

Va'eira 2017

1.

Why don't we have sorcerers and demons nowadays?

“The necromancers of Egypt did the same by means of their incantations; so Pharaoh's heart was strong and he did not heed them, as Hashem had spoken.” (7, 22)

"ויעשו כן חרטמי מצרים בלטיהם ויחזק לב פרעה ולא שמע אלהם כאשר דבר יקוק."

Why are there no sorcerers, demons or spirits that can enter into our bodies and control us nowadays? Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky zasa"l (Emes L'Yaakov pages 263-264) says **when prophets prophesized, witchcraft, sorcery, demons and spirits were able to exist and function. Conversely, when prophets stopped prophesizing then witchcraft, sorcery, demons and spirits were unable to exist and function.** For example, when we were able to hear a bas kol, a heavenly voice, sorcery existed. The Rambam (payrush Mishnayos to Mesechas Avoda Zara perek four) says that demons are all false and they never really existed. Many argue on this opinion of the Rambam, including the Gra (Biur Hagra yora daya siman 179) who says that we do find the concept of demons in several Gemaras. Rabbi Kamenetsky explains that at the time of the Gemara, Amoraim had the ability to resurrect the dead and even create certain beings. The Pasuk in Koheles (7, 14) says "את זה לעמת זה עשה האלהים." "God has made the one as well as the other." Since we attained such a high level of holiness, we needed an equal power on the tummah (impure) side. Nowadays, since these spiritual strengths no longer exist, the ability to create impure beings also disappeared. Rav Elhanan Wassermann said the last time we heard of a dybbuk (spirit that enters into the body) was in the time of the Chofetz Chaim. The Gemara as well relates the concept of yeridas hadoros (decrease in generations). Nowadays, since we don't have this immensely high level of kedusha (holiness), therefore, we don't have witchcraft and the like.

What is the reason that level of tummah depends on the level of Kedusha? Rabbi Kamenetsky (Emes L'Yaakov Brachos (6a)) explains that Hashem created this world with free will. We can choose kedusha over tummah or the opposite. If we did not have an equal level of both, then we wouldn't have the concept of free choice. Meaning, if kedusha would be so obvious and strong then it would be considered as if we didn't have a choice to choose bad/tummah. Therefore, at the time of the Gemara, when there was a high level of holiness, Hashem allowed a very high level of impurity. This enabled us to have free choice and thereby enable us to choose holiness and grant us reward. The Ben Yehoyadah (ibid) discusses this as well and explains that nowadays we don't have demons and the like because we don't have the high level of kedusha corresponding to it.

2.

Repentance

“Pharaoh turned away and came to his palace. He did not take this to heart either.” (7, 23)

"ויפן פרעה ויבא אל ביתו ולא שת לבו גם לזאת."

The Shemos Raba (5, 6) says Hashem knew that He would harden Pharaoh's heart in order that He will use the attribute of strict justice (see 13, 4 and 10, 1) which says Hashem strengthened Pharaoh's heart). On this concept, Rav Yochanan says heretics will now have a claim that Hashem never gave Pharaoh a chance to repent. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish says there is a way you can close the mouths of these heretics. You can tell them this is the way of midah k'neged midah (measure for measure). Since pharaoh mocked the concept of repentance, therefore the gates of repentance closed on him. Hashem already gave him many chances to repent, but because he didn't, he was punished, and his heart was hardened. Similarly, the Gemara in Shabbos (104) says one who wants to become impure is provided with the ability to do so.

The question arises; it still seems that Pharaoh didn't have free choice because Hashem hardened his heart. The Ramban (7, 3) answers that since Pharaoh was so wicked and caused so much bad to the Jews, he therefore deserved to be punished. Originally, he had a normal heart which was capable of repenting, but since he refused to repent, his heart was hardened. (The Rambam (hilchos teshuva 6, 3) says one is judged for his original actions.) The second answer the Ramban offers is that he had free choice, but still refused to send out the Jews even after the fifth makh. After this, the makkos became too difficult to bear. He therefore wanted to send the Jews out. The reason why he wanted to send the Jews out was shelo leshma (insincere). Meaning, he wanted them to leave only because he didn't want to suffer anymore and not because he wanted to repent. Therefore, **Hashem hardened his heart in order to give him the ability to properly repent and send the Jews out from his own free will and not because of protection from physical pain.** So really, he could have repented and his repentance would have been accepted. (The Ibn Ezra and Seforno offer additional answers as well.) Rav Pincus (Tiferes Shimshon page 55) offers a proof that Pharaoh's free will was never taken away from him. The pasuk (beginning of parshas Bo) says that Hashem hardened the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants. Immediately after this, the pasuk says that Pharaoh's servants complained to Pharaoh and asked 'when will you free the Jews?' Therefore, we see clearly, they all had free choice to let the Jews go, but it was a difficult one.

