

A JOLT OF -OY GEVALT!

by Rabbi Label Lam

And HASHEM hardened the heart of Pharaoh and he did not send out the Children of Israel. (Shemos 10:20)

At first, "And Pharaoh's heart hardened" (Shemos 8:15) and in the end "And HASHEM hardened the heart of Pharaoh". Why is that so? That is according to what Reish Lakish says, "He who comes to contaminate is opened up for."... Once a person desires badness he is tripped up from heaven. (Pesikta Zuta)

Why did HASHEM harden Pharaoh's heart? Doesn't that interfere with his free will? Now we know why HASHEM did so. Pharaoh hardened his own heart and therefore HASHEM hardened it for him. By giving up control and abusing his free will he was made to lose control and he was denied free will. It was really all a testimony to Pharaoh's terminal stubbornness. He was perhaps the biggest denier of HASHEM that ever walked the good earth.

The Kotzker Rebbe ztl. sardonically said that the "free thinkers" of these days believe that they are authentic scoffers, but their actions don't always support their claim. They are really deceiving themselves and others. Whenever they are visited by the slightest of tragedies or illness they immediately run to pray and petition G-d. Pharaoh, on the other hand, was a real scoffer. Nine plagues had already landed on the heads of Egypt and each with a clear warning with precise detail as to how it would unfold being fulfilled. Still Pharaoh not only refused to yield but he resisted in believing. The Torah tells us, "And it was at midnight and HASHEM smote every first born in the Land of Egypt from the first born of Pharaoh that sits on the throne until the first born of the captive who was in the dungeon and all the first born animals. And Pharaoh got up that night (from his bed: Rashi) and all his servants and all of Egypt and there was a great outcry throughout all of the Land of Egypt and there was no house in which there was not there a death. He called to Moshe and Aaron at night and said, "Rise up, go out from among my people, even you, even the Children of Israel; Go and serve HASHEM as you have spoken!" (Shemos 12:29-31) The Kotzker takes note that Pharaoh himself was a first born and he had heard directly all of Moshe's warnings for the first nine plagues and amazingly the verse testifies "and Pharaoh got up..." that means that he went to sleep as if nothing unusual would be happening that night. This demonstrates that he was a real scoffer. He saw the truth staring him in the face and yet he remained unaffected.

On the flip side the sages tell us, "One who comes to purify gets help!" As opposed to the one who seeks impurity who finds an open door, the one who truly desires holiness gets wind in his sails.

Avraham Avinu after nine increasingly difficult tests is faced with the ultimate. He is asked to bring his son Yitzchok as a burnt offering. It was Yitzchok he waited for till one hundred years of age and in whom he had sewn wisdom for thirty-seven years. There too the Torah tells us, "And Avraham arose in the morning..." (Breishis 22:3) That implies also that he went to sleep the night before the fateful journey. That too is amazing! With increasing clarity and intensity he learned over the course of a lifetime to look truth in the face and embrace it. Therefore he accepted his destiny with perfect calm.

Oddly, from the outside, the Baal Bitachon- the Master of Trusting G-d, and the bum can look hauntingly similar. Both are sleeping peacefully. What's the real difference? One goes to sleep comforted by truth while the other is sedated, in a fantasy- a bubble, at risk of being awakened by a jolt of -oy gevalt! DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).