

The only thing we can do is cry out! – Parashat Va'eira

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January 8, 2024



No matter how much we try to escape from the evil inclination, it continually attempts to entrap us. The only advice we have is to cry out to God, because prayer and crying out always help.

In this week's *parashah*, *Parashat Va'eira*, the Torah describes the plagues with which God forcefully struck the Egyptians—plague after plague. God had an objective: to fulfill His promise to our forefathers to take the Jewish nation out of Egypt. Pharaoh refused to let them go and arrogantly denied the existence of the Creator, telling Moses, "Who is God that I should listen to His voice?" (Exodus 5:2). The Creator showed him His power in increasing stages, starting with the plague of blood. With a fine-tuned strategy,

He increased the force of the plagues until—in next week's *parashah, Parashat Bo*, the Plague of the Firstborn was the breaking point of the Egyptians and Pharaoh, when they finally submitted unconditionally and sent the Jews out of Egypt.

It is amazing to see how God sent plague after plague, yet each time Pharaoh hardened his heart and was not willing to surrender. Sometimes it looked like he would finally give in—in certain instances, he was even willing to enter into negotiations and to concede on certain issues. But each time, he refused in the end and was not willing to accept God's demands unconditionally.

The Torah mentions again and again the same cycle of events: "Pharaoh's heart was hardened" (Exodus 7:13, 7:22). As soon as the situation got a bit better, Pharaoh immediately hardened his heart and refused to send the Jews out of Egypt. As soon as Pharaoh saw there had been a reprieve, he hardened his heart (ibid. 8:11).

What can we learn from this? Reb Noson teaches:

All this can serve as an example for us regarding each Jew's serving God. What happened to Pharaoh is also what happens to each and every one of us. Each person has his own Egypt. All we want is our problems to end and to attain some kind of spiritual level. But when the evil inclination sees that someone is trying to release himself from his grip and get out from under his control in order to serve God in the way that the tzaddik teaches him, it strengthens himself and tries to do just as it did to Pharaoh: to make his burden greater and to load him up with more problems. In this way, he overwhelms him so that he should give in completely, stop fighting and return to his bad habits.

What happened to Pharaoh is also what happens to each and every one of us. Each person has his own Egypt. All we want is our problems to end and to attain some kind of spiritual

level.

When Pharaoh made the working conditions more difficult for the Jews, Datan and Aviram rebelled against Moses. They said, "You have made our very scent abhorrent in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants, to place a sword in their hands to murder us" (ibid. 5:21). Datan and Aviram simply despaired. They chided Moses, "Here you are seemingly trying to take us out of Egypt, but in fact you are giving Pharaoh a 'bargaining chip' to make our enslavement even worse. Leave us alone. Why have you done this to us? Do you really think that we will win? Don't you see that we have no chance?" They did not believe in the possibility of change and of breaking out of the Egyptians' domination. The same thing happens to every person who loses his faith that he can get out from under the hand of the evil inclination and serve God.

When a person is stubborn and wants to merit leaving Egypt, and begins to serve God regularly, the powers that oppose holiness take a few knocks from him and are weakened. But then these evil forces regroup and gain new inspiration to fight back and not allow him to continue to serve God. This is exactly like Pharaoh. Notice how many times Pharaoh took a blow and submitted, but immediately afterwards he returned to his impudence and again refused to give in.



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Moreover, even after the Tenth Plague, when Pharaoh was completely subdued and allowed the Jews to leave Egypt, the terminology is not exact. He did not “allow” them to leave, but literally cried and begged them to go. It would have seemed that for sure this was the end and the Jews wouldn’t hear from him again. But after six days had passed, Pharaoh pursued them with 600 chariots to bring them back to Egypt.

From all of this we can learn what it is like for each and every person.

Every exile is based on the Egyptian exile. Even when a person has full-heartedly accepted upon himself to serve God, he must still go through difficult and bitter tests provided by the evil inclination. This is just like the Jewish nation who left Egypt, and passed through the Sea, and received the Torah on Mount Sinai—and then fell into sin, the very worst sin, of the golden calf and served idols.

For there are many levels to the evil inclination, and even if a person has destroyed one level, there are many more levels

to break. The battle is eternal and unending, as our Sages teach, "You can never be sure of yourself until the day you die."

What lesson comes out of all this? Reb Noson concludes:

A person always needs to cry out to God and to discard and reject all kinds of wisdoms that could confuse him. He should go with truth and simplicity and then he will never fall, because crying out in prayer, supplication and requests always helps, and whatever will be, will be.

(Based on Likutey Halakhot, Shiluach HaKen, 4:6)