The Chofetz Chaim (al hatorah page 98) offers an additional answer. There are sinners who receive heavenly assistance (siyata dishmaya) from above to repent as we daven every day in Shemoni Esrei. There are others who do not receive heavenly assistance. They need to repent from their own efforts. Hashem instructed Moshe to tell Pharaoh that because he distanced himself from repentance because of his irrational decisions, the privilege of heavenly assistance will be withheld from him. **He didn't get heavenly assistance, but of course he still had the option to repent.**

This was the error of Elisha ben Avuya, Acher. The Gemara in Chagigah (15) relates that he heard a bas kol say everyone can repent except Acher. He thought that he couldn't repent at all because his free will was stripped from him. However, he was mistaken because what that really meant was that he wouldn't have heavenly assistance to repent, but rather he would have to do it himself.

The Gemara in Brachos (34b) quotes Rav Avahu who says **in a place where those who repent stand, even someone who is completely righteous can't stand.** (אמר רבי אבהו מקום שבעלי)

(תשובה עומדין צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין.) The Yad Yosef explains that tzaddikim don't have the lusts, desires, and temptations that someone who experienced them and repented has. Therefore, his yeitzer doesn't incite him to sin to the same degree as the baal teshuva. When a penitent sins he becomes so attached to the sin and is so involved with this sin that even if someone calls out his name he wouldn't answer. The baal teshuva takes these kochos (strengths) and applies them to kedusha. When his name is called, he won't answer because he is so engrossed with spiritual pursuits. Additionally, the Yad Yosef says, **when a sinner repents all his aveiros (sins) turn into zechuyos (merits) as stated in mesechas Yuma (86b)! This turns these huge aveiros into huge mitzvos and puts him ahead of the tzaddik gamur (complete)! We are assuming that the baal teshuva has more sins (which will turn into merits) than the tzadik's mitzvos. Additionally, the tzaddik gamur doesn't have the mitzvah of teshuva! Therefore, teshuva tips the scale in his favor. Furthermore, the baal teshuva had to overcome his yeitzer hara more than the tzaddik gamur!**

(Heard in the name of the Arvei Nachal) **The baal teshuva is so dear to Hashem because he strived so much more than the tzaddik to become connected to Torah and to work on himself. He constantly tries to grow. The tzaddik may become stagnant and complacent with his avodas (service of) Hashem. Therefore, this desire puts him above a complete tzaddik.** With this we can explain the Gemara in Chagigah (9b) that says you can't compare someone who reviews his Torah learning 100 times to one who reviews 101 times! (אינו דומה שונה) (פרקו מאה פעמים לשונה פרקו מאה ואחד וכו'. One of the explanations of this Gemara is one who only learns 100 times is complacent with his learning. The one who continues and reviews an additional time shows his desire to continue growing. This is the baal teshuva; he is always striving to grow more.

The Rambam (hilchos teshuva perek 7, 4) paskins (holds like) like Rav Avahu and writes that a baal teshuva shouldn't think he is far from the tzaddikim and Hashem because of the previous sins he committed. Rather, he should think he is beloved by Hashem and it's as if he never sinned and his reward is very great. This is because he tasted the taste of sin and yet conquered his yeitzer. The Mishna in Avos (perek daled) says who is a strong man? One who conquers his yeitzer hara! This is because he knows what sin tastes like and threw it away to come close to Hashem!

There is an analogy of a king who gave three servants delicious meals in a glass container and said make sure you don't eat from it. If you hold back you will receive a great reward! The first servant couldn't hold himself back and he ate the entire meal. The second servant couldn't control himself. He took a few bites and then remembered the king and how upset the king would be, so he stopped eating right then. The third servant knew he would be tempted to eat from the food, so he made sure to completely abstain, and made restrictions to ensure he wouldn't eat from it. When it came time to reward his servants, the first servant got nothing. The second servant received two million gold coins for his effort and valor. The third servant was rewarded with one million coins. **The king explained the second servant deserves much more because he tasted the delicious food and held himself back because he loves me so much. The third servant didn't have the same test, so I don't know how much he really loves me. The Baal teshuva tastes sin and yet controls himself which reveals his great love of Hashem.** The Gemara in Chagigah (12b) says Hashem loves the baal teshuva. The Tanna D'bei Eliyahu

offers an analogy of a king who instructed his servants to come to his palace very early in the morning. In the morning, he found many men and women who showed up. The king praised the ones who usually don't get up early but forced themselves to get up anyway.

