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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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עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Parashat Va'eira

The Requirement to be Aware of the Effects of One's Actions

In *Parashat Va'eira*, the Torah states (7:3-5), "I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and I will increase My signs and wonders in the Land of Egypt: And Pharaoh will not listen to you. And I will place My hand on Egypt and I will take out My legions – My Nation, *Bnei Yisrael* – from the land of Egypt, with great judgments: And Egypt will know that I am Hashem, when I extend My hand over Egypt, and I will take out *Bnei Yisrael* from amongst them."

Questions:

1) The Maharal asks: How is it possible that Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart and took away his free-choice so that others would learn a lesson from him? 2) He furthermore asks why Pharaoh was punished – he was not responsible since Hashem had hardened his heart! 3) Why is it written in *pesukim* 3 and 4 that Hashem placed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, while in *pasuk* 5 it states, "And I will take out *Bnei Yisrael* from amongst them"? 4) Furthermore, in *pasuk* 4 it already states, "and I will take out My legions – My Nation, *Bnei Yisrael* – from the land of Egypt." Why does the *pasuk* therefore repeat in *pasuk* 5, "and I will take out *Bnei Yisrael* from amongst them?" 5) What does the *pasuk* add by stating, "And Egypt will know that I am Hashem?" As far as freeing the Jewish Nation from their bondage is concerned, why does it make a difference whether or not the Egyptians know that He is Hashem? 6) The *rishonim* furthermore ask why the Torah commands us to perform many mitzvot in memory of *yetziat Mitzrayim*. As we know that twice daily, each individual is commanded to recite *Kriyat Shema* in order to remember the exodus from Egypt.

Lack of Sensitivity to the Effects of One's Actions

We are witness to a reality that many individuals do not display enough sensitivity and thought to the results of their actions. This is because it is the accepted way in Western Civilization for society to act democratically. This connotes freedom of speech and expression and freedom to act as one pleases. This is expressed, for example, inside the *Knesset*, where stormy debates erupt in a lowly and inappropriate fashion between the representatives and noteworthy figures in the legislature. They do not consider just how much this impacts on Israeli society, whether it be the language that they use or the way they denigrate each other. Another example: It is within the power of the media to spill the blood of elected officials before the world's eyes, without thinking about the results of their actions and what they lead to. Similarly, there is unbridled incitement and slander against the *Chareidi* community, and it would not be believed to what extent this negatively effects the Israeli society and causes baseless hatred amongst Jews. Even if we would agree that an individual is responsible for his own actions and that he has the right to do as he pleases, however, the influence on his fellow and that which others learn from his actions, **that** Democracy and Western culture do not take into account. However, our holy Torah teaches us that with all the freedom of expression and deeds that every individual possesses, he still has a responsibility to think and be careful about the effects of his speech and actions, as we will soon explain.

The Maharal's Explanation as to Why Egypt was Punished

Now we can explain the questions that we previously asked on the *parasha*. The Maharal, in his *sefer, Gevurot Hashem* (*perek* 31) asks why Hashem struck Pharaoh with so many plagues in Egypt, "in order to increase His wonders in the land of Egypt?" He asks that if Pharaoh wished to listen, why did Hashem harden his heart until he was no longer able to listen? If so, the plagues were delivered unnecessarily, because Pharaoh and the Egyptians did not sin! The Maharal explains that this is not difficult at all. Rather, since the wicked Pharaoh said "Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice," and everyone knew about his heresy, he and those who were with him caused that Hashem's Name should not be known. This caused a desecration of His Name. Therefore, it was now fitting that the Name of Hashem should be publicized, since Pharaoh and the Egyptians were denying



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it. Therefore, Hashem said, "I will harden the heart of Pharaoh, and I will increase My signs and wonders in the Land of Egypt ... And Egypt will know that My Name is Hashem." This is in place of what Pharaoh said, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice?" **Therefore Pharaoh was responsible to rectify his previous error, so that by doing so, Hashem's Name would become known. This is why Hashem hardened his heart** so that he would not listen. This way Hashem would be able to strike him with the first five plagues, and Hashem's Name would become known.

The Maharal is teaching us, therefore, that it was because of the Egyptians' heresy that the Jews descended until the 49th gate of impurity. Therefore the Egyptians were required to rectify that which they marred. This is why Hashem punished the Nations of the World, so that the Jewish Nation would see and learn to rectify their ways. [See the *Meshech Chachma* who writes similarly.]

