

ONE MAN AGAINST THE WORLD

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1. Avram at 99 had the letter Hey added to his name to become Avraham.
2. This was in conjunction with the mitzvah of circumcision entering into a covenant with G-d.
3. There is a linkage between circumcision and receiving the Land Of Canaan as a gift.
4. G-d created existence with the spirituality that lies within the letter Hey.
5. To be able to father, the future patriarch of the Jewish People needed Hey, which is the equivalent of all existence.
6. Zohar: The foreskin is an expression of the evil of the fruit of the tree of Knowledge.
7. The mitzvah of circumcision was to minimize the effect of Adam's sin.
8. Only after Avraham had the letter added and was circumcised was he able to father Yitzchok.
9. On the 3rd day after his circumcision, G-d unsheathed the sun so he should not be bothered with guests.
10. Avraham was so pained he could not engage in hospitality G-d sent angels in human form.
11. He offered them the shade of his tree, water to wash their feet, bread to satisfy their hunger.
12. In the merit of shade of the tree: The Jewish People were protected with the clouds of glory for 40 years.
13. In the merit of the water: the wellspring of Miriam.
14. In the merit of the bread: the Manna.
15. Midrash: The Torah was given to those who consumed the Manna.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Lech-Lecha

ONE MAN AGAINST THE WORLD



Is Forgetfulness a Blessing or a Curse?

Torah: Hashem instructed Moshe to present himself to Pharaoh and demand that the Jews be released from their bondage. “Afterwards Moshe and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh, ‘So said Hashem, the G-d of Israel, ‘Send out My people that they may celebrate for Me in the wilderness.’” Pharaoh replied, “Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel!”

Midrash: When Pharaoh was told that “Hashem, the G-d of Israel” wanted the Jews to be released, he immediately consulted his books that listed the names of all the deities but did not find “Hashem” listed. Pharaoh therefore responded to Moshe, “I do not know Hashem.” It is important to comprehend the context of this exchange between Pharaoh and Moshe because from it we can gain a profound understanding of human nature.

Prior to his conversation with Pharaoh, Moshe was a fugitive in Midian for many years. Hashem commanded Aaron to meet Moshe in the desert on his return to Egypt and to go together to confront Pharaoh at his palace. As the Midrash describes, Pharaoh’s palace had four hundred gates, guarded by hungry beasts that would attack any one who dared to approach the palace uninvited.

Midrash: As Moshe and Aaron approached Pharaoh’s palace their long white beards swayed in the wind like palm branches and their eyes radiated like the sun. When they reached the gates of the palace, the hungry and ferocious beasts became docile and licked at their feet. After Pharaoh heard that two tall men with white beards and powerful eyes had reached his gates and that his guard animals became like domestic pets in their presence, he became concerned and fearful to the degree that he needed

to do his bodily functions immediately. He had no time to secretly leave the palace and go to the Nile. He normally went to the Nile for his bodily functions so that his subjects would think that he had none and that he truly was a deity. In the event of emergencies, Pharaoh had a room in the inner sanctum of his palace where he could hide and do his bodily functions. So this is where he went.

Midrash: When Pharaoh was in this inner chamber relieving himself, *Hashem* sent ten mice to bite him. Pharaoh screamed from pain as the mice gnawed at him. After this experience with the mice Pharaoh composed himself and went to meet his uninvited visitors, *Moshe* and *Aaron*.

Moshe told Pharaoh that “*Hashem*, the G-d of Israel” wants His people released and Pharaoh responded, “Who is *Hashem* that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know *Hashem*, nor will I send out Israel!” The *Midrash* states that Pharaoh had forgotten what had happened to him. Moments earlier Pharaoh was screaming in fear and pain and now he was arrogantly telling *Moshe*, “Who is *Hashem* that I should heed His voice to send out Israel?”

The *Midrash* is teaching us that Pharaoh would not have been able to speak in this arrogant manner if he hadn't forgotten his terrifying experience from moments before. *Chazal* are teaching us that it only takes an instant to forget an experience or a feeling. Regardless of the nature of the experience, they are telling us that the moment one is removed from that situation one forgets that experience as if it never happened.

