

GENUINELY JOLTED

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

After Pharaoh stubbornly endured the first six plagues - blood, frogs, lice, wild beasts, epidemic and boils - at times considering letting the Jewish nation leave and at times not even going that far, he made a significant concession after the seventh plague, hail. "Pharaoh sent and summoned Moshe and Aaron and said to them, 'This time I have sinned; G-d is the righteous one and I and my people are the wicked ones.'" (Shemos/Exodus 9:27) What about this particular plague compelled Pharaoh to make such an admission?

The Da'as Zekainim me'Ba'alei Tosfos (collection of comments on the Torah by the Tosafists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries) explains that prior to the onset of the hail, G-d had Moshe warn Pharaoh and the Egyptians, "And now send, gather in your livestock and everything you have in the field; all the people and animals that are found in the field that are not gathered in the house, the hail shall descend upon them and they shall die." (9:19) Pharaoh was conceding G-d's righteousness in offering ample warning while he and his countrymen were wicked for not giving any credence to the warning, thus allowing their cattle to be killed.

But Pharaoh was warned about most of the previous plagues and he ignored those warnings just the same. And despite the compounded pummeling, Pharaoh continued to resist. What was unique about these events that Pharaoh admitted that he was evil, that he was wrong?

Rabbi Alter Henach Leibowitz (Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Kew Gardens Hills, New York) elucidates that Pharaoh was profoundly impacted by the pure chessed (loving kindness) demonstrated by the Master of the Universe. G-d always demanded Pharaoh's compliance in releasing the Jewish people to totally avert the plagues. But unique to the hail was the Divinely noted opportunity to spare the livestock a gruesome death by moving them indoors, even if Pharaoh was too stubborn to concede and avoid the plague completely. Thus, Pharaoh contrasted G-d's righteousness to his nation's wickedness in ignoring the warning. The human appreciation of being the beneficiary of a genuinely selfless act made more of an impression than all of the fear generated by the awesome, magnificent miracles.

Much has been written in our day offering advice for winning friends and influencing people. But G-d Himself, the creator of human psychology and the author of the ultimate "self help" manual - the Torah - offers simple, straightforward advice. Genuine selfless loving kindness, emulating that done by G-d during every nanosecond of the human experience, from the first moment of Creation until

this moment's involuntary breaths and heartbeats, breaks down the most fortified psychological barriers.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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