Analogy of the Kol Yehudah

R' Yehudah Tzadkah, in his *sefer, Kol Yehudah*, explains this idea by way of a parable: There was a wealthy man who hired a nursemaid for his baby son. The baby took ill and needed strong medications that could not be administered to a small baby. The doctor therefore suggested that the nursemaid drink the medicine so that this would have a positive effect on the baby. However, the nursemaid rejected the proposal, for why should she be forced to suffer for the sake of the baby? Understandably, they went to a *din Torah*, and the *rav* residing ruled that the nursemaid was obligated to drink the medicine. He replied that since the baby was nursing from her, she had caused his illness, and she was therefore also required to heal him. So too, explained R' Tzadkah, is the way of Hashem – He punishes the Nations of the World, because it is due to their wicked ways that the Jews were influenced to also act poorly. The gentiles are therefore required to rectify the negative effects that they had on the Jewish Nation. Therefore, by punishing the Nations of the World, the Jewish Nation awakens and repents. This is why Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart.

The Great Principle of Zecher Yetziat Mitzrayim

From here we can learn a great principle in *avodat Hashem*. By always remembering *yetziat Mitzrayim*, we learn a lesson from Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who were punished with mighty plagues because they caused the Jewish Nation to sin by imbuing them with their crooked worldview. They are therefore responsible to rectify that which they wrecked. Everything that happened with Pharaoh and Egypt is but a parable to learn that it is incumbent upon each individual to contemplate every word that he speaks and every act that he performs. He must think about how will affect others, because he will be tried and punished for every individual upon whom he exerts a negative influence.

Explanation of the Requirement to be Justified in the Eyes of the Jews as Well

I humbly believe that this is the Torah's intention by commanding (*Bamidbar* 32:22), "And you shall be justified by Hashem and by Israel." This must be clarified – if man is justified in Hashem's eyes, why need he be concerned with what others think about him? People see only with their human eyes, but Hashem sees the heart and knows the truth. However, according to what we explained it is understandable: When an individual affects others adversely with his deeds, he is responsible and will be held accountable. Therefore the Torah states that it is not enough for man to be innocent only as far as Heaven is concerned. Rather, he is required to think and make sure that he has not caused his friend to stumble. If his friend sees him do something which appears incorrect, he may learn from it and do similarly. From here we discover the definition of "one who sins and causes the masses to sin." It does not only refer to someone who actively goes and tries to influence others. Rather, even passively – when individuals learn from his wicked deeds, he is considered to be one who causes the masses to sin. Similarly, it has been said in the name of R' Yisrael Salanter *zt"l* that anyone who studies Torah in public can be either one who merits the masses or one who causes the masses to sin; this is because each deed has either a positive or negative influence. **This has also been stated in the Rambam's Iggeret HaRambam (Maamar Kiddush Hashem).** The Rambam writes that man must be concerned lest his deeds cause the public to tell derogatory stories about him. For even if he has not sinned, if they do speak negatively about



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him, he has desecrated the Name of Hashem. He writes that this can be divided up into two categories: The first is that a *chacham* should not do a deed that is permitted to everyone, but inappropriate for him – this is a desecration of Hashem's Name. An example of this is what Rav said (*Yoma* 86a), that it would be a desecration of Hashem's Name for him to take meat and not pay immediately. In other words, it would be inappropriate for someone of his caliber to take something without paying immediately. Even though this is a permitted action, for him it would be inappropriate. Similarly, R' Yochanan said that it would be a desecration of Hashem's Name for him to walk four *amot* without *tefillin*, etc. This is because for someone of his stature, it would not be fitting. This is as we find throughout the Talmud that "for an important person it is different." The second category is for a *chacham* to act in a lowly and unpleasant manner in his business dealings and the like, to greet people with anger and disgrace, and not to interact well with others. If he does not act with sparkling and proper *middot* when he is with others – he has desecrated the Name of Hashem. This is what our Sages state (*Yoma* ibid.), that one who studies Torah but does not conduct his business honestly, and does not speak pleasantly with mankind; what does mankind say about him ... So says the Rambam.

Our Sages Forbade Things Because They Arouse Suspicion

Similarly, in *halacha* we find many prohibitions that were enacted because if one performs them, it will cause people to think that he is doing a sin or neglecting to perform a positive mitzvah. This is all to teach us that if someone learns from his misdeeds, he will be held responsible; otherwise why would our Sages penalize him for the misperceptions of others?

