

## BO – YOUR FREE WILL & YOUR INNER VOICE

### “FOR I HAVE HARDENED THE HEART OF PHAROAH”

In Parashas *Bo*, Hashem said to Moshe, "בא אל פרעה, כי אני הכבדתי את לב פרעה", "Come to Pharaoh, for I have made His heart and the heart of His servants stubborn."

Hashem "hardened" the heart of Pharaoh. *Chazal* state that sometimes if Hashem gives a person *bechirah* and the person chooses not to utilize his *bechirah* (free will), Hashem causes the person's heart to become hardened. Furthermore, *Chazal* explain that in the original plagues, it was Pharaoh himself who chose to harden his heart, and in the final set of plagues, it was Hashem Himself who hardened the heart of Pharaoh, because his *bechirah* was taken away from him.

### A DEEP LOOK AT THE ROOT OF BECHIRAH

The root of the concept of *bechirah* is the fact that Hashem "chose" to create the world and all the beings that He created in it. Hashem had a *ratzon* (will) to create the world which is the deep root of *bechirah*. There were two "options", so to speak, which Hashem made Himself choose from: either to create the world, or not to create the world. *Chazal* teach that Hashem first consulted with the angels. Some of the angels said to create the world, and some argued that the world should not be created. Hashem decided to create the

world and this is the root of all *bechirah*, derived from Hashem Himself, when Hashem chose between two options, so to speak.

Ever since then, the power of *bechirah*

has been carved into the design of Creation. In the terminology of our Sages, this is known as "*koach poel b'nifal*", "the power of the Performer is retained in the handiwork". Just as Hashem "chose" to create the world, so too did He give the power to His creations to "choose" between one option and another.

All creations can choose. We can't see it clearly amongst non-living objects and plants, but animals have somewhat of a power to choose and control what they want to do. Free will is mostly apparent in human beings, who can clearly choose. It is not only the Jewish people who were given *bechirah*; the gentile nations as well were given *bechirah*. The seven Noachide laws were accepted by all of mankind, and although most of the gentiles do not keep them<sup>1</sup>, they still have *bechirah*. As explained above, this is because the nature of *bechirah* has been implanted by Hashem into His creations.

But the main use of *bechirah* has been given to *Klal Yisrael*. When Hashem chose us from amongst the nations to receive the Torah, not only did He choose us to be His people, He gave us a power of *bechirah*, which is unique only to the Jewish people.

It is not to be understood in the simple sense that the Jews were given the choice to accept the 613 mitzvos of the Torah and the gentile nations were given the choice to accept the seven Noachide laws. Rather, the Jewish people received a **deeper** use of *bechirah*, which the other nations did not receive. It was an entirely **different** kind of *bechirah* than what the gentiles received.

The gentiles have a lower use of free will, which has been implanted into all

creations, whereas the Jewish people are "one" with Hashem, and therefore their power of *bechirah* is reminiscent of Hashem's own *bechirah*, so to speak. This higher *bechirah* is one of the unique qualities in the Jewish people.

In clearer terms, what is *bechirah* about? Generally speaking, *bechirah* means to choose between two sides; to choose between good and evil. But there is a deeper understanding, as follows.

At first, Hashem created worlds and destroyed them, until He created our world. Hashem placed a Tree of Good & Evil (*Eitz HaDaas Tov V'Ra*) in it. He commanded Adam and Chavah not to eat from the tree. The concept of "evil" (also called "the world of disparity") began with the destruction of these worlds, and this is what paved the roots for *bechirah*.

When confronted with a choice between good and evil, if man chooses good, then he is connecting himself to the original plan. However, if he chooses evil, he is connecting himself to the "world of disparity", to a shaky foundation, "*raua*" (shaky), from the word "*ra*", evil. Therefore, every time that a person chooses, he is choosing either connection (good) or destruction (evil). Either he chooses *chibbur* (connection) or *cherev* (destruction), which are an opposite arrangement of the same letters. This is the depth of *bechirah* given to man.

The inner essence of this *bechirah* is rooted in Hashem's own *bechirah*, Who is constantly choosing, each moment, to sustain Creation. Hashem renews the Creation each day in His goodness; He keeps renewing His free will, on a constant basis, that there be a Creation. This is His constant *bechirah*, so to speak. The Nefesh

<sup>1</sup> *Bava Kamma 38a*

HaChaim explains that there are 1,080 moments in every hour; in each of these moments, Hashem is renewing Creation, renewing His *bechirah*.

