

EMOTIONAL PLANNING

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

When Moshe and Aaron approached Pharaoh to request the release of the Jewish nation prior to the eighth plague, locusts, they transmitted G-d's response to the King's intransigence. "So said G-d, L-rd of the Hebrews, 'Until when will you refuse to be humbled ("le'anos") before Me? Send out My people so they may serve me!" (Shemos/Exodus 10:3) Rashi explains that "le'anos" derives from the etymology of "ani", a poor and destitute individual. G-d is asking Pharaoh how long he will refuse to recognize his "poverty" before G-d and become subservient to Him. Apparently, Pharaoh's repudiation of G-d's numerous requests to free the Jews was borne in his haughtiness, a stubbornness that did not allow him to defer to the will of the King of Kings.

Even though the original subjugation of the Jews was for the economic benefit, after seven nature-defying plagues that wreaked havoc on the Egyptian psyche, infrastructure and economy, any objective observer would realize there was no longer any benefit to keeping the Jews captive. As Pharaoh's own advisors blurted out after Moshe's warning of the forthcoming locusts, "How long will this be a snare for us? Send out the men so they may serve G-d, their L-rd. Do you not yet know that Egypt is lost?" (ibid. v.7) The only reason for Pharaoh's continued refusal to comply with the demand for their release and to withstand the torturous plagues was the maintenance of his own honor. But this reaction is illogical. If Pharaoh was truly concerned with his honor, he should have acquiesced long ago. True, his image would suffer slightly, but the alternative was self-destruction. Indeed, that path led to the complete annihilation of the agricultural infrastructure by the locusts, the deathblow to Pharaoh's illusion with the death of the first-born sons, and the obliteration of his army in the Sea of Reeds. Which would have been the greater blow to the royal ego, the one he could have suffered releasing the children of Israel after seven plagues or the one he did suffer at the Sea, where he not only lost any remaining vestige of his honor but also any remaining vestige of his national glory? How could Pharaoh make such counter-productive decisions?

Chidushei HaLev (1) elucidates that Pharaoh was not thinking. His conclusions came from his ego-blinded heart, with no rationale entering the process. This is the ability of the heart and its emotions to so absolutely blind the mind to reality. Such decisions more often bring destruction, not progress, to the extent that even the lust that the heart desires to satisfy is undercut and unfulfilled.

There is barely an area of our lives for which we do not preplan. We start planning our careers while in high school. We plan our professional projects. We plan our vacations. But do we plan our emotions? Mesilas Yesharim (2) bemoans "there are few, however, who devote thought and study to

perfection of Divine service - to love, fear, communion and all other aspects of saintliness...Their failure to devote more attention to it stems from its being so manifest and so obvious to them that they see no need to spending much time upon it...Though the beginnings and foundations of saintliness are implanted in every person's heart, if he does not occupy himself with them,...he will trespass upon them without feeling or perceiving that he is doing so." (Introduction) Just as an athlete trains and prepares for every eventuality in his confrontation, an "emotional planner" studies and prepares for every spiritual eventuality to assure that rational thought maintains control. With such spiritual preparedness, even when circumstances do not follow our original plan, we will always emerge from the essential battle - the battle for self-control and rational response - victorious, with our honor intact.

Have a Good Shabbos!

FOOTNOTES:

(1) *the ethical discourses of Rabbi Alter Henach Leibowitz, Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim of Kew Gardens Hills, New York*

(2) "Path of the Just", one of the most popular Mussar (introspective Jewish self-improvement) works in Jewish literature; a moving, inspiring work describing how a thoughtful Jew may climb the ladder of purification until he attains the level of holiness; authored by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, 1707-1746 of Padua, Italy, and Amsterdam

Copyright © 2004 by [Rabbi Pinchas Avruch](#) and [Torah.org](#)