

BESHALACH (EXODUS 13:17-17:16)

Some People Just Don't Get It!

2005 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Ah, they don't make kings the way they used to! Or do they?

The king of Egypt was, to say the least, a very stubborn man. He never did seem to get it. His country was absolutely destroyed over his obstinate refusal to release his Hebrew slaves. Repeatedly, Moses told him to let the Israelites leave. Repeatedly, he refused. Repeatedly, he responded to G-d's punishment with a contrite promise to comply. Repeatedly, he changed his mind.

Even after the Exodus, when the Pharaoh had finally done the right thing, he changed his mind:

*Pharaoh and his servants had a change of heart ab**out the Nation (of Israel*). “What have we done,” they said, “*by freeing Israel from our service?!” (Exodus, 14:5)*

The Egyptians pursued us into the Red Sea. Even when G-d miraculously parted the waters of the Red Sea for Israel, the Egyptians still tried to destroy us. They cast all logic to the wind and ran into the sea where they ultimately drowned. They hated us so much that they ignored all reason and common sense.

Sort of reminds us of most of today's world leaders. No matter what Israel does, it's no good. No matter what the Arab terrorists do, they are “freedom fighters,” peaceful people who have been driven from their homeland by vicious Zionist marauders. The U.N. and the European Union don't seem to recognize the truth when it stares them in the face. They just don't get it.

Forget about logic. Forget about fairness. When hatred for Israel drives your chariot, you will stop at absolutely nothing to accomplish your goals.

It is very frustrating. How are we supposed to manage when the leaders of the world don't get it? How can there ever be peace in the world when people who should know better are so illogical?

Why can't the world's leaders be more like the king of Nineveh? Yes, Nineveh, you remember Nineveh, don't you? Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. The Assyrians had exiled ten tribes of Israel. G-d had sent Jonah to Nineveh with an ultimatum: Repent or be destroyed.

After Jonah's famous “whale of a detour” he went to Nineveh where he announced, “*In forty days, Nineveh will be overturned!*” (Jonah, 3:4)

We already know from Pharaoh's behavior how he would have responded to such a decree. He would have ignored the warning, just as he ignored all of Moses' warnings. But this fellow was different:

The matter reached the king of Nineveh. He rose from his throne, removed his robe, dressed in sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He declared... "Let no one... taste food or drink water... Let everyone turn from his evil ways...Who knows, perhaps G-d will relent, and turn from His fierce anger, and we won't be destroyed!" (Ibid, verses 6-9)

What a pleasure! An enemy of Israel who is actually willing to listen to G-d's prophet! A world leader who gets it! Wouldn't it be nice if all the nations of the world were willing to listen to logic?

Why was the king of Nineveh so willing to heed G-d's call? Why was this man so different from Pharaoh? In order to understand the contrast between these two men, it is necessary to learn something about the king of Nineveh's past, and something about the Pharaoh.

Pharaoh was a survivor. He survived the Tenth Plague. Although he was a firstborn, G-d spared him so he could live to see the splitting of the Red Sea. All of the Egyptians who pursued Israel into the sea perished. Or did they?

The waters came back and covered the chariots and horsemen of the entire army of Pharaoh, who were coming behind them in the sea; NOT ONE OF THEM REMAINED. (Exodus, 14:28)

NOT ONE OF THEM REMAINED. There is another way to read this, another translation. Some commentaries read it *NO ONE REMAINED, EXCEPT FOR ONE.*

EXCEPT FOR ONE. Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer tells us that there was a lone survivor of "Pharaoh's Last Stand." Pharaoh himself lived to tell the story of what happened to his country as a result of his intransigence. Pharaoh knew what he had done. He was ruined. His army was destroyed. His land was devastated.

Pharaoh never returned to Egypt. He went away. He headed north, to Assyria. Pharaoh ended up in Nineveh. In fact, he ended up as king of Nineveh!

Can you see now why the king of Nineveh was so quick to respond to Jonah's warning? It seems that the king never even met Jonah! All it says is "*The matter reached the king of Nineveh.*" He heard about the prophecy; that was all he needed to know!

Can you envision the scene? "Listen folks. Trust me. If the G-d of Israel says to improve our ways or else, HE MEANS IT!! I know! I saw what happened at my old job! Please! Listen to me! YOU DON'T MESS WITH THE G-D OF ISRAEL!!!"

How do you like that?! Pharaoh, stubborn old Pharaoh. He finally figured it out! He finally got it!

And, someday, so will everybody else!

Have a great Shabbos.

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