Thus, the inner *bechirah* taking place every moment in Creation is the fact that Hashem keeps choosing to renew the universe, and we find that this deep kind of *bechirah* is also given to us. The Nefesh HaChaim says that if there would even be one moment where a Jew is not learning Torah, the entire creation would collapse and return to nothingness. So the depth of our *bechirah* is that we are given a choice: either to take a sword (also called “*cherev*”) and destroy the world with it, or to choose connection (*chibbur*) to Hashem. Just as Hashem is choosing every moment to sustain Creation, so does a Jew have *bechirah* to sustain the world, by choosing to connect himself to Hashem, and on a deeper note, to Hashem’s *bechirah*.

This is the depth of *bechirah* which are given uniquely to the Jewish people. Only the nation of Yisrael is called “*adam*” (man), whereas the rest of the world is not given the title of “*adam*”. Our unique *bechirah* is to choose to connect ourselves to the *bechirah* of Hashem, or *chas v’shalom* to choose the opposite, to choose destruction. This is the deep *bechirah* that each and every Jew possesses.

If a Jew chooses evil/destruction, not only is he causing destruction to envelop himself as an individual, but he is causing destruction to come to the whole Creation. *Chazal* state, “*hevay domeh lo*” – “you shall resemble Him” – just as Hashem is merciful, so should you be merciful. As we have explained here, the depth of our *bechirah* is to choose to “resemble” Hashem, by connecting our choices with Hashem’s own *bechirah*. It is clear that if a Jew chooses to do evil, he is not connected to Hashem’s *bechirah*, for there is a rule that “From the mouth of the Supreme One, evil cannot come forth.” Evil has no reality in that deeper

dimension.

## THE THREE POINTS OF FREE WILL

We have so far explained that the depths of *bechirah* were given only to the Jewish people, who have the unique *bechirah* to choose either between connection to Hashem, or destruction, *chas v’shalom*. But the power of *bechirah* is explained more clearly by Rav Dessler, who explained that there are “three points of *bechirah*” in each person, without exception. Each person has his own “point of free will”, as well as a point “above” his free will, and a point “below” his free will.

Any person, in whatever situation, has his own point of free will, according to his unique situation. This is his “point of free will”, with its accompanying *bechirah*.

The point “below” the free will is not within the range of one’s *bechirah*. For example, if a person grew up in a Torah observant environment, it is not within his *bechirah* to deliberately profane Shabbos, and it is not within his *bechirah* to commit murder or idol worship. These are all “below” the point of his free will.

There is also the point “above” his free will which are areas which are too hard for the person to do at this point. For example, almost no one has the *bechirah* to learn Torah with the diligence of the Vilna Gaon, day and night, without interruption. It is above one’s current level of capability.

This is a general description of the three points of free will: the point of free will itself, the point below free will, and the point above free will. A person needs a lot of wisdom and Heavenly assistance to know himself well and to know which parts of his life are within the range of his *bechirah*, which parts of his life are below his *bechirah* and which parts of his life are beyond his *bechirah*.

Understandably, a person knows well

that there are certain acts which would fall under the category of above his free will and below his free will. Something which is nearly impossible for him to do falls under the category of “above” his free will, and something which is unthinkable for him to do falls under the category of “below” free will. But it is almost impossible to determine precisely one’s actual point of free will, where his free will begins and where it ends.

But a person can get somewhere near it with the more he sanctifies and purifies himself and when he works to understand his soul. Then Hashem will enlighten him and he will be shown which areas are within his range of free will.

## WE PRAY NOT TO HAVE DIFFICULTIES: AVOIDING THE TESTS ABOVE OUR FREE WILL

A person should not attempt to deliberately access the area above his free will. We *daven* daily that we should not have *nisyonos* (difficult tests) in spite of the fact that all of our life is spent in *nisyonos*. The *nisyonos* which we are given are all within the range of our *bechirah* which we can overcome. But the *nisyonos* which are above our point of *bechirah* are too hard for us to overcome, and it is these *nisyonos* that we pray not to have to struggle with.

However, there are times where a person will need to access the point above his free will. Sometimes Hashem places a person in a situation in which it is really above his *bechirah* to choose the right decision. If he’s not able to pull through and rectify what needs to be rectified in such a situation, that is understandable, and he is not to be blamed for it; it’s not within his *bechirah* to go above his free will. But the problem in such a situation is that he might choose to go in the opposite direction and go below his point of free will, *chas v’shalom*.