The Offspring of Tzaddikim

With this we can understand what our Sages expounded on the *pasuk*, "These are the generations of Noach. Noach was a righteous man" – we see from here that the offspring [- lit. "generations"] of the *tzaddik* are the mitzvot and good deeds that he performs. In other words, since someone who sees the behavior of a *tzaddik* learns from his deeds and they influence him for the best, these are therefore the "offspring" of his deeds. This is to say that not only does he receive reward for the good deed itself, but even for the effect that his deeds have on others. This applies throughout all the generations: To whatever extent that he influences and strengthens an individual in his *avodat Hashem*, he receives merit for both him and all his ensuing generations.

What is Din [Judgment] and Cheshbon [Accounting]?

According to this, it seems that we can explain the intention of the Tanna in *Pirkei Avot* [3:1], "Akavia ... And before whom you will give a *din* and *cheshbon*." The commentators ask that *din* and *cheshbon* seem to be the same thing, and there appears to be a redundancy in the Mishnah. Furthermore, it would apparently make more sense to first write *cheshbon* [accounting] and then write *din* [judgment]. According to what was explained above, we can understand that *din* refers to the actual act of sin the individual performed. Yet *cheshbon* refers to the adverse effects that each one of his deeds had on others. Sometimes the *cheshbon* will be greater than the actual sin. I humbly believe that from here we can learn even more; namely, that even the *mitzvot* that an individual performs can incur a punishment. For example, one who performs a mitzvah, but does not carry it out completely – like someone who recites *birkat hamazon* and busies himself with something else while saying it; someone who comes to *tefillah*, but arrives late; someone who speaks in middle of *Tefillah*; someone who speaks inappropriately; one who quickly grabs the next spot on line by the checkout counter; one who cuts the line in an uncivilized fashion – and the like. For one who sees him acting in such a manner, learns from him to make light of mitzvot and even to imitate this bad behavior, and for this he will be required to give a *din* and *cheshbon*. This is a very difficult thing to avoid, and the *cheshbon* is harsher than the sin. According to this, the *din* is for the sins that he committed, and the *cheshbon* is for even the *mitzvot* that he performed, if they had negative effects on others.



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For the Sin We Committed With the Yetzer Hara

We can ask on the text of the *viduy* that we say on Yom Kippur – “For the sin we committed with the *yetzer hara*.” This is apparently difficult, for aren’t all sins committed with the *yetzer hara*? Why is there a separate *viduy* for this? However, according to what we have said, we can explain that the intention of this confession is not for the **sins** he committed – those were certainly done because of the *yetzer hara*. Rather, the intention is for the **mitzvot** that man does together with the *yetzer hara*. As we have said many times, these are the mitzvot that teach others to make light of mitzvot, such as coming late to *tefillah*; speaking in middle of *tefillah*; using a cell-phone in middle of *tefillah*; arriving late to a learning session or *shiur*, etc. – these all stem from the *yetzer hara*, who has planted an insensitivity inside of him for the performance of mitzvot. This is like the parable that is brought in the Pesach Haggadah of the *Ben Ish Chai* in the name of the *Shaar Hachatzet*: There was an individual who violated the entire Torah; however, on Yom Kippur he would try to act differently than on other days of the year by eating only kosher. He certainly did so to ease his conscience by slightly listening to the voice of his *yetzer hara* and slightly to the voice of his *yetzer hatov*. It is exactly like *kla'im*, a forbidden mixture. Similarly, each individual who contemplates his deeds, will see that they are mixed with both his *yetzer hara* and his *yetzer hatov*. It is for this which he confesses in the *viduy* on Yom Kippur.

Words of Mussar

You have learned just how much man is required to consider the effects that his words and deeds with have on others; he must be even more concerned with this than how they will affect he himself. He must be especially careful to speak and act properly before the eyes of others, lest he affect them negatively, for which he will be held responsible. One who is greater or held in more esteem than his friend, is liable to a greater degree. According to this principle, it is not enough for man to repent for his deeds; rather, he must worry about how he will rectify all of the effects caused by his actions. Therefore it appears that from here we can present an important enactment – everyone is required to pray to Hashem that the hearts of all those whom he affected adversely, should be awakened to repent fully. Only then will he be able to rectify every flaw that he caused. By doing so, we will merit performing the Will of Hashem and being blessed with all the blessings written in the Torah that are intended for those who carry out His Will.

Anyone who wishes to receive this *dvar Torah* by email and to also hear the *shiur* that is delivered on Kol Chai radio on Friday morning, can please call 050-600-0318 and give us your email address, or send it to rabi.m.malka@gmail.com, and it will be sent to him *be'ezrat Hashem*.

Shabbat Shalom U'Mevorach,
Rav Mordechai Malka