

SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

by Rabbi Label Lam

And the masters symbolists of Egypt were able to produce the same effect with their hidden arts, and Pharaoh's heart became obstinate and he did not listen to them (Moshe and Aaron) just as HASHEM had said. And Pharaoh turned away and **he went to his house and he did not attend his heart** even to this. And all of Egypt dug around the river for water to drink because they were not able to drink from the water of the river. (Shemos 7:22-24)

What do we learn from the fact that "Pharaoh went to his house"? It struck me as an oddity that the Torah would focus in on this detail. Every word must be teaching some deep and relevant secret.

The Malbim has a sensible approach. Even if Pharaoh remained unimpressed with the feat that Moshe and Aaron had performed, turning the Nile River into blood, and even if it was only because his magicians were able to reproduce on some small scale an illusionary model of water being turned red, when he gets home to discover there is no water, that practical reality should set off alarm bells and a state of desperation. Even still he did not beg Moshe to rescind the plague but rather they dug around for water.

Let's try another angle. Pharaoh no doubt was a very smart person. Powerful evidence is beginning to pile up before him that there is a Creator and Controller of the Universe that has taken up the cause of the Jewish People that he is oppressing.

Not only is he being asked to believe in an entity that he currently does not accept but he is also invested in actively denying it because belief in G-d would demote him in the land he now dominates. It would be hard for him to change his world view even if he wanted to. How much more, so if he has reason to resist. What we are privy to observe is the slow and painful education of the obstinate heart of the man Pharaoh.

Paradigms die hard. They are not shifted easily. The status quo is stubborn. As new and challenging information is introduced that mind will tend to adjust and torture logic rather than change. This process of resistance is called cognitive dissonance. We cannot accommodate facts that run contrary to our current belief system. Pharaoh's world view is being dismantled slowly before our eyes and we are witnesses to the almost impossible nature of the process. Not only are the Jewish People stuck in Egypt but Pharaoh is stuck too. Change is hard!

Why does the Torah tell us that Pharaoh went to his home and there he did not pay attention? Perhaps in his public persona it was important for him to project power and certainty but when he

went home he could cogitate on the matter and realize at least privately that something unusual is happening here, but no! Rabbi Mordechai Schwab ztl in Maamer Mordechai detects in those words the important ingredient that blocked Pharaoh and prolonged the pain of the process. "He did not attend his heart". The word is "Hisbonenus"- "Contemplation". If one does not think seriously and deeply about a matter no productive change can be expected.

There is a room in our house that everything gets dumped into it. It's a small room and it happens to be my office. This week I was off from the steady routine of work and I decided to liberate it and carve out a place for me to contemplate. When it was all done I realized that that room is a metaphor for the human mind. Furniture and boxes have to be removed and rearranged to give it new life. At some point the room is so crowded and cluttered with odd pieces that it ceases to function. That simple sorting out process requires a new vision. Pharaoh realized that he needed to rearrange his world view in order to accommodate HASHEM when his world was nearly collapsed. Hopefully we can figure it out **sooner rather than later**.