

# DON'T LET YOUR EGO GET THE BEST OF YOU

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The entire story of the Torah regarding the redemption of the Jewish slaves from Egypt descends into a contest of wills. Pharaoh reaches the limit of his patience in this week's parsha. He warns Moshe not to dare come and see him again. He assesses that Moshe's demands are not serious since he remains inflexible and not open to any compromise regarding them. He also apparently believes that Moshe has run out of plagues to visit on Egypt.

The troubles that Moshe has visited on Egypt have not dented the spirit of Pharaoh. Only when finally his own life is threatened and when all of Egypt is mourning its deaths does Pharaoh waver in his determination to refuse Moshe's requests. And even then he will soon regret his decision to free the Jews from Egyptian slavery. What is the reason for Pharaoh's behavior?

His advisers have long ago declared to him that Egypt is lost if he continues on his present course of recalcitrant behavior. Yet Pharaoh is unwilling to concede to Moshe. Their discussions and differences have now turned personal and no logic can any longer rule the day. His angry outburst to Moshe and his banishing him from his palace marks the breaking point in his behavior.

There will be no reasoning with him from now forward. Only the blows of the deaths of the first born Egyptians will affect him and, as mentioned above, only weakly and temporarily. His stubbornness will eventually lead to great tragedy and loss for his people.

But that is always the way of tyrants. Blinded by one's own ego, uncaring as to the fate of others, deluded by one's own alleged infallibility, stubbornness and illogic rule the day. Pharaoh cannot be wrong. He seems himself as never having been wrong. Lord Acton's famous phrase that "absolute power corrupts absolutely" is always borne out to be accurate.

The struggle for Pharaoh's mind and soul is what the Torah is teaching us here. The kings of Israel always had prophets that pricked the bubble of their ego. Moshe may be banished from the Pharaoh's palace but his message cannot be so contained. Ideas and spirit are the stuff of human existence. Eventually they penetrate the most closed of palaces and societies. That is what Moshe is trying to convey to Pharaoh. The prophet stated that Pharaoh though himself to be a god - the god of the Nile no less.

All dictators think themselves to be gods. Their pictures of themselves are to be regarded as talismans and no criticism of themselves is allowed. Judaism spares no one from criticism, even our greatest leaders. There are no perfect people and there is no human that in any way can be deemed

as a god. Moshe's visits and conversations with Pharaoh were meant to have him realize that he is only human and therefore prone to error and mistakes.

Pharaoh is unwilling to hear that message from Moshe and therefore he will be forced to hear it from plagues and death itself. This type of confrontation is a lesson to all of us as to dangers of power and ego. It is the contest between Moshe's humility and Pharaoh's arrogance. And we all know who won out in that contest.

Shabat shalom.

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