

# *A Wicked Catalyst*

PARSHA INSIGHTS - BISHALACH (5760)

## **PAROH BROUGHT US CLOSE TO HASHEM**

**“Paroh drew near.** The *Bnai Yisroel* [Children of Israel] lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them! And they were very frightened, and the *Bnai Yisroel* cried out to Hashem. And they said to Moshe, ‘Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? What is this that you have done to us, to bring us out of Egypt?’” (14:10-11).

The *Oznaim L'Torah* points out an apparent inconsistency in the behavior of *Bnai Yisroel* as they felt cornered between Paroh's army and the waters of the *Yam Suf* [Red Sea]. First, they CRIED OUT TO HASHEM. Suddenly afterward, however, they directed harsh words at Moshe *Rabainu* [Moses our teacher]. If their attitude was to *daven* [pray] and humble themselves to G-d so He would rescue them, why did they act in a vicious manner at the same time?

The answer he provides reflects the astonishing brilliance and vast knowledge of the Lutzker Rav. Who caused the *Bnai Yisroel* to come close to Hashem and pour out their hearts in supplication by the *Yam Suf*? **Paroh** is “credited” for prompting them to do this. Remember the opening words of the *psukim* [verses] we are studying: “Paroh drew close”. The *Midrash Rabba* 21:5, and other commentators, are bothered by the words “Paroh *HIKRIV*”. It should have said “Paroh *KARAV*”, the usual conjugation for the past tense verb which means “came close”. (Another possibility would have been “*VAYIKRAV* Paroh”, which is also a form of past tense in Biblical Hebrew.) The words of the Torah make it seem that Paroh BROUGHT SOMETHING CLOSE, a causative action.

The *Midrash* therefore concludes that Paroh brought *Bnai Yisroel* close to *teshuva* [repentance]. The hostility of Paroh, which inspired us to repent and scream from the depths of our hearts, was more effective than “a hundred fasts and prayers”, proclaims the *Midrash*. We see that the catalyst for *Bnai Yisroel's teshuva* was Paroh's ruthless pursuit. This being the case, the repentance had to have some defects. Why?

“From the wicked comes forth wickedness” (*Shmuel Alef* [Samuel 1] 24:14). (Dovid had said this to Shaul; you will be terminated by the hands of evil people, but my hand shall not be upon you, even though I had the opportunity to defend myself and kill you. Let a *rasha* [wicked person] be the one to slay you, since *reshaim* [wicked people] are the ones who produce wicked results.)

When a *rasha* causes *Bnai Yisroel* to accomplish something positive, the finished product will be faulty.

Now we understand why the Jews lashed out against Moshe even while in the process of *teshuva*. Their *teshuva* had been brought about by Paroh, the *rasha*. No one could expect flawless results from such a source. Inconsistency would surely prevail, since the benevolence of a *rasha* leads to an impure outcome.

There are other solutions to this puzzle. We have explored only one. We are hereby reminded that we should try to benefit from the assistance of righteous people. What one gains from a *rasha* is a mixed blessing, but *tzadikim* [righteous people] bring pure goodness to the world.

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

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