Here is an example. The *Gemara* says that one must give away all his money

rather than commit a sin of the Torah. If a person is not on such a level, and he knows that he is not capable of withstanding such a test, what should he do? He must *daven* to Hashem that he should not be brought to such a *nisayon*. What will happen if he is now tested to give away all his money or commit a sin?

If he would know for sure that it is within his free will to be able to give away all his money rather than commit the sin, then he is indeed obligated to give away all his money, and not commit the sin. But if he knows that he is not on this level, what should he do? Either he will do one of two things. If he acts based on his current level, he will surely fail the test. It is not within his actual level right now to withstand the test, so if he tries to withstand the test, he will not succeed. Or, he might try to act above his current level, by persevering with *mesirus nefesh* (self-sacrifice). This is wonderful and praiseworthy, if he can do this!

But as a first course of action, instead of trying to act above his free will, what must a person try to do, to begin with? He must daven to Hashem that he not be brought to such *nisyonos*.

## THE HIGHER FREE WILL

We have explained that a Jew's power of *bechirah* stems from Hashem's *bechirah*, but we must understand that it is only an offshoot of Hashem's *bechirah*, so it is not the full level. Hashem's *bechirah* is perfect and complete, whereas a human being's *bechirah* is a constricted version and is only used on a partial level.

When Hashem first placed Adam in *Gan Eden*, He requested of him, "Make sure that you do not ruin and destroy My world". Hashem can "destroy" worlds, and gives a person the *bechirah* to build or "destroy" which is reminiscent of Hashem's power to destroy worlds. However, man's *bechirah* is only a resemblance of Hashem's *bechirah*, and it

is not the actual *bechirah* of Hashem.

Man's *bechirah* has been constricted and limited to the level where he stands. A person's *bechirah* is enabled by the light of Hashem, and that is why man always has *bechirah*, on whatever level he is at.

The *gemara* brings the story of Elazar ben Dordaya, who repented after a lifetime of sin, whereupon the Sage Rebbi exclaimed, "There are those who acquire their World (To Come) in one moment."<sup>2</sup> There is a wonderful and deep understanding of this amazing occurrence. Elazar ben Dordaya used his *bechirah* to acquire all that there is to acquire, which was reminiscent of Hashem's *bechirah*, and that was how he was able to acquire his entire World To Come in one moment.

When someone feels very near Hashem, as Elazar ben Dordaya did, he is able to groan and cry about his situation, feeling remorse. A person who is close to Hashem has an increase of *bechirah*; his *bechirah* is more of a resemblance to Hashem's *bechirah*, and therefore he becomes capable of anything. There is no need for him at that point to daven to Hashem to be spared from *nisyonos*, because when one is at a level of great closeness to Hashem, his *bechirah* resembles Hashem's *bechirah*, and he is only able to choose good.

## PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

However, it is forbidden for a person to try to begin with this level. A person first has to daven to Hashem to be spared from *nisyonos*. There are only rare individuals who merit to raise their *bechirah* to a level that resembles Hashem's *bechirah*. And we should also understand that even those who merit to attain this higher level of *bechirah* are not using Hashem's actual *bechirah*, but an offshoot of it, which is enabled by Hashem's light.

Most people usually do not reach the higher level of *bechirah*. That being

the case, a person needs to first daven to Hashem to be spared from *nisyonos* which he won't be able to handle.

Prayer is half of a person's *avodah*; a person also needs to actually avoid *nisyonos*. The *Gemara* says that if one is able to run away from sin, he must do so, rather than try to face the temptation and try to overcome it. The word "*bechirah*" is rooted in the word *bachar* (בחר) to "choose", which alludes to the word "*barach*" (ברח) to "run away", because a person's *bechirah* requires him to run away from sin if he can. It is forbidden for one to place himself in a situation that tests him and which will require him to go above his *bechirah* in order to overcome it. Instead, he must run away from such situations.

So **one must daven to avoid *nisyonos***, and he must also do his other half of the job, which is to actually run away from *nisyonos* and to avoid them. A person is always able to utilize his *bechirah*. When a person lives superficially, he acts by rote, and he goes through life like a horse. But if he does not live by rote, he is always using his *bechirah*.