Rambam: Hilchos Talmid Torah says that a person needs to study *Torah* until the moment of his death. The reason for this is because people forget. How do we understand this? Is the *Rambam* telling us that if one had 30 seconds left to live that he is obligated to continue to study *Torah* because in these final moments he will forget?

Forgetting an experience completely does not happen in an instant. The moment that one is no longer engaged in that experience (whether it is *Torah* study or anything else) the impact and vividness of that experience immediately begins to fade. In order for *Torah* to remain real and vibrant within us, we need to study every moment.

We learn from the *Gemara* that *Hashem* created the *Yetzer Ha'ra* (evil inclination) and *Torah* is the “antidote”. Does this mean that studying *Torah* once will cure a person from the *Yetzer Ha'ra*? Does one moment in time have an affect on the next moment? It seems clear from the *Rambam* as well as what we have learned from the incident between Pharaoh and *Moshe* that a person begins forgetting from the moment an experience ends. This is why the *Rambam* states that one is obligated to study *Torah* every moment until he dies.

Gemara in Pesachim: Forgetting is a kindness which *Hashem* has provided to mankind. Since there is death and tragedy in the world, we would not be able to survive if we could not forget the pain. Survival would be impossible if we continuously remembered tragedy with the same degree of vividness. Therefore *Hashem* blessed us with the process of forgetting. In fact, death and forgetting are similar processes. The life cycle begins with birth and through continual deterioration and breakdown of the physical body the cycle ultimately ends with death.

Similarly, knowledge comes into existence and then gradually begins to fade in one's memory until it is forgotten. According to the *Gemara* if *Moshe* did not break the *Luchos* (tablets with the Ten Commandments) after seeing the Golden Calf, every Jew would have remembered every iota of *Torah* he ever studied and it would have remained completely fresh and vivid in his mind for the rest of his life.

It is only because *Moshe* broke the *Luchos* that we forget the *Torah* we learn. Why is the forgetting of *Torah* a consequence of the breaking of the *Luchos*? Furthermore, it says that at Sinai, the Jews reached the spiritual level of *Adam* before the sin in *Gan Eden* when death did not exist. When *Klal Yisroel* said, “We will do and we will listen,” they reached the ultimate spiritual level and death was eliminated from the existence. However, after *Klal Yisroel* sinned with the Golden Calf and *Moshe* broke the *Luchos*, existence reverted to the spiritual level we had after *Adam's* sin and we became subject to death once again. Then, since death was again part of existence, forgetting became a necessary part of existence as well.

In the spiritual realm, existence is forever and therefore time has no relevance. However, since we are part of a physical existence we are subject to

time limitations including death, and the forgetting process. *Chazal* are teaching us that we must feel the vibrancy and reality of *Torah* within us constantly since every moment that we are not actively engaged in the process of renewing the *Torah* through study we are gradually forgetting the *Torah*.

The Connection with the Infinite

Parshas Vayeira: “And G-d (*Elokim*) spoke (*vayidaber*) to *Moshe* and said to him, ‘I am *Hashem*. And I appeared to *Avraham*, to *Yitzchak*, and to *Yaakov* as *Kael Shakai*, but through My Name *Hashem* (*Yud Kay Vav Kay* “*YKVK*”) I did not become known to them.” Meaning the four letter Name of *Hashem* (*YKVK*) that represents “I was, I am, and I always will be” – the infinite G-d – was only revealed to *Moshe* and not to any of the Patriarchs. It was through this Name that *Hashem* established a special relationship with *Moshe* and enabled him to perform great revealed miracles. The Patriarchs were not able to perform revealed miracles since they did not know this Name of *Hashem*.

