

וארא

TWO PATHS — ONE CHOICE

The *Sefas Emes* (643) points out that Moshe used different expressions of prayer after each individual *makah* (plague).

ויצעק משה אל ה'

And Moshe cried unto Hashem (*Shemos* 8:8).

ויעתר אל ה'

And [Moshe] entreated Hashem (ibid. 8:26).

He goes on to suggest that these different types of *tefilah* indicate that each *makah* revealed to *Klal Yisrael* another of the “ten expressions of prayer” (עשרה לשונות של תפילה) (see *Sifri, Va'eschanan* 3:23; *Devarim Rabbah, Va'eschanan* 1). In order to properly prepare for the redemption, *Klal Yisrael* had to become conversant with all the different forms of *tefilah*.

צעקה מקרעת גזר דין של אדם

Crying out cancels the doom of man (*Rosh Hashanah* 16:).

By studying each *makah*, and recognizing therein the greatness of Hashem, *Klal Yisrael* demonstrated their desire to come closer to Hashem. Hence, they were Divinely gifted with the ability to reach greater heights through *tefilah*. Each *makah* revealed to them a greater level of prayer, and it was only through prayer that the redemption was finally possible (Ramban, *Shemos* 2:25).

The reverse trend is apparent with relation to Pharaoh and Mitzraim. The *Midrash (Shemos Rabbah* 5:7) states that Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart so as to punish him.

ואני אקשה את לב פרעה

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart (*Shemos* 7:3).

Rabbi Yochanan (*Shemos Rabbah* 13:3) warned that this act might be a pretext for the heretics to claim that Hashem did not permit Pharaoh to do *teshuvah*. Reish Lakish responds: Hashem gives several warnings; if the sinner pays no heed to these warnings, the doors of repentance are closed to him in order to punish him for his sin.

The Ramban (*Shemos* 7:3) explains this concept in reference to Pharaoh. Pharaoh in his wickedness had unjustifiably perpetrated such horrible crimes against *Klal Yisrael* that Hashem withheld the possibility of repentance from him. This was so that he would be judged by the wretchedness of the acts which he committed of his own free will. The first five plagues came upon Pharaoh as a warning which he did not heed. At that point his free-will was removed from him. During the second set of five plagues his heart was Divinely hardened. In fact his will did soften, but only due to his weariness from the intense onslaught of the *makos*. Pharaoh had still

not recognized Hashem. Under such circumstances, G-d decided not to permit Pharaoh to repent, so that due to the worldwide publicity of the plagues, “I will magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Eternal.”

The Ibn Ezra (ibid.) explains that man is endowed with the wisdom to improve his ways; to remove the evil from his heart. The implication is that if man does not utilize this wisdom to repent, then that right will be taken away from him.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 6:3) states that Hashem withholds the ability to repent from the sinner, so that “he may die and perish in the sins which he committed.” Thus Yeshayah prophesied, “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and close their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn and be healed” (*Yeshayah* 6:10). The people were so wicked and so deserving of punishment that the liberty to repent was removed from them. In a similar vein, the *Navi* disparages the sinners, “But they mocked the messengers of G-d, and despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Hashem arose against His people, till there was no remedy” (*Divrei Hayamim* II 36:16). Justice required that repentance be withheld from them until retribution could be visited upon them.

The Ramban (*Shemos* 7:3) asks why, if Hashem’s intention was to harden Pharaoh’s heart, did He send Moshe to Pharaoh with additional warnings to repent? The Ramban answers: the entire scenario was merely a demonstration by Hashem. The Al-mighty will remove the privilege of *bechirah* from a sinner who, ignoring all warnings, persistently and voraciously continues his transgressions. Hashem never decreed that Pharaoh should mistreat *Klal Yisrael*; Pharaoh’s iniquity was borne of his own volition.

Similarly, Sichon, because of his sins, was penalized by having the opportunity for *teshuvah* withheld from him. “For Hashem hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand “ (*Devarim* 2:30). Thus because of the Canaanite’s abominations, Hashem also withheld repentance from them until they waged war against *Klal Yisrael*. “For it was of Hashem to harden their hearts, to come against Israel in battle that they might be utterly destroyed” (*Yehoshua* 11:20). It is people who choose sin, not Hashem; it is only after repeatedly ignored warnings that Hashem removes their ability to repent, and the transgressor becomes locked into an eternal state of sin.

