



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת צו תש"ע 5770 Parshas Tzav

IS IGNORANCE BLISS?

A most striking aspect of the Pesach Haggadah is the enigmatic introduction to the Exodus narrative. A central section of the Haggadah is the exposition of the verses from *parshas* Ki Savo, which recount the ordeal of B'nei Yisrael in Mitzrayim and their subsequent, miraculous deliverance. Yet we begin this part by recalling the exploits of another nefarious character who opposed us from an even earlier period – Lavan, the implacable foe. As the Haggadah states:

צא ולמד מה בקש לבן הארמי לעשות ליעקב אבינו. שפרעה לא גזר אלא על הזכרים, ולבן בקש לעקור את הכל. שנאמר: ארמי אבד אבי.

“Go and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Ya'akov Avinu. For Pharaoh's death decree applied only to the Jewish males, whereas Lavan sought to uproot everyone, as it says (*Devarim* 26:5), ‘An Aramean (Lavan) sought to destroy my forefather.’”

NONE THE WISER

As mentioned previously in these pages, there are numerous aspects of this statement that bear examining. Of particular note is the sinister plot attributed to Lavan. The Haggadah seems to be stating that Lavan attempted the eradication of the Jewish people on a grand scale. Yet where, in fact, do we find record of such a massive plan? While a review of Lavan's activities as listed in the Torah (*parshas Chayei Sarah*, *parshas Vayeitzei*) reveals evidence of someone whose character was less than pristine, we do not find an explicit exhibition of Hitlerite behavior.

And so the question begs itself: what exactly is the Haggadah referring to? What were the particulars of Lavan's attempt at wholesale murder of the Jewish

people? And what is the Haggadah's intent in telling us something we know little – or nothing – about?

This itself – explains the Vilna Gaon – is precisely the point. *We* have no knowledge of what plots Lavan had been spinning, nor were the Jewish people who lived during Lavan's time aware of what he had in store for them. The Torah is revealing to us that, nevertheless, the lack of knowledge does not mean that there was no danger. In fact, the Jewish people had been facing extinction, and Hashem saved them, even without them knowing that there was anything amiss.

In other words, this is one of the ways in which Hashem conducts His world and shelters His people. While in every generation, they may be faced with real – yet unknown – peril, Hashem will often choose to shield them not only from the danger, but even from the knowledge that they ever were in any danger in the first place (*R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver, Si'ach Yitzchak*).

It is likewise interesting to note how much this idea comes into play in our daily lives.

CLOSE CALL

There is a poignant Talmudic phrase that appears in the context of an extremely fascinating occurrence: the eventful Purim *se'udah* (feast) of Rabbah and R' Zeira (*Megillah* 7b).

Celebrating with good spirits, Rabbah – in a state of intoxication – ended up slaughtering his companion, R' Zeira. Upon awakening the next day from his stupor, the realization of what had transpired sunk in. Being on an elevated spiritual level, though, Rabbah's prayers were able to effect a resurrection for his colleague.

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**MISHNAS
CHAYIM**

משנת היום

When Purim time rolled around the following year, Rabbah extended an invitation to R' Zeira once again. This time, R' Zeira declined, however, with the following explanation: **לא בכל שעתא ושעתא מתרחיש ניסא** (a miracle does not take place every time).

This same idea appears elsewhere, in a more sobering context. Rabbeinu Yonah borrows the phrase in his comments on the Mishnah in Avos (2:13), which states:

וכשאָתָה מִתְפַּלֵּל, אַל תַּעַשׂ תְּפִלְתְּךָ קָבַע, אֲלֵא רַחֲמִים וְתַחֲנוּנִים לְפָנֵי הַמְּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

“When you *daven*, do not act as if the prayer is a burden; rather, consider it as a petition for mercy before the Omnipresent One, Blessed Be He.”

Rabbeinu Yonah stresses the need to experience true contrition when offering prayers. If an individual was aware of the reality of his situation, his smugness would disappear in an instant.

Why do many of us approach *davening* with a certain measure of sluggishness? All too often, only a person in the midst of an extremely difficult, dangerous, or frightening situation feels the need to passionately beseech the Almighty for assistance. It is an individual involved in his daily and familiar routine who does not feel a pressing need to supplicate before the Master of the World.

In truth, this feeling of calm is completely erroneous; the average person actually faces more peril than he may care to know. No individual is completely free of sin (*Koheles 7:20*), nor impervious, therefore, to the scepter of retribution. The only reason, in fact, that he is not immediately stricken is because of Hashem's merciful attributes, whereby He *temporarily* overlooks a person's failings. That a person continues to merit health and sustenance despite his personal sinfulness is only by the Graciousness of Hashem.

But this is not a permanent situation. While Hashem will patiently wait for the individual to repent and continues to supply his needs in the interim, the “bill” will eventually come due. When He sees fit, Hashem can decide that enough is enough, and this individual is no longer deserving of Long-Sufferance.

When a person realizes that his very existence is only due to an extraordinary measure of Divine Forbearance, he may begin to appreciate the urgency of prayer. Referring to a person's daily life, Rabbeinu Yonah employs the same language used by R' Zeira to describe his transcendental experience. A person should pray fervently for his daily needs, Rabbeinu Yonah says, and not take for granted that they will always be present. For “one cannot rely on the assumption that a miracle will occur at every moment.”

We may be blissfully unaware of the dangers that lurk against individuals in our daily lives or against the nation in every generation. Chazal have tried to impart to us, however, that these challenges are, in fact, very real. We can merit the Divine Protection we so desperately need by turning our hearts to the Almighty in sincere prayer.

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