam that was built to prevent water from spreading. They dried the land, built houses, and settled the area. However, years later, the dam burst and decimated the entire area, destroying the houses and killing tens of thousands. The Chafetz Chayim was shocked and began to cry over the very terrible tragedy. The merchant asked the Chafetz Chayim why he was so upset; the people who suffered were gentiles – what difference did it make if a tragedy befell them? The Chafetz Chayim responded with a question asking the merchant if he had ever been in the marketplace in Warsaw. The merchant responded that he had been. He then asked what would happen if he stood on a chair in the marketplace and started speaking words of *mussar* – would people listen to him? The merchant replied that practically everybody in the market were gentiles, and they would therefore not understand what he was saying. Only if a Jew would pass by, would his words have a chance of being heeded. The Chafetz Chayim then told him, "Listen to what you are saying. If you speak *mussar* in the market, the gentiles would not understand; only if a Jew would pass by would there be someone to talk to. So too, when Hashem brings a tragedy to the world, He speaking to the gentiles who do not believe? They will certainly not listen. If so, to whom is Hashem speaking? There is no doubt that He is speaking to the Jewish Nation. However, to avoid punishing the Jews, He shows us that He controls the world. It happens to the Nations of the World so that the Jews should see, hear, and accept reproach. This is the obligation of every man – to contemplate how Hashem directs the world and to examine his ways."

Words of Mussar for Our Times

These are words of *mussar* that are especially appropriate for our times, when to our sorrow, we see terrible tragedies occurring frequently, not to the gentile nations, but to the Jewish Nation itself. It seems, *chas ve'shalom*, that since the tragedies that took place amongst the nations did not arouse the Jewish Nation to repent, the disasters have therefore drawn nearer to us. It has begun to affect Jews themselves, to arouse us to self-introspection and repentance. Therefore, it is a requirement for each and every individual to inspire himself as well as others to make a spiritual accounting. He must consider how he can improve his deeds, and not simply carry on in life as if nothing has happened, as if it is not relevant to him. For the moment that tragedies take Jewish lives, *Racmana litzlan*, instead of the gentiles or Jewish property, it is a sign that the predicament is a very severe one. Therefore, one should seize the moment and try to ensure his wellbeing by praying and studying Torah excessively and to also perform acts of kindness. By doing so, he will awaken Hashem's mercy for the Jewish Nation, and we will merit seeing an end to our suffering, a hastening of the redemption, and the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*, speedily in our days. *Amen ve'amen*.

**Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,
Rav Mordechai Malka**