Despite *Moshe*’s unique relationship with G-d, he questioned *Hashem*’s actions. The *Torah* tells us at the end of *parshas Shemos*, “*Moshe* returned to *Hashem* and said, ‘My Lord, why have You harmed this people (the Jews), why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your People.’” *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, “Now you will see (*teer’eh*)...” *Moshe* questioned *Hashem*’s practices, which was considered a lack of faith. As a result of this lack of faith, *Hashem* told *Moshe* that he would “Now see (*teer’eh*)” the redemption from Pharaoh, implying that he would not see the future redemption to come – meaning entering into the land of Israel.

In order to understand the level of *Moshe*’s lack of faith and *Hashem*’s rebuke, we need to first comprehend the significance of what *Hashem* revealed to *Moshe*, namely *YKVK*, which is the Name of *Hashem* that enabled *Moshe* to perform revealed miracles.

Parshas Shemos: Pharaoh replied to *Moshe*, “Who is *Hashem* (*YKVK*) that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know *Hashem* (*YKVK*) nor will I send out Israel!” So that said, “The G-d of the Hebrews...” After Pharaoh rejected the Name *YKVK*, which as we see from the *pasuk* is associated with *Yisroel*, the

Torah refers to the Jews as “the Hebrews (*Ivreem*)”, the Lord of the Hebrews (*Elokai Ha’Ivreem*), and not “*Yisroel*”. Why do we have the change from *Yisroel* to *Ivreem* and from *YKVK* to *Elokai*?

As we have said previously, the name *Yisroel* is associated with the spirituality of the Jews, while, “Hebrews” (*Ivreem*) represents their physicality. Before the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai the Jews were referred to as *Ivreem* and after Sinai they were referred to as *Yisroel*. Similarly, *YKVK* represents the infinite G-d, which is outside of this physical existence. *Elokai* (the Name of *Hashem* which corresponds to the attribute of Justice) is a Name that connotes a power.

The Egyptians were pagans who worshiped many gods and could relate to the concept of “an all powerful G-d, an infinite being”. However when Pharaoh rejected the Name *YKVK*, he denied the existence of an infinite G-d Who transcends the physical world. Consequently, by denying this level of spiritually, Pharaoh could not comprehend or relate to the status of *Yisroel*.

Rabbenu Bachya: The monarch of Egypt was called “Pharaoh.” The letters spelling “*afar*” (dust/earth) are contained in the name “Pharaoh.” Meaning that the Egyptians only believed in the earthiness of existence. For the Egyptians, spirituality did not exist. Pharaoh believed that the magicians in his court were able to perform wonders only by manipulating physicality within the context of nature. The natural order could not be overcome, overridden, or transcended in any way.

YKVK is diametrically opposed to *afar* because it is a Name of G-d that refers to the infinite which makes physicality and earthiness irrelevant. *Moshe* proclaimed *Hashem*’s Name *YKVK* to Pharaoh and commanded him to release *Yisroel*. This meant that the infinite G-d who has relevance to spirituality and not physicality was commanding that His spiritual people (*Yisroel*) be set free. By stating the Name *YKVK* to Pharaoh, *Moshe* challenged Pharaoh’s ideological framework. However, Pharaoh could not fathom anything beyond physical existence and therefore he said, “I do not know *Hashem* (*YKVK*)...”

Now we can understand why *Hashem* rebuked *Moshe* for his lack of faith. *Hashem* revealed his name *YKVK* to *Moshe* which was a level of revelation that was not experienced by the Patriarchs. In so doing, *Hashem*

enabled *Moshe* to override nature and go beyond physical existence in a way that was not available to any of his forefathers. *Moshe* had direct relevance to the Infinite G-d whereas the Patriarchs did not have the ability to perform revealed miracles; nor did they have the same level of intimacy with *Hashem* as *Moshe* had.

Yet, they never questioned *Hashem's* actions. *Moshe* on the other hand said, 'My Lord, why have You harmed this people (the Jews), why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your People.' Since *Moshe* demonstrated this lack of faith, *Hashem* told him that he would see the redemption from Egypt but not the entry into the Land of Israel.

