

EVERYONE NEEDS ATTENTION

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 359, Making Ice on Shabbos. Good Shabbos!

Everyone Needs Attention

The pasuk [verse] at the beginning of the parsha says, "Vayehi b'Shalach Pharaoh es ha'am" - "and it was when Pharaoh sent out the nation". The Medrash Rabbah comments on the word "Vayehi" - "and it was". The Medrash says that the expression "vayehi" is related to the word "vai" (as in 'oy vai'), which means to cry out. The Medrash asks, "Who cried out?" The Medrash answers that Pharaoh screamed in anguish when he had to send the Jewish people out.

What did Pharaoh cry about? The Medrash relates a parable. A King had a son who travelled away from home. The prince spent some time at the house of a wealthy person. When the King heard where the prince was staying, he corresponded with this person and asked him to send the prince home. The wealthy person ignored the letter. The King sent more letters, all of which were ignored. Finally the King went to the house of this person to take his son home himself.

When the King finally took his son home, the wealthy person started to cry out. The neighbors asked him, "Why are you crying?" He responded, "I had a great honor in hosting the prince in my home. The King corresponded with me and took an intense interest in what was happening in my home. Now, I no longer have the prince in my home, so the King will have no interest in me whatsoever. That is why I cry out."

That is how Pharaoh felt. As long as the Jews were in Egypt, G-d kept sending him messages. Now that the Jews left, Pharaoh would no longer have a 'correspondence' with the Master of the World. "Woe to me" (vay), says Pharaoh, "that I sent the Jews out and lost my dialog with G-d". That is why the pasuk begins "VAY-ehi b'Shalach..."

What conclusion must we arrive at from this Medrash? Was Pharaoh a masochist? Did he miss the 'correspondence' that G-d was sending to him: Blood, Frogs, Lice, etc., etc. Did he love getting beaten up. Why did he cry out when he was no longer 'hearing' from G-d in this fashion?

Pharoah may have had deep psychological problems, but masochism was not one of them. Pharoah was a very real human being. Human beings need to feel wanted. They need to feel "I am somebody. Somebody notices me." When a person is no longer noticed, he feels like less of a person.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (one of the premier personalities in the mussar movement today, residing in Jerusalem) mentions in one of his books that a certain young man once stopped coming to prayer services at a Yeshiva. A friend asked him, "What happened? Don't you daven anymore?" The young man responded, "Heaven forbid, I daven at another minyan now. There is no shortage of minyanim in Jerusalem." His friend asked him, "Why don't you daven in the Yeshiva anymore?" The young man responded, "This way maybe the mashgiach [spiritual mentor of the students] will notice me."

This is an example of the fact that negative notice is better than no notice. "I want somebody to know that I exist." Apathy is worse than punishment.

Small children sometimes 'act out'. (Sometimes they don't have to be so small.) We may ask, "Why are they acting out? Why can't they behave? Why can't they just sit quietly at the Shabbos table? Why do they act out, only to be sent away to their rooms in the middle of the meal?"

The answer is that they, in fact, want to be sent away because that way they are at least noticed. We all have a choice. We can either give our children or our spouses positive attention or we might have to give them negative attention. But we will need to give them attention, one way or another.

This is the lesson of the Medrash. Pharoah would rather be beaten over the head and worse, than not be noticed by G-d at all. The worst thing for Pharoah was the realization that after sending out the nation, G-d would become oblivious to him. Everyone needs attention.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas B'Shalach are provided below:

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