



MENUCHAV'SIMCHA

Candle Lighting 4:42 PM

Vol. 17 Issue 11

DECIDING YOUR DESTINY

Parshas Vaerach

By Rabbi Aharon Sperka

ואני אקשה את לב פרעה והרביתי את אתתי ואת מופתי בארץ מצרים

"But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, so that I may multiply My signs and marvels in the land of Egypt." (7:3)

This pasuk raises a very strong question as it seems to go against the whole concept of בחירה - free choice. When a person makes a decision to act a certain way, he can be held accountable for its outcome. A good deed will earn him reward while a sin will land him retribution. If a person is forced to do a certain action, however, he cannot be liable for it, as it isn't his doing. It is certainly not the way of Hashem to put people in situations where they are forced to sin. Yet we find that Hashem coerced Pharaoh into sinning and then held him accountable and punished him. How can this be?

Many commentators discuss this question. Let's focus on the approach of the Ramban. He begins by quoting a Midrash. "...Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish answered, 'He laughs at mockers' (Mishlei 3:34), if he was warned once, twice and a third time and he did not repent, Hashem closes the door of teshuvah so as to extract retribution from him for what he sinned. So too with the evil Pharaoh, Hashem sent warnings to him five times and he did not listen to Hashem's words. Hashem said to him: 'You stiffened your neck and you made your own heart heavy, behold I am going to add impurity to your impurity.'" (Midrash Rabbah 13:4) The Ramban continues, "And here is the answer to the question that everyone asks: If G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart, what then was his transgression [since he had no choice]?"

...Pharaoh, in his wickedness, had unjustifiably treated the Jews terribly, so he was punished with the withdrawal of the path of repentance... "

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva (6:3) elaborates similarly, "And, it is possible that a man should commit either one grievous iniquity or a multitude of sins so that the Judge of Truth will decree against him that, whereas this sinner committed those sins of his own free will and consciously, repentance should be withheld from him altogether, and grant him no leave to repent, so that he might die and perish in the iniquity he committed... It is, therefore, written in the Torah; "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart" (Ex. 14.4), because at the beginning he sinned of his own free will, and meted out evil to Israel... Thereafter justice demanded to withhold repentance from him, so that due punishment might be visited upon him. Therefore, the Holy One, blessed is He hardened his heart... "

This requires explanation. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos teaches us שכר מצוה ומצוה ושכר עבירה. This is meant literally: The reward of a mitzvah is the mitzvah itself and the punishment for a sin the sin itself. A mitzvah brings in its wake a special closeness to Hashem and a momentous spirit of holiness that lifts the doer higher.



Continue on the other side

SAGE ADVICE WORDS OF WISDOM FROM OUR SAGES

BY RABBI AVRAHAM PENDRAK

BROTHERS MATTER

קח אהרן את אלישבעת עמינדב אחות נחשון לו לאשה
"And Aharon took Elisheva, the daughter of Aminadav, the sister of Nachshon for himself as a wife." (Vaerach 6:23)

"And Aharon took Elisheva, the daughter of Aminadav, the sister of Nachshon for himself as a wife."

Chazal derive from here that when a man marries a woman he should check if her brothers are of good character.

One who marries a woman needs to look into her brothers, as it says here, "Aharon took Elisheva...the sister of Nachshon...". If the Posuk already tells us that Elisheva was the daughter of Aminadav, do we not know on our own that she was the sister of Nachshon? Why does the Posuk have to add the words, "the sister of Nachshon"?

From this we understand the importance of investigating into the brothers of a woman one wants to marry, as most sons turn out similar to their mother's brothers.

