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76-01 147 St | Flushing, NY



(718) 544-5213
JEPQueens@gmail.com

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

WATCH IT FLY UP AND UP AND UP!

PARSHAS SHMOS

When Pharaoh died, Bnei Yisroel groaned and cried from the hard, backbreaking work (Shmos 2:22). Hashem heard their outcry and remembered the covenant with our forefathers. Our redemption from Egypt was about to begin.

Rashi quotes the **Midrash** that Pharaoh did not actually die. Rather, he became stricken with leprosy. Pharaoh's advisors told him that the only cure was to bathe in the blood of Jewish babies twice a day. One hundred and fifty Jewish babies were to be slaughtered in the morning and another 150 were to be slaughtered in the evening. When the Jewish People heard this new decree they cried-out bitterly to Hashem.

"A long time passed and the king of Egypt died. The B'nei Yisrael moaned because of their enslavement, and they cried. Their plea about their enslavement went up to Hashem." (Shmos 2:22)

This cruel and inhumane decree by itself did not cause Hashem to say that it was enough suffering and that it was time to redeem the Jewish People. Rather, it was the sincere, heartfelt prayers that came from intense suffering. Those prayers reached Hashem and caused Hashem to say that it was enough!

The **Zohar** says that not every tefillah can break through several spiritual barriers to reach Hashem's Heavenly throne. However, the sincere, heartfelt prayers of one who is beset by tragedy and suffering, does pierce the gates of Mercy and reaches Hashem. Amazingly, that powerful tefillah also elevates with it many other tefillos which otherwise would not have reached Hashem because they lacked the heartfelt sincerity.

Imagine one who has great needs and wants to get an appointment with his king. He would be so excited if he would merit, even a few moments with his ruler. But he probably wouldn't have the audacity to ask for more than 1 or 2 requests.

Yet, we have a unique opportunity, every second of the day, to talk to the Creator and Master of the World! And HE always listens to us! And Hashem is willing to listen to as many requests that we ask of Him. Unfortunately, we don't always grab these opportunities. While davening to Hashem, our minds may wander

and we may get distracted. While we say the words of davening, at times our minds and hearts may be miles away. Our tefillah may be mere lip service. There is a joke (??) about a person who felt someone hitting him. He looked around and realized that he was hitting himself. He was in the middle of davening Shmone Esray and was saying *selach lanu* and was hitting his own chest.

It is very difficult for such a tefillah, which is merely lip service, said without the feelings of the heart, to go up to Hashem.

Unfortunately, it is often not until one experiences a life-crisis that his tefillah takes on a new meaning. Then he screams to Hashem with total sincerity, from the depths of his heart. Such a tefillah reaches the Heavenly throne. And such a tefillah elevates other tefillos and takes them with it to the Heavenly throne. No doubt the Jews enslaved in Egypt davened to Hashem for redemption. However, once they heard about the brutality of this terrible new decree of slaughtering 300 Jewish babies to bathe in their blood, that was too much to bear. They cried with a true heartfelt tefillah. That tefillah pierced the heavens and brought about the beginning of their salvation.

A personal thought: According to the Midrash, the heartfelt tefillah stemmed from the cruel law to kill Jewish babies for their blood. Yet the pasuk says that Hashem heard the cries as a result of their

backbreaking work. Perhaps the explanation is, as we have been saying, that the sincere, heartfelt tefillah as a result of this terrible decree was such a powerful tefillah that it took with it, as it pierced the heavens, all the previous tefillos that the Jews had davened to Hashem to save them from the backbreaking work.

It is often not until one experiences personal or communal tragedies that his tefillos are powerful enough to pierce the heavens. Those tefillos are so powerful that they bring along with them other, less heartfelt tefillos of his, as well as less heartfelt tefillos of others.

(Rav Avrohom Pam also quoting Rav Avraham Chechanover in Shabbos With Rav Pam by Rabbi Sholom Smith)

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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