

JUSTICE FOR ALL!

PARSHAS VA'ERA

The redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt was about to commence. Moshe and Aharon were going to Pharaoh to warn him that Hashem would bring the 10 plagues upon Egypt if Pharaoh wouldn't let the Jewish People leave Egypt. Clearly, the plagues would cause a big embarrassment to Pharaoh. Hashem instructed Moshe and Aharon on how to treat the Jewish People and how to treat Pharaoh (Shmos 6:13). **Rashi** explains that Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to deal gently and patiently with the Jewish People. Hashem also told them to speak respectfully to Pharaoh. **Ohr Chaim and Rabbeinu Bachya** both explain that Hashem told Moshe and Aharon to show respect for Pharaoh since he was the King of Egypt.

Midrash Rabbah (7:3) spells out that even though Moshe and Aharon had to bring justice upon the Egyptians, they were instructed to show respect for Pharaoh. **Mizrachi** adds that even if Pharaoh would become angry to the request to let the Jewish people go, Moshe and Aharon should listen to his angry words without responding.

The **Talmud** (Zevachim 102A) says that one should always show awe of the kingship even when the king does not deserve respect, such as the villain Pharaoh.

Rav Leib Chasman z t"l (sefer Ohr Yahil, quoted in Yalkut Lekach Tov by Yaakov Yisroel Beifuss) says a beautiful illustration. Imagine Pharaoh sitting on his throne, surrounded by his officers and subjects. Pharaoh tries to speak but his voice can't be heard. Instead, there is the shrill sound of croaking frogs, coming from Pharaoh's stomach and the stomachs of all the others in the throne room (Shmos 8:29 and Rashi).

This punishment is but one example of the different plagues that Hashem brought to punish Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Clearly, this punishment was not respectful of the king, but justice had to be done.

After the 9th plague, the evil Pharaoh got angry at Moshe, telling Moshe that he didn't want to see his

"Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, commanding them regarding B'nei Yisrael and Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to bring out B'nei Yisrael from the land of Egypt." (Shmos 6:13)

face again. If Pharaoh would see Moshe's face again, he said that he would kill him! Despite those harsh words, Moshe responded in a respectful way to the monarchy. He said, "All your servants, will come down to me, and prostrate themselves saying, 'Go! You and all

the people that follow you'" (Shmos 11:8). Moshe said "all your servants" but he really meant that Pharaoh, himself, will go searching for Moshe to beg him to take all the Jews out of Egypt.

According to Hashem's justice, Pharaoh deserved the embarrassment and disgrace that occurred as a result of the plagues. However, he didn't deserve the added disgrace of Moshe saying that Pharaoh, himself, will run all over, looking for Moshe.

Rav Leib Chasman z t"l says that we see from this that Hashem's judgment is extremely meticulous and precise. One is not punished by one iota more than is deserved.

This is like the story of the *mekalel* and the *mekoshesh*. Soon after entering the desert, a Jew desecrated Shabbos by gathering wood. He was put in jail while awaiting a determination as to which type of death he would receive as his punishment. During the same timeframe, someone cursed using one of Hashem's very holy names. He, too, was put into jail, waiting to see what his punishment would be. I believe that **Rabbi Henach Leibowitz** zt"l says that although

the blasphemer did a terrible sin, he was not put in the same jail cell as the wood-gatherer. The reason was that it was not clear if the blasphemer would be receiving the death penalty. It would have been inappropriate to put him in the same cell as someone waiting to be put to death. That would have caused the

blasphemer undue pain and suffering. He would have thought that he, too, was going to be punished with death. That would have pained him more than he had deserved and therefore, would not have been proper justice.

Rav Leib Chasman z"l says that we also see how careful one must be with one's speech, even while meeting out very harsh punishments.

What lesson can we learn from this? Moshe had to be careful of his speech even when speaking to such an evil person such as Pharaoh. Certainly, we should be speaking to our fellow Jews with the utmost of respect! Obviously, we should not disparage or embarrass a fellow Jew! After all, the Talmud (Shabbos 67A) tells us that all Jews are children of Kings!

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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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