

What's The Agenda?

Dear Parents,

One of the delights of learning in a *Yeshiva* from a young age, is learning *Parshas HaShavua* and especially the first *Parshiyos* in *Sefer Shemos*, which are reinforced again and again at Pesach time each year. One of the potential pitfalls of learning these *Parshiyos* at such a young age is the internalizing of childish impressions of people's behavior, that remain even as one matures.

Our impression of Paroh is usually quite superficial and warped. An otherwise smart person who acts so obviously foolish, reckless and arrogant in the face of Divine retribution, we imbibe an image of someone who seems to be an abnormal person. He seemingly fails to see the glaring danger he faces, a danger that is easily recognizable by any school child, and destroys himself and his country in the process.

The truth and depth of *Paroh's* personality and behavior is very much within the norms of human psychology and we would do well to shed our childish notions of him and look deeply at what influenced his behavior, specifically in regard to dealing with adversity. He was clearly wicked and his attitudes and behavior reflected that attribute. Nevertheless, by analyzing his reactions to events and adversity, we can learn much that is relevant to us and our children.

One example from this week's *Parsha* can be seen in the aftermath of *מכת צפרדעים* - the plague of frogs. The *Pasuk* tells us that the frogs died and were piled high throughout the land, causing a terrible stench. (*Shemos* 8:10). The next *Pasuk* tells us that *Paroh* saw that there was relief (from the plague) and he hardened his heart and refused to allow the Jewish People to leave *Mitzrayim*. The *Kli Yakar* points out that this is the only time this expression - *הַרְוָחָה* 'relief' is used in connection with the *Makos*.

In all the other *Makos*, once it was over- it was over. The damaging force was gone completely. This helps explain why *Paroh* refused to budge once the plagues had passed - at the moment, everything was fine again. However, by the frogs, there were piles of foul-smelling dead frogs throughout *Mitzrayim*, which should have evoked a different, more agreeable reaction from *Paroh*. The *Kli Yakar* answers that the Torah then says "He saw..." What did he see? He saw there was *הַרְוָחָה* - there was relief. Apparently interpreting the word *הַרְוָחָה* as applying to the land of *Mitzrayim*, *Paroh* saw the land was spacious and open, from the word's *shoresh* - "revach". The terrible odor from the frogs was only in confined spaces, but in the great outdoors, the general countryside, the problem was manageable.

Before you conclude that this is the thinking of a madman, consider, unfortunately, how normal this way of thinking is. **Paroh had an agenda - to hold onto his slaves.** When one has an agenda, and especially a person with poor *Midos*, he will be able to twist and interpret the seemingly obvious (to others) reality in front of him and process a message in accordance with his pre-existing agenda. The slightest hint of a possibility that things are not as bad as they actually are, is enough to continue on a destructive path that seems delusional, but such rationalization is in fact common to all of us.

Rationalizations and justifications are found everywhere. Men fail to get up on time for minyan because they need to preserve their health, *tzedakah* is minimized because the cause is really not that worthy, the one extra piece of cake won't really make a difference and a certain eatery must be kosher because just look at everyone who is eating there. What happened to objective thinking? Aren't we rational, honest people?

This is an area that requires special focus for our children. They are totally 'agenda' driven - whatever feels good at the moment is the most important (and perhaps only) thing in the world to a child. It is hard for a child to share a toy or candy he wants, not wake up a sleeping parent when he wants even the most trivial thing or to sit down and study in place of playing a game. We need to realize these are real pressures that exist within all people. **We too often interpret a behavior as chutzpah or defiance when it is the result of an inner struggle** between the child's 'agenda' and what you have taught him is right.

The awareness that it is normal human behavior to see the world through 'agenda-colored' glasses will give parents and teachers the advantage of having greater patience and more insight into children's (mis)behavior. When a child does something wrong, inappropriate or defiant, seek first to understand from the child what he was thinking. You will usually be (pleasantly) surprised by what you hear, thereby sparing you and your child from unnecessary anguish and hard feelings.

Let's allow our 'agenda' of loving our child to balance the scenario into one where we can lovingly guide, teach and redirect to the path we all desire, *B'Ezras Hashem!*

Best wishes for a wonderful, understanding *Shabbos*,



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