

REALLY BIG

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The stubbornness of Par-oh in the face of almost one year of devastating plagues is unparalleled in human history. To simply say he hardened his heart sheds no light on the weakness in his character that would blind him to the path of submission that would have saved his country from disaster.

The Torah states that when Par-oh entered his palace, he suddenly had a change of heart and would reject the demands of Moshe and Aharon for freedom for the Jews. "And he came into his house and did not concern his heart with this [warning] either". Shemot 7:15 Rabenu Bahye adds that the wicked king Nebudhadnezar was also proud of his palace and therefore became haughty.

The question is: These monarchs had fame, success and power - Why did their palace make them conceited when they had so much else of which to be proud? The lesson is that arrogance is not an intellectual response, but instead an emotional one. A beautiful home with its opulent décor aroused feelings of ga-avah - arrogance - more that wealth and power did intellectually.

We live in a society where exterior trappings define the man. Clothing - cars - and big-boy toys define a person to friends and neighbors more than the real person does. More dangerous is the fact that these not so meaningful possessions transform the way one looks at oneself as well. A simple man surrounded by lavish trappings sees a distorted self-image that may very well lead to haughty behavior beyond one's true worth as a human being and as a member of society. Wrong decisions and poor choices are sure to follow the blindness of conceit.

The Jewish home has been a paradigm for an environment conducive to spiritual growth and boundless self-improvement through the ages. Even the wicked prophet Bil-am praised, "Ma tovu ohalekha Yisrael - How goodly are your tents Israel" as he perused the modest life style of our ancestors. We should all take a close look at our priorities and re-establish our homes as a beautiful environment to nurture ourselves and our children in a life of happiness and contentment steeped in Torah values.

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