This is evident from the incident related in the *Gemara* (*Gittin* 56:) regarding the imminent conversion of Onkelos. Prior to converting, Onkelos conjured up the images of various sinners to consult with them regarding his plans for conversion. In the netherworld of *Geihinom*, where the truth is clearly evident, all the sinners reported to Onkelos that *Klal Yisrael* was considered first among all the nations. Nevertheless, they all advised him to oppose rather than join with *Klal Yisrael*, for even when the truth is abundantly clear, their hardened hearts remained firm. The ability to repent still eluded them, and remained distant from them, as part of their eternal damnation.

בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכין אותו

Upon the path which a man wants to travel, is he directed (*Makos* 10:).

Hashem looks into a man's heart and discerns the direction he wishes to take in life: he is then Divinely aided in pursuing that direction (see Maharsha *ibid.*). No road is forced upon him. Whatever action a man desires to take, be it good or evil, is abetted by Heaven. If man demonstrates to Hashem that he wants to improve himself, Hashem gifts him with improvements. Should man embark on a path of evil there will be no Divine interference, but there will be Heavenly aid to that end (Maharal, *Chidushei Aggados* *ibid.*).

בא ליטמא פותחין לו, בא ליטהר מסייעים אותו

If he comes to defile himself, the doors are opened for him; if he comes to purify himself he is helped (*Shabbos* 104•; *Yoma* 38:).

Hashem recognized that *Klal Yisrael* hungered for His glory, and so that became the form of their Divine guidance; He recognized that Pharaoh and Mitzraim sought to oppose Him — and so He also helped them further along their wicked path.

This principle applies to both *Klal Yisrael* and gentiles. For at the same time that *Klal Yisrael* was growing spiritually from the lessons of the *makos*, there was also a significant group of Egyptians who were doing the same. *Targum Yonasan* (*Shemos* 12:38) reveals that 240,000 Egyptians joined with *Klal Yisrael* in the exodus from Mitzraim. This group, the *eirev rav*, gained this privilege by carefully analyzing and studying the *makos* and they came to the realization of the truth of Hashem.

Put into proper perspective, this group of Egyptians were eligible to witness the “parting of the sea” and “*Kabbolas Hatorah*,” while eighty percent of *Klal Yisrael* were doomed to perish during the *makah* of *choshech* (Rashi, *ibid.* 13:18; 10:22). This apparent discrepancy can be very easily explained. The 240,000 members of the *eirev rav* demonstrated their desire to achieve closeness to Hashem; hence, Hashem helped them along that path. Only twenty percent of *Klal Yisrael* displayed an active interest; hence they were the ones aided by Hashem to that end.

It must be understood that when Rashi (*ibid.*) refers to that eighty percent as “*resha'im*” — “wicked ones” — that designation is only relative to the enthusiastic twenty percent. The sole purpose of the Mitzraim experience was as a preparation for *Kabbalas Hatorah*. Hashem required a nation that was prepared to respond to Him with the enthusiastic cry of “*naaseh venishma*.” Hashem was confident of the motivation of the twenty percent who actually did leave Mitzraim. The rest of the nation, the eighty percent, were indifferent in their devotion and sluggish in their sincerity. At Sinai they would have been foot draggers — probably claiming that they would have to “think it over.” They were in the majority, and could conceivably have had a discouraging influence on the other twenty percent. Heaven forbid, there might not have been a *Kabbalas Hatorah*. Hence, Hashem decided to benignly remove these recalcitrants from the scene — not necessarily as a punishment — but as a preventative measure. This eighty percent certainly went on to receive their eternal reward. They were merely conveniently removed from the world's stage, so that humanity could continue on to its rendezvous with destiny — the *Kabbalas Hatorah*. Each group of people were directed along the path they chose to follow.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto explains in *Derech Hashem* (1:3) that man must strive for perfection through his own free will; man's inclinations are balanced between good and evil, and he is not forced to pursue either one of them. He has the power to choose either direction, knowingly and willingly.