

# LESSON OF THE SNOW

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

Snow. For local readers, it requires no introduction. For those reading this abroad, suffice it to say, we here in Toronto (and in much of the Northern Hemisphere) have had lots of it lately. It's on our minds and on our tongues (that is, we can't stop talking about it). Too often, it is also inside our boots.

Just yesterday, upon coming to Beis HaMedrash (synagogue) in the midst of our latest blizzard, and being welcomed-in by the hustle and bustle of each and all kibbutzing about the latest weather forecast, and how much snow might and might not fall, I remarked to a friend, "You know, there is nothing quite like snow - Something that can so disrupt our lives, yet bring simcha (joy) to one-and-all!" There's no doubting it: Snow has a special way of bringing simcha in its path.

One must acknowledge, a friend once remarked, the incredible kindness that the Ribbono Shel Olam (Almighty) has done with us by making snow white. Imagine if snow was black! Everything would become dark and gloomy.

But how does snow relate to Moshe and Pharaoh and this week's sidrah? Snow, in Lashon ha-Kodesh, is "sheleg." The three Hebrew letters that make up the word sheleg are shin - lamed - gimel. The Midrash asks: What caused Esther to invite Haman to join her with king Achashveirosh at her feast? She said (Mishlei/Proverbs 16:18): "Greatness comes before a fall (Lifnei Shever Gaon)." Simply, this means that at times, Hashem grants greatness to the wicked only to make their ultimate downfall that much harder to bear. One who falls from a low place to an even lower place will likely be injured. But one who falls from a high peak to a deep canyon will be mortally wounded. Esther saw the downfall of Haman drawing near, and, in order to make his downfall all the more painful, she granted him an exclusive invitation to her feast.

There is, however, explains the previous Bobover Rebbe zt"l (see Kedushas Tzion vol.2 pp. 12) a deeper explanation of this concept of "Lifnei shever gaon/The greatness before the fall." The Gemara (Berachos 9b) quotes in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "One should always run to greet a king. Not just a Jewish king, but even a gentile king. In order that, if he will merit (to see the coming of Mashiach and the renewal of the kingship of the House of David), he will be able to appreciate the difference between "our" kings and "their" kings." Jewish leaders have always been the epitome of humility. They never sought out positions of leadership, and only consented to take such positions after much communal pressure. How different is this from the many wicked dictators of world history who actively pursued their positions of power, and, having attained their goal, abused their

positions to the denigration of those beneath them, and displayed unspoken arrogance and self-admiration.

Contrast, for example, Moshe Rabbeinu with Pharaoh. Moshe, even after being told by Hashem to go and lead the Jewish nation, said (Shemos 3:11), "Who am I to go before Pharaoh and to take the Jews out of Mitzrayim?" He found himself totally unworthy of the task. Pharaoh, on the other hand, took his power so sincerely that he set out to convince his nation that he himself was a god, as it is written (Yechezkel 29:3), "That he (Pharaoh) has said, 'My river (the Nile) is my own; I have made it for myself.'"

Greatness, like many things in life, is really a test of one's character. Will he attribute his power and his accomplishments to his own strength and talents, or will he recognize that whatever greatness he has, has been given to him by Hashem, Who is the source of all blessing and power. One who attributes his successes to Hashem is indeed worthy of greatness. He need not fear from the "greatness before the fall." But one who fails the test, who's successes cause him to indulge himself in smug self-admiration and self-glorification, rest assured that his greatness will be no more than a prelude to the bone-jolting fall that looms in the distance.

The letters of sheleg: Shin - Lamed - Gimel, comprise the first three letters of the pasuk, "Lifnei Shever Gaon/Greatness comes before the fall." Perhaps, like the snow, the "great" people of the world are at first elevated to the heavens, where they are admired and idolized. They are like the beautiful snowflake in its cloud, which, in its heavenly abode, thinks the world of itself. Soon, though, it will be rudely tossed to the earth, where it will be trampled, turn to slush, melt and dissolve away.

Regarding the humble leaders of our nation, however, Shlomo haMelech says (Mishlei 31:21), "Her house does not fear from sheleg." Those who accept their greatness with humility and modesty need not fear from "Lifnei Shever Gaon."

So, as we put on our boots and galoshes, and traipse through the latest snowfall, we would be well-served to remind ourselves of the "Lesson of the Snow" - Namely, those who recognize that all they have is from Hashem, will enjoy continued success, while those who don't, won't.

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