Hashem's New Relationship with Existence

Torah: After *Hashem* commanded *Moshe* to go to Egypt he said, "I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech. Then *Hashem* said to him, 'Who gave man a mouth, or who makes one mute...Is it not I *Hashem*?' " Didn't *Moshe* know that *Hashem* is the giver of speech as well as everything else? Did *Moshe* need *Hashem* to remind him of this fact or is there another meaning to this exchange?

The four-letter Name of *Hashem* "YKVK", as we explained earlier, enabled *Moshe* to perform revealed miracles; whereas, the level of revelation given to the Patriarchs through the name *Kael Shakai* only allowed them to perform concealed miracles. *Chazal* tell us that the Name *Kael Shakai* was the Name that *Hashem* used to limit the infinite energies He unleashed at the beginning of time in order to create the world. Contrarily, YKVK is the Name of *Hashem*, which is associated with the Infinite G-d and therefore unlimited. When *Hashem* presents Himself as YKVK there is nothing which is able to obscure, limit or conceal His presence.

The *Torah* gives us examples of miracles which *Hashem* performed for *Moshe's* forefathers. *Avraham* was able to defeat the four kings by performing great miracles; however, these miracles were concealed within nature. *Noach* did not necessarily need to build an ark to survive the Great Flood because *Hashem* could have performed a miracle and suspended him and all the creatures above the waters.

Ramban: The reason why *Noach* was instructed to build an ark was so that *Hashem* could bring about the miracle of his survival through a concealed and natural way. If all of existence had survived through a revealed miracle, it would have been difficult to deny G-d's existence and thus free choice would have been diminished. Therefore, in order to maintain free choice in a proper balance, *Hashem's* involvement with existence was in a concealed manner - prior to *Moshe's* revelation of YKVK.

Moshe, for his entire life, was known to have a speech impediment. If *Hashem* had commanded him to address Pharaoh and *Klal Yisroel* then G-d would have miraculously removed this impediment. This miracle would have been a revealed miracle for all to see. *Moshe* understood that historically *Hashem's* relationship with existence was through concealed miracles.

Therefore, when *Moshe* said to *Hashem*, "I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech" he was not questioning *Hashem's* power to give him the ability to speak properly. He was questioning the revealed nature of the miracle. Since *Hashem* had always interacted with the world in a cloaked manner, this revealed miracle would indicate a change in the way *Hashem* relates to the world.

Hashem's response, "Who gave man a mouth, or who makes one mute...Is it not I *Hashem*," confirmed to *Moshe* that G-d intended to bring about revealed miracles and that His approach to the world was in fact changing. The series of miracles, which ensued surrounding the redemption of *Klal Yisroel* from Egypt and the subsequent receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai, demonstrated *Hashem's* new revealed interaction with existence.

Torah: When *Moshe's* mother, *Yocheved*, placed *Moshe* into the basket; she only put pitch on the outside of the basket and not on the inside.

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The reason for this is that pitch has a foul smell and a *tzaddik* (such as *Moshe*), should not smell this odor. It is normal for a mother to prevent her child from smelling a foul odor so why does the *Torah* tell us that only a *tzaddik* such as *Moshe* should not smell this foul odor? There is an opinion in the Midrash that states that the quality of the wood used by *Yocheved* to make *Moshe's* basket was the most inferior quality wood. Why would *Yocheved* use the most inferior wood?

Midrash: Since a *tzaddik* values his money as much as his own life, *Yocheved* would use the least expensive wood. Spending more than what was absolutely necessary would have been considered a waste of money. Why should money be an issue? If saving *Moshe's* life was contingent on the quality of wood, shouldn't *Yocheved* have spent any amount of money to ensure his safety?

Yocheved and *Amram* (*Moshe's* father) were convinced that *Moshe* would survive the water regardless of the quality of the wood that was used, because *Moshe* was to be the Redeemer of Israel. They believed that *Hashem* would perform the miracle necessary to ensure *Moshe's* survival. However, they understood that the miracle must be concealed. Thus, the basket made by *Yocheved* was only to cloak the miracle. Therefore inferior wood was sufficient for the sake of concealment of the miracle.