## TESHUVAH - RETURNING TO ONE'S PREVIOUS LEVEL OF BECHIRAH

Now let's understand the following. Whenever a person uses his *bechirah*, two things are happening. First of all, he is choosing between either good or evil; either he is doing a *mitzvah* or he is committing a sin, *chas v'shalom*. But there is also a deeper aspect. Every time a person uses his *bechirah*, he is also changing his *bechirah* level. Every time he makes even a small decision to do something good, he is slowly increasing his level of *bechirah*.

It can be compared to water dripping on a rock; there will not be any recognizable changes to his level, but inside his soul, he

is changing. Only Heaven can see it. The more a person attains self-purification, the more he will be able to feel that when he chooses correctly, the changes are causing changes to his level.

Therefore, if a person chooses to sin, *chas v'shalom*, not only does he need to do *teshuvah* from the sin (which includes confession, regret, and resolution not to sin again, and all other principles of *teshuvah* which Rabbeinu Yonah discusses in *Shaarei Teshuvah*), but he also needs to return to his previous level of *bechirah* which he had before he committed the sin. In choosing evil, he has fallen from his *bechirah* level, and the inner part of his *teshuvah* lies in returning to the level of *bechirah* that he had been on before.

This is the depth behind the statement of *Chazal*, “If you see a Torah scholar commit a sin at night, do not think (negatively) of him the next day, for he surely repented.” What does it mean that the Torah scholar who sinned surely did *teshuvah*? It can be explained from the following interpretation. There is a verse, “A righteous person falls seven times, then rises.” The simple meaning of this verse is that even though the *tzaddik* falls seven times, he still rises afterwards. But it can also mean that every time he falls, he rises. And now we can see an even deeper meaning, according to what we have been explaining: When a *tzaddik* falls to a sin, not only is he pained by the fact that he has fallen to the sin (which Rabbeinu Yonah describes as “*yagon*”, to feel pain over the sin, which leads to regretting the sin), but he has also a deeper pain: by sinning, he has now placed himself on a path that is not good, and his level of *bechirah* has descended.

Thus, “if you see a Torah sin at night, do not think (negatively) about him the next day, for he surely repented” – he surely will do *teshuvah*, because “a

righteous person falls seven times and rises”, and when he falls, he immediately wants to return to his previous level of *bechirah* which he had been on before he sinned.

If he falls again to the sin, he will not be falling from the same place he had previously fallen from, because he has returned to his previous level since the last fall, and when he falls again, he is falling from a higher place than before.

When a person is unaware of this perspective and he hasn't taken it to heart, he will simply live by rote and take life as it comes, following his natural behavior patterns, and when he sins, he might feel pained over the fact that he has done something improper, but he is not aware of the fact that his *bechirah* level has also descended.

The result will be that he will become further entangled in his sins, as *Chazal* say about continuing to sin, that it is like a thick rope that keeps being tightened with more and more thick ropes. Slowly as times goes on, the ‘rope’ will keep getting thicker and harder to undo, causing his *bechirah* level to descend.

## HOW PHARAOH'S HEART BECAME HARDENED

If we have understood the above, we can now proceed to understand the depth behind how Pharaoh's heart became hardened.

Hashem brought ten plagues upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh and all his servants, and with each plague, they were given *bechirah*. By the time they already received their second plague, frogs, their *bechirah* level was already not the same level as when they received the plague of blood. And when they received the third plague, lice, their *bechirah* level had gone down since the plague of the frogs. It was not the same level of *bechirah* each time; it kept descending [so their free

will was decreasing each time]. Why did this happen? It all started from the first plague. Pharaoh could have chosen to free the Jewish people after the first plague, but he chose not to.

As a result, his *bechirah* level descended, and now he had a little less *bechirah* to free them. This process of weakened *bechirah* continued to worsen throughout all of the plagues, where his *bechirah* level kept descending and he did not want to do *teshuvah*; with each plague, he had a little less *bechirah* than before, because his *bechirah* level kept going down.

Now we can have a deeper understanding of how Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh. There is a rule, “In the way a person wants to go, he is led.”<sup>3</sup> There are two kinds of *bechirah* a person can have. The basic level of *bechirah* is when a person chooses to utilize his power of *bechirah*. There is also another kind of *bechirah*, a higher kind of *bechirah*, which is explained by Reb Yeruchem Levovitz:<sup>4</sup> when a person decides that he has no other alternative than to do the will of Hashem. That is the deep use of *bechirah*.

What is an example of this deeper kind of *bechirah*? One example is when a person makes an oath, where he commits himself to something by means of an oath; this is discussed in the Talmud, in the tractate Nedarim. From this we can learn that there is a kind of *bechirah* where a person can choose to make himself obligated in something, and he will then see no other alternative. This level is reached by *tzaddikim* (as explained earlier).