The Gemara in Yuma (86b) quotes Reish Lakish who says one who repents is so great because it will turn his sins into merits. (אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכיות וכו.) How is this possible? The Maharsha explains that when someone does teshuva he will do so many mitzvos which will outweigh his sins, but it doesn't really mean his aveiros will turn into mitzvos. The Yalkut Mefarshim quotes **the Maharam Shif who learns that Reis Lakish is actually saying that his sins will turn into mitzvos. When one sins he creates a bad angel and when one does a mitzvah he creates a good angel. When he repents, all his bad angels turn into good angels.**

One quintessential example of a baalas teshuva is Rachav. The sefer Melitz Yosher (Nevi'im kesuvim page 10) quotes the Gemara in Zevachim (116) that says Rachav was involved with a lot of zenus (elicit relations). Yisro is another good example of a baal teshuva. In fact, the Mechilta (parshas Yisro) and Gemara in Sotah (43) say Yisro worshiped idols. Nevertheless, the Devarim Raba (2, 28) includes them with Moshe Rabbeinu! We see how much one can elevate himself by repenting to the extent that he or she will even be listed next to Moshe Rabbeinu! The Gemara in Megilah (14b) says that Yehoshua even married Rachav and many Nevi'im (prophets) emerged from her! Similarly, Moshe Rabbenu married Yisros daughter! No matter how low a person stoops, he can always return to Hashem and merit great things!

Rabbi Binyamin Eisenberger (mesilas neviim on yeshoshua page 30) suggests good advice on how to overcome the yeitzer hara. We must imagine that we are trapped in a room and the only way to exit the room is through an open window. If the yeitzer tests us, we need to be strong and immediately run away. There is always a window to escape through! This is the pshat (explanation) of an exit sign! The American law requires exit signs. The explanation is if there is an emergency there needs to be an exit sign that instructs us how to get out of the room! We need to create spiritual exit signs for us to escape the yeitzer hara. The Gemara in Sota (36b) relates that Yosef Hatzaddik saw the image of his father by the window. This symbolized that Yosef should immediately run away from his yeitzer hara! Yosef immediately ran outside! (של אביו ונראתה לו בחלון, שיעקב האיר לו לראות את החלון הפתוח למלט נפשו מיד יצרו, ומיד "וינס ויצא החוצה".) One factor that prevents us from repenting is yiush (giving up). Some people unfortunately give up hope and think since he already distanced himself so far from Hashem, Hashem will not accept his repentance. This is a big lie. The sefarim tell us the soul of every Jew is tied and connected to a very thick unbreakable rope as the pasuk in Devarim (32, 9). Ropes connect two things, even if they are very far away. The neshama (soul) of every Jew always holds on to one side of the rope and Hashem holds on to the other. This rope is unbreakable. There are very few people throughout our long history who became disconnected to this rope! There is always hope! The pasuk in Yehoshua says rachav lowered the spies through the window on a rope! Rachav demonstrated how proper repentance should be done. The rope she used was previously used for elicit relations. It was now used for mitzvah purposes. There is always hope! We should never lose hope!

The sefer Mashal Lemah Hadavar Domeh (pages 377-378) relates a story that the Chofetz Chaim related. There was a merchant who sold wine. This man went to a distributor to buy large quantities of wine for a cheaper price. After the distributor presented the exact calculation to the merchant, the merchant then asked if he could buy on credit. The wholesaler complained and said no because he hadn't yet paid Him back for the last purchase! Why would this time be any different? While they were speaking another businessman heard this and suggested that the merchant buy less than planned, make a profit, and then come back and buy a bigger amount! This is exactly what he did! **The Chofetz Chaim explains that we ask for forgiveness from Hashem and tell him we won't sin anymore. However, Hashem knows our sincerity level and will say 'why is this time any different? You already owe me from last time!' Our only tactic is to start small and start to repent in one specific area. We should then accept upon ourselves more, little by little, and this is how we will get rid of our debt. This is the concept of someone who repents should do it slowly and meticulously, one step at a time.**

Thank you Yair Moshe Ausabel for typing this up.