Under normal circumstances, a basket made to withstand the water must be sealed with pitch on the inside and outside. Proper concealment of the miracle would have occurred if the basket was waterproofed on the both sides. The *Torah* tells us however, that *Moshe's* basket had pitch only on the outside and not the inside. Why didn't *Yocheved* coat the inside of the basket with pitch? This seemingly contradicts the principle that miracles must be concealed.

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: A *tzaddik* should not smell the foul odor of the pitch. Therefore *Chazal* tell us that protecting *Moshe*, the *tzaddik* from any discomfort was the overriding factor. This is why the miracle had to be partially revealed.

How to Overcome Any Circumstance

Parshas Vayeira: *Hashem* told *Moshe* to inform the Jews that G-d was going to free them from their enslavement in Egypt. Using four expressions of redemption *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, "Say to the Children of Israel: 'I am *Hashem*, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I shall be a G-d to you...'"

Moshe addressed the *Klal Yisroel* as he was commanded by *Hashem*," So *Moshe* spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel, but they did not listen to *Moshe*

because of shortness of wind (*kozteir ruach*) and hard work." Despite the fact that *Moshe* had proven to the Jews that he was the Redeemer of Israel and the agent of G-d, the Jews had no capacity to understand nor were they receptive to *Moshe's* words because they were overwhelmed with their bondage. Even though the *Bnai Yisroel* heard and understood *Moshe's* words, they were incapable of processing and internalizing *Moshe's* words. The question is - what is *kozteir ruach*?

Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'Kadosh: The majority of Jews in Egypt did not study or adhere to *Torah* and were idolaters. These Jews were subject to the physical bondage and had *kozteir ruach*. However, a small minority of Jews (The Levites) did study and abide by the *Torah* (*Bnai Torah*.) They did not have *kozteir ruach*. As the *Ohr Ha'Chaim* states, "*Torah* broadens the heart," meaning that *Torah* gives a person the breadth and depth of understanding as well as the capacity to effectively deal with difficulties and issues.

If someone is not a *Ben Torah* (someone who studies and integrates *Torah* into his life) then his capacity for being able to cope with difficult situations is limited. Since the Jews were slaves and not involved in the study or observance of *Torah*, they had a limited capacity and depth of heart to overcome their bondage and therefore were not receptive to *Moshe's* words promising redemption.

We say every morning in davening (praying) "Open our heart with your *Torah*." The only way that one can open his heart and have the capacity to deal with all of the overwhelming issues of life is through the *Torah*. If a person experiences hardships and has difficulty overcoming them, it is an indication that they need to study more *Torah*.

Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'Kadosh: It is only by being a *Ben Torah* that one is able to deal with the difficulties of life and to overcome any situation.

In the early 1970's groups of Russians left the USSR and came to the United States. *Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky zt'l*, who spoke Russian, engaged one of the elderly Russians in a conversation to discover how much *Torah* he remembered from his childhood. The elderly Russian shared with *Rabbi Kamenetsky* that he did not even remember the *Shema*. However, since he was in a concentration camp with a rabbi, he did remember one verse of *Torah* from the rabbi's constant repetition.

He explained that this rabbi was forced to carry heavy bags of wet salt up and down an steep hill all day and as he carried this great burden he groaned and said, "Because you did not serve Hashem with goodness of heart and with happiness!" The Nazis killed the rabbi's wife and eleven children and he was subjugated to the torturous task of carrying the heavy salt every day while being beaten and humiliated. Despite the unimaginable difficulty of the situation, the rabbi recited, "Because you did not serve Hashem with goodness of heart and with happiness" every time he carried the salt. It was clear to the elderly Russian that the rabbi was not demoralized and broken.

Rabbi Kamenetsky asked the elderly Russian the name of the rabbi from the concentration camp. The Russian told him that it was the *Klausenberger Rebbe* *zt'l*. The *Klausenberger Rebbe* had lost his entire family, thousands of his *Chassidim* and members of the community in the Holocaust, yet he was able to cope with the situation. The *Rebbe* was able to put the world into perspective and not experience *kozteir ruach*. He was able to survive this situation only because of the *Torah*, which he possessed. Despite his personal suffering, the *Klausenberger Rebbe* had the depth and breadth of heart to be able to overcome unimaginable difficulties.