Pharaoh, though, reached the exact opposite of this. He lost his *bechirah*, slowly throughout the plagues, and it is really because he chose to be in a situation where Hashem will take away his *bechirah*. He wanted to be evil, and he had chosen to act this way from the

<sup>3</sup> “In the way a person wants to go in, he is led” – Talmud Bavli: Makkos 10a.

<sup>4</sup> The *Mashgiach*, was a famous *mashgiach ruchani* and *baal mussar* at the *Mir yeshiva* in Poland

very onset of the plagues. There are many reasons explained in *Chazal* of why Hashem “hardened” the heart of Pharaoh. There is one very well-known reason: The more that Pharaoh kept seeing the miracles, the more he should have repented. Since he did not take the messages of the plagues to heart, he was punished each time with more and more hardening of his heart.

He still remained with *bechirah*, but it was becoming smaller and smaller with each plague.

But it can also be explained in different terms, based upon what we have been explaining here. Whenever a person has *bechirah*, he can either choose to utilize his *bechirah* and “choose” to be a chooser, or, there is an alternative, deeper path: he can choose not to have *bechirah*. Within this second path, he can either use this power for holiness or for evil. Either he can choose to submit his will to Hashem’s will - the holy use of this ability; or he will choose to follow his physical passions and to feel helpless with them - the evil use of this ability.

These are two different deep abilities of our soul. When it comes to using one’s *bechirah* for holiness, either a person can use his *bechirah* to choose to resemble Hashem’s *bechirah* (the first path), or a person can use his *bechirah* to nullify himself to the Creator’s will. (This is called the *bittul* (nullification) of *bechirah* /free will to the level of *yediah*/ higher knowledge).

## FEELING HELPLESS WITH YOUR EVIL INCLINATION

In this week’s *parshah*, we see the evil use of *bechirah*. It is not only Pharaoh who used his *bechirah* incorrectly, as we simply understand. It is the very same fallen use of *bechirah* which anyone can relate to, when we are faced with a conflict of choosing between what’s comfortable and with what we know is correct.

A person is tempted to do a certain act which will be a sin to do, and whenever he faces this conflict, he is filled with doubts about what to do, and the doubts feel painful. There are clashing forces within him. As a way to escape this pain that takes place inside him, he might feel a wish to go free from all of this tension, and deep down, he is requesting of Hashem to remove the Heavenly voice (the *bas kol*) that tells him not to sin, otherwise known as the *yetzer hora* (good inclination) – he wishes he wouldn’t have a *yetzer tov* (good inclination) right then, and this way he’ll be able to enjoy committing the sin without feeling guilty.

This is what it means that Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh! Pharaoh wasn’t being punished. His heart became hardened, because that is the outcome of what happens when a person takes the path of Pharaoh, and he continues to descend from his level of *bechirah*, because he keeps refusing to choose what’s right over what’s comfortable.

We can simply understand it as an example of “In the way that a person wants to go in, he is led”, and that is why a person will keep falling further and further into sin, away from his initial *bechirah* level, and that he is to be blamed for his sins even after he continues to fall into more sin. We can understand that this is what happened to Pharaoh. But the deeper way of understanding this is that Pharaoh really wanted to listen to his own passions, and he didn’t want to feel the guilt of his conscience, which is painful to ignore; and that way he’ll be able to do whatever he pleases without having to feel guilty about it. That is what Pharaoh really desired.

“**In the way a person wants to go in, he is led**” – when a person desires to fulfill his natural passions and he doesn’t want to have the guilt of knowing that he did not use his free will correctly, Hashem will deal with him like how Pharaoh was dealt with; his heart will become

hardened. Pharaoh himself wanted this! Pharaoh didn’t want to have his *bechirah*, because he did not want to have to feel the guilt over choosing incorrectly. “Pharaoh” is from the words “*peh ra*”, “evil mouth”, as is well-known; the hint of this is that all that he requested was to be evil, and to abandon good.

This was what Pharaoh had been “requesting” of Hashem all along, throughout all of the plagues. He did not want his *bechirah*, because that would get in the way of his passions. The Rambam famously said that “Pharaoh is the *yetzer hora*” (the evil inclination), and this is logical to anyone who understands. As we are explaining here, it is not only Pharaoh who wanted to keep ignoring the truth so that he could choose what’s comfortable over what’s right. Every person, on some level, must traverse this point.