[Bava Basra 110a]

Menucha Vesimcha has been dedicated by **Kutest Kids Early Intervention Services.**

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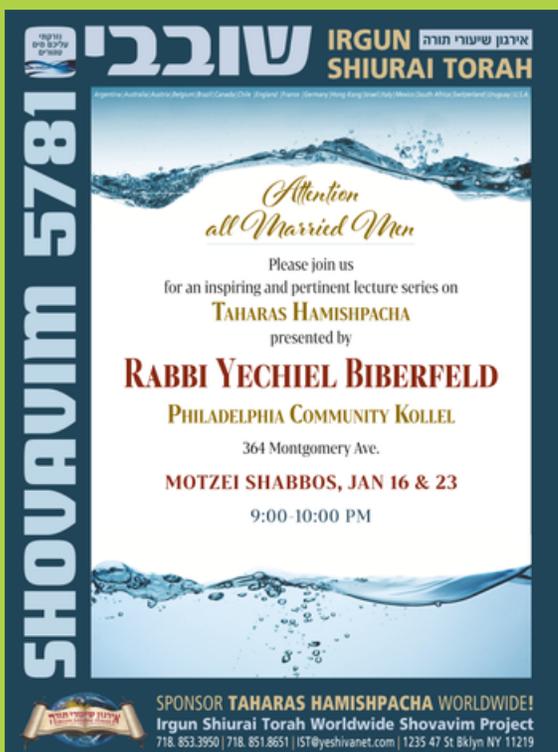
MENUCHAV'SIMCHA

That itself is the real reward of a mitzvah. Likewise, the punishment for a sin is the separation and severance from Hashem. The pain and suffering that are the result of a sin are secondary to this much greater penalty. The more a person sins, the further he distances himself from Hashem and it is possible to eventually reach a point of no return. The sinning itself is what brings a person to a place where he can no longer do teshuva. Why? Rabbi Dessler explains that when a person commits a sin, there is a spirit of foolishness that takes hold of him and he later regrets his action. But if he repeats his actions, the foolishness that drove him to sin in the first place takes hold of his judgment, and affects his perception. He begins to believe that he did nothing wrong, and no longer regrets his actions. He continues his bad conduct and does not look back. Eventually, it becomes an ideal that he lives with. This is in line with what Chazal teach us כיון שעבר אדם עבירה ושנה בה נעשית לו כהיתר - If a person transgresses and repeats, it becomes to him as if its permitted. (Kiddushin 20a)

Sam was a diabetic who had a strong craving for sweets and an intolerance to insulin. He knew that sugary foods are harmful for him, but his desires were so strong that he was not able to resist his urge. At first, he would enjoy small amounts of sweets and would then regret it, for he knew it was dangerous for him. After several violations of the doctor's orders, his attitude changed. He was no longer troubled by his prognosis. Instead, he took pride in the fact that he would not let his medical condition compromise his way of life. As he continued to consume more and more sweet foods, he became more and more convinced that he was doing the right thing. He continued this way until he died a short while later.

Pharaoh acted in a similar way. He knew from the onset that he was wrong for enslaving the Jews and tormenting them, but he convinced himself that he was doing the right thing. He made an ideology out of it. There was no way for him to repent because as far as his corrupted mind was concerned, he was a tzaddik, and nothing he did required teshuva. This is all the working of Hashem. It is the nature that Hashem put into creation and into the human psyche. Had Pharaoh realized in time, he would have been able to do teshuva, but by indulging in sin and making a שיטה out of it, he got himself stuck in the quagmire of sin, and sunk ever deeper. Hashem hardened his heart, but only because Pharaoh chose to go in that direction. Hashem simply played along with the rules that Pharaoh had chosen.

This is a great lesson we can learn from Pharaoh. It is easy for us to excuse our bad habits and actions, but if we are not on top of our game, we can find ourselves in situations of no return. This goes the other way as well. When we choose to do mitzvos and pursue actions that bring us close to Hashem, we set ourselves on a course of greatness and holiness. Our destiny is in our hands. We can choose which way we want to go and whichever way we choose, we will get there.



SHOVAVIM 5781

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שובבי

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PARSHAS VAERAH SHABBOS ZEMANIM

Friday, January 15

4:42 pm - Candle Lighting

4:45 pm - Mincha/Maariv

5:00 pm - Shkiya/Sunset

Shabbos, January 16

8:15 am - Shacharis

9:09/9:45 am - Latest

Krias Shema

4:21 pm - Mincha

5:01 pm - Shkiya/Sunset

5:56 pm - Maariv

6:13 pm - 72 minutes

6:45 pm - Masmid