The average person, who is not engaged in *Torah* study, is confronted with difficulties, which do not even compare to those of the *Klausenberger Rebbe*, yet they are overwhelmed. The *pasuk* says that Hashem will take away the "stone heart and give us a heart of flesh." Meaning, that the *Torah* can sensitize a person's heart in a way that can give him the capacity to be able to overcome any situation and not have a shortness of spirit - *kozteir ruach*.

Miracles are not Enough for True Belief

Parshas Vayeira: Moshe addresses the *Bnai Yisroel* and communicates to them the four stages of redemption which Hashem had instructed him to say. In the fourth expression of redemption Hashem states, "I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a G-d to you; and then you shall know that I am Hashem your G-d, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt." This *pasuk* is telling us that when the *Klal Yisroel* will accept the *Torah* at Sinai, only then they will know that Hashem is one who took them out of Egypt.

Torah: Before the *Bnai Yisroel* arrived at Sinai, Hashem performed the great miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. Moshe stretched out his arm and split the Sea, thus allowing the Jews to cross to safety. The Egyptians pursued them into the Sea. Moshe again stretched out his arm and caused the Sea to close.

Torah: "On that day, Hashem saved Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great hand that Hashem inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered Hashem, and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant." After witnessing the splitting of the Sea, *Bnai Yisroel* acknowledged that Hashem had saved them from the hands of the Egyptians and they sang His praises, "This is my G-d and I will exalt Him..."

Chazal: Hashem's presence was palpable even to the lowly maidservant. Yet it states that it was only at Sinai that *Klal Yisroel* acknowledged that Hashem had taken them out of Egypt, even though at the Red Sea they apparently acknowledged that Moshe was Hashem's servant. In other words, if the Jews understood that Moshe was able to take them out of Egypt only because he was acting as the dedicated servant of Hashem, then why was this reality unconfirmed until Sinai?

Rambam in *Hilchos Yisodie Ha'Torah*: All the miracles that were performed by Moshe such as the splitting of the Red Sea, the plagues on Egypt, and the receiving of the *mun* (the miracle food of the desert) etc, were not intended to prove that Moshe was a prophet. But rather, every miracle was needed to fulfill a specific purpose. For example, the splitting of the Sea was intended to punish the Egyptians and the miracle of the *mun* was needed to provide sustenance for the Jews in the desert.

Rambam: If a person's beliefs were to be based on miracles alone, they would be on weak ground and subject to contention. For example, if the miracles that were performed by Hashem through Moshe were intended to establish Moshe as a prophet one could have said that all of these supernatural events only came about through sorcery. Therefore the Jews could only come to an absolute and definite belief in Moshe as Hashem's prophet only by witnessing Hashem openly and directly communicating to Moshe in their presence.

At Sinai, every Jew in existence stood at the foot of the mountain and witnessed first hand how *Hashem* spoke openly to *Moshe* and commanded him to convey His *Torah* to the *Klal Yisroel*. Since *Klal Yisroel* witnessed the interaction between *Hashem* and *Moshe* with their own minds, emotions, and souls they concluded with absoluteness that the word of *Moshe* was synonymous with the Word of G-d.

From the words of *Rambam*, we can understand that it was not through miracles that could have been misinterpreted, but rather through the Sinai experience that every Jew acknowledged *Hashem* as their G-d and *Moshe* as his prophet. This is why *Hashem* said that only at Sinai would the Jews conclusively acknowledge that *Hashem* had taken them out of Egypt. This is the reason why Judaism is based on solid foundation. Judaism and *Torah* are based on the absolute truth and fact - not on presumption and assumption.