When a person is facing a conflict between his *yetzer tov* and his *yetzer hora*, and he knows that he must now utilize his *bechirah* to choose right over wrong, he faces two different inner voices of evil. He is not sure if he should decide between the voice of his *yetzer tov* and the voice of his *yetzer hora*, and that is one part of his conflict. But another part of his conflict is that his *yetzer hora* is also telling him not to have a sense of right or wrong at all.

The *yetzer hora* tells him, “Why have a guilty conscience? It’s painful and it is suffering, to have to fight me so much and to try to choose what’s right. Just do whatever you want to do, and don’t even bother thinking about ‘good’ and ‘evil’. All of this self-talk is making you crazy, because it’s causing you to have so many doubts about what you’re doing. Just follow your heart’s desire.” The voice of the *yetzer hora* convinces a person to choose evil over good, and as *Chazal* say, “The wicked are controlled by their hearts.”

As long as a person still wants to have

*bechirah*, he will be able to control himself from listening to his *yetzer hora*. Of this *Chazal* say “The wicked are full of regrets”. There is always a voice of good in a person that screams out from inside him and it makes a person feel pained and guilty over choosing evil. But when a person chooses to follow his passions and ignore the truth, he is really forming a belief that he wants to live his life with such an attitude; he wants to silence the inner voice that begs him to listen to his conscience, so that he can live a painless and guilt-free life.

We should understand that every person, on some level, experiences a “hardening of the heart” like Pharaoh. What causes a person’s heart to become hardened? It is when he keeps ignoring the voice of truth inside him, which tells him to choose what is correct. Just as Hashem hardened the heart of Pharaoh after Pharaoh persisted with this attitude, so does every person experience this on some degree.

## AVOIDING PHARAOH’S MENTALITY

If we want to avoid the “hardening of the heart” that happened to Pharaoh, we must know the following. There is no one who doesn’t have *nisyonos* (difficult situations), and there is no person who doesn’t have spiritual failures. But in order to avoid becoming like Pharaoh, we need to take the upper road.

Earlier we brought the words of the *Gemara* that “If you see a Torah scholar commit a sin at night, do not think (negatively) about him the next day, for he surely repented”, and we explained that every time a *tzaddik* falls, he does *teshuvah*. But even if a person is not on the level where he is doing *teshuvah* after every time he falls, he must make

sure not to stifle his inner voice of good, which is telling him not to do certain things that are bad. If one can do this, he is “erasing” the “Pharaoh” within.

As long as a person can sense the inner voice in him telling him to choose right over wrong – which can be felt either as a feeling or as a thought – when a person will then be tempted with something improper, he will at least be aware that it is not good. Even if he succumbs to the sin, he can still be fixed, and his heart hasn’t been hardened yet like Pharaoh. But if he is tempted with the evil act and it feels not only forbidden to him, but “permissible” to him, and he does not think or feel that there is anything wrong with what he is doing, and he believes deep down that his life should be lived guilt-free – it means that his heart has become hardened!

If a person has fallen very low and he wants to get out of the situation, as soon as he falls to the sin, he must not let himself feel any despair or helplessness. Rather, he needs to let himself feel the pain of listening to the inner voice of good inside him, the voice of his *yetzer tov*, which is telling him that he has just done something wrong and that he has gone against the will of Hashem. If a person feels ready to deal with the truth and not to run away from that inner voice of good, he will never become hardened like Pharaoh.

We must know that this is a part of life which most people have to deal with; we are not speaking here about something that doesn’t happen often.

Most people, at a certain point in their life, have silenced their inner voice of good. They continue to follow their passions and to do whatever they wish, having long ago silenced their inner conscience, so that they don’t have to feel the pain, of what it’s saying to them. They have let themselves become completely captured by evil.

But if a person makes sure to keep listening to his inner voice – even if he falls many times to a sin, even if he falls 10 times or 100 times to the sin, or more – he is at least **aware** of his situation. The pain that accompanies this awareness is part of the rectification process, and it will be a guarantee that his heart will not become hardened like Pharaoh’s.

In conclusion, we can now understand better the verses that this parshah begin with: “Come to Pharaoh, for I have made his heart and the heart of his servants stubborn, so that I can put these signs of Mine in his midst. And so that you may relate in the ears of your son and your son’s son that I made mockery of Egypt and My signs that I placed among them – that you may know that I am Hashem.”