The Cost of Truth

Torah: *Moshe* and *Aaron* went before Pharaoh to demand the release of the Jewish people from bondage. *Moshe* informed Pharaoh that he was the agent of *Hashem* and that Pharaoh must comply by freeing the *Bnai Yisroel* or else *Hashem* will bring punishment upon Egypt. In order to prove that he was the agent of *Hashem* and that the ultimatum that he gave to Pharaoh was real, *Moshe* had a miracle performed before Pharaoh. *Moshe* was told by G-d to tell *Aaron* to throw his staff on the ground and it would be transformed into a snake. Pharaoh was not impressed.

Midrash: Pharaoh boasted to *Moshe* that the Egyptian court had many experts in witchcraft who could perform the same "trickery" as he did. In order to demonstrate this, Pharaoh's magicians threw their staffs on the ground and they too were transformed into snakes.

Torah: After *Aaron's* snake transformed back into a staff it devoured the Egyptians' snakes. This of course was not possible through sorcery because, as the *Sforno* explains, sorcery can only affect appearances and function within nature. It was clear to Pharaoh that the miracle of *Aaron's* staff devouring the snakes was not sorcery. Nevertheless, Pharaoh was not impressed. The obvious difference between

Aaron's action and the magicians was not sufficiently compelling to convince Pharaoh that *Moshe* was the Redeemer of Israel.

Moshe saw that Pharaoh was unaffected by the miracle of the staff and subsequently performed another miracle. *Moshe* informed Pharaoh that he was going to transform the water of the Nile into blood and all the fish in the Nile were going to die. Why did *Moshe* specify to Pharaoh that the "fish were going to die?" Is it not obvious that fish can only live in water and not blood? As the *Sforno* explained, sorcery cannot change the essence of any existence, it only gives this appearance. Therefore if *Moshe's* plague were to come about through witchcraft the fish would have lived. If the fish were to die then that would imply that the water was changed to real blood and that could come about only through the Will of *Hashem*.

Once again Pharaoh was not impressed or moved in any way although the difference between the plague of blood and witchcraft was obvious. Pharaoh was convinced that his magicians could basically perform the same miracle. The fact that Pharaoh's sorcerers could not transform water into real blood was not enough of a difference for Pharaoh to acknowledge *Hashem* or *Moshe* as the Redeemer of Israel.

When *Aaron* performed the miracle of the Lice, The sorcerers no longer denied that G-d was the cause of the miracles and they said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of G-d!" Despite this, Pharaoh remained steadfast in his denial of G-d's power. The difficulty is how could Pharaoh not acknowledge the reality of *Hashem's* power even when all of his expert magicians told him that this was definitely the Hand of G-d?

There is a cost factor associated with seeing the truth. Therefore if the cost is too great one goes into a state of denial. Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, had deified himself claiming that he created the Nile. If Pharaoh acknowledged that *Hashem* was the omnipotent G-d then he would have reduced himself to a mere mortal. Therefore Pharaoh rejected and would not consider that *Moshe's* actions had any greater significance than witchcraft.

The Egyptian army who chased the *Bnai Yisroel* into the Sea did not even pause to be amazed at the most spectacular event that had taken place in the history of the world. Since the Egyptians were so focused

on the destruction of the Jewish people, they did not want to be distracted by this miraculous event. However, when the Sea began to close upon them and death was imminent, the Egyptians acknowledged *Hashem*. It was only then that their self-importance and self-image, which was their cost factor, no longer had any relevance because they were about to die. Their impending death made the Egyptians see reality clearly.

When does a person acknowledge truth? It is when the cost of this acknowledgement is not too great. However if accepting the truth were to be too costly, then one would shut down and refuse to acknowledge reality. We see from Pharaoh and the Egyptians that regardless of how strong the truth may be; a person may not acknowledge it. If a person were conflicted with his own ego or circumstance, one would rationalize almost anything not to change.

The Chazal teach us that a wise man is one who understands the consequences of his deeds. This understanding is more than an intellectual comprehension of the results of one's actions. It is the internalization of the consequences of one's actions. The wise man is able to sense the truth of a situation and understand its consequences. The only reason a person does not sense the truth is because he chooses to deny reality in favor of his own interests.



Yad Avraham Institute