Hashem not only wants us to tell over the story of what He did to Pharaoh, but to tell over the attitude of Pharaoh which led to his downfall and how we need to live our lives very differently than he did. The more that a person perseveres in this path, and is willing to go through the pain of listening to his inner voice of good, which keeps telling him not to sin and to feel remorse over sin, which doesn’t stop harassing him, even over his deeply rooted negative patterns that are very hard for him to overcome – the more he continues to listen to this inner voice and he doesn’t ignore it, he is closer to becoming “one who comes to be purified, is assisted.”<sup>5</sup>

This was the root of the redemption from Egypt.

## REHABILITATING MY SOUL

**QUESTION** My soul lays in this entire question. I had a breakdown because I was acting way above my level. Currently, I am no longer exerting myself beyond my physical and emotional capabilities. However, I still feel weak, in the aftermath of everything. If I try to have even minimal exertion when using the various capabilities of my soul, my breathing becomes heavy and my heart is pounding quickly, I have great difficulty concentrating, and I get headaches. I can't get through a Shacharis davening without experiencing any of this.

My question is: What am I supposed to do, so that I can get past this weakened state (meaning my physical and emotional symptoms), as a result of the breakdown that I experienced? It's also possible that now it's too difficult for me to do even the barest physical or emotional exertion, as long as it's a bit above my current capability, because ever since I broke down, my capabilities have gone down.

**ANSWER** Begin your life again, as if you are just beginning. Become like a convert to Judaism, who is considered to be like a newborn infant. Don't think at all about the past. Don't work off your past, because if you are continuing from your past, you will still be stuck in the past, of being weakened emotionally, which led to you become weakened physically. If you begin your life again, starting from a new beginning, you are starting from your current capabilities [with no relation to your past].

It may be necessary for you to "start from a new beginning" several times throughout the day. Whenever you feel a difficulty with something, desist from it, and only after you feel calmer physically and emotionally should you begin again, according to your current capabilities. In addition, you should access the soul's power of *oneg* (pleasure) in different ways, which will strengthen your soul. In this way, you will soon be healed. May you have peace and may peace be upon you. Rise, and succeed. As an aside, try to get advice on which types of foods you can eat, which will give you more physical strength.

## FEELING ORPHANED

**QUESTION** The Rav says in sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh, Part 4 (Chapter 1) that an orphan has a harder time relating to Hashem with a father-child relationship, because he doesn't have an analogy of what a father-child relationship looks like. How can this be reconciled by the fact that Hashem is called the "Father of orphans", meaning that an orphan has a simpler connection with Hashem? (It's often said that an orphan naturally feels closer to Hashem, but I couldn't find a source for this).

Similar to the above question, I want to ask a more specific question. I do have a father, Baruch Hashem, but I feel like an orphan. So, what does the Rav advise me on: (1) How I can achieve a relationship with Hashem even though I don't have the analogy of the father-son relationship from my own life? (2) Also, what can I do to create a relationship with my father? Am I supposed to just "let go" of this need that I feel?

**ANSWER** 1) There are many different kinds of relationships with Hashem. Every person has certain ways of connecting to Hashem that are more revealed, and every person also has other ways of connecting to Hashem that are more hidden.

For example, a Kohen's relationship with Hashem is obviously more connected with the fact that he has a certain uniqueness of being a Kohen. The same goes for a Levi, and the same goes for a melech (king). It's the same thing when it comes to relating to Hashem as a "Father". Not everyone has this kind of connection with Hashem. For example, someone who doesn't have a father, or someone who feels like an orphan in his father's lifetime, doesn't have a "fatherly" relationship with Hashem. Therefore, if someone doesn't have a father or if he is missing a relationship with his father, there are other ways of connecting to Hashem which he can strengthen himself in.

To illustrate, it is well-known that when a person is weak when it comes to a certain sense, he will be unusually stronger when it comes to a different sense. It's the same when it comes to

not having a father: Since it's harder for you to have a "fatherly" relationship with Hashem, there are other aspects in which you are able to have a very strong relationship with Hashem.

2) However, there is no such thing as letting go of the need for a father. There are different ways of how a person can gain a fatherly connection: (1) One way is by becoming connected to those who were called our Avos (our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov). This is a more abstract kind of relationship, but we are able to have a more personal relationship with them somewhat, by davening by their graves. (2) Another way to gain a fatherly connection is, if this is possible, to have a relationship with one's father's father. The father of one's father is also referred to as a person's own "father". (3) A rebbi (Torah teacher) is also called one's "father". (4) One can also gain a little bit of a "fatherly" connection with his father-in-law. A father-in-law resembles a father on some level. (You can refer to the shiur of – **בלבביפדיה** **מחשבה** on the topic of **אב** (av/father), where this is discussed further.)

3) It is also possible for a son to rise above the father [where the father receives from the son]. We see this with Yaakov and Yosef. At first, there was a natural father-son relationship between Yaakov and Yosef, in which Yaakov taught Yosef. But later, in the 17 years when Yaakov lived in Egypt, Yosef supported Yaakov. From here we see that there comes a point where the son gives to the father. Therefore, practically speaking, a son needs to be giving something to his father, and this furthers their relationship. And when a son awakens this kind of relationship with his father, in which he is giving to his father, the natural relationship between father and son is also awakened, where the father returns to his role of being the giver towards his son.

4) You need to discover any aspects of a relationship that you have with your father, and to gain a strong emotional connection to whatever relationship you do have with your father. This will enable the relationship with your father to slowly open up, more and

more. Practically speaking, you need to firstly remember any times in which you did enjoy a relationship with your father, even if it was only a little, and then you need to become emotionally connected to that. Even more so, you can connect to the “pure child” in you (tam, pure child), the point in you which is a little child, which receives a warm and natural relationship from a father. In that place in your soul you can find a fatherly connection, and you should awaken it and become connected to it. This is a lengthy discussion.

## GOG, MAGOG & AMALEK TODAY

**QUESTION 1)** Is the “war of Gog and Magog” [the final war in the End of Days] the same thing as Amalek’s war against G-d?

**ANSWER** At the root, the war of God and Magog is a war against G-d, and this branches out into a war against the Jewish people, just as the war of Amalek is. Amalek is the evil “wind” which includes all evil forces in it, and Gog and Magog is the container [earth] which holds it and actualizes it.

**QUESTION 2)** What is the final rebellion against G-d all about (both the war of Gog and Magog and the war of Amalek)?

**ANSWER** It is about fighting a war against G-d from all directions.

**QUESTION 3)** What is “Gog” about and what is “Magog” all about?

**ANSWER** Same answer as before.

**QUESTION 4)** Why will Gog and Magog merit burial? Does that mean they will do teshuvah before their deaths?

**ANSWER** Gog and Magog represent the element of earth [on the side of evil], because they are the “container” [for the war of Amalek against G-d], and therefore they will be buried in the earth.

**QUESTION 5)** Will Amalek be erased before Mashiach comes or after Mashiach comes?

**ANSWER** I don’t know of an explicit source which discusses this. However, the “light of Mashiach” has already begun to wage war against Amalek. It seems that both will take place simultaneously: The destruction of Amalek, and the coming of Mashiach, will probably take place at the same time.

**QUESTION 6)** The Rav said that from 5760 and onward, the power of “Amalek” began to dominate the world. How exactly do we see this? Is it referring to the dominance of the media?

**ANSWER** Yes.

**QUESTION 7)** Amalek is all about “My strength and the might of my hand”, and this arrogance seems to characterize the most powerful countries of the world, such as America, Russia, China, North Korea, and Israel, who all boast of their power. Are all these countries a branch of “Amalek”?

**ANSWER** The countries of chutz l’aretz

(outside Eretz Yisrael) are a branch of Amalek, while Israel is entirely under the exile of the “Erev Rav”.

**QUESTION 8)** When America defeated the Germans in World World II, was this a degree of erasing Amalek, since Germany is synonymous with Amalek? If that’s the case, then America can’t be a branch of Amalek, since it was America defeated “Amalek”. Or perhaps America is still a branch of “Amalek” because they did it for their own interests, and it was all about showing their power, which would still categorize America as “Amalek”?

**ANSWER** Amalek is able to be at war within itself [hence different countries of “Amalek” are able to wage war against other countries of “Amalek”]. Part of the “war of Amalek” includes the war of “Esav” against the Jewish people, and the war of “Yishmael” against the Jewish people.

**QUESTION 9)** Amalek’s main characteristic is leitzanus, they mock G-d because they think they are powerful and they represent a life where everything is about “me” and not about submitting to the authority of G-d. Since the world today is centered on pursuing pleasure and self-gratification, would that place all of the nations of the world under the category of Amalek?

**ANSWER** At their root, all of the nations are included in Amalek, each nation in a different way.

