Assembly Notes
PARSHAS BO 5785
Assembly Theme: You Can Do It

בסד
the lubavitch multi-academy trust
lubavitch girls' school

Freedom of choice exists only for humans. In the Parsha Beraishis (beginning of Genesis) G-d says "See, humans are like us in knowing good from evil..." Animals by contrast are innocent. A lion that tears apart a different animal is doing what it was programmed to do. It can only operate on its instincts. It is not good or evil. Even angels in Heaven are called "Holy animals" (חיות הקודשbecause they only know how to do G-d's will. They have no evil inclination and therefore no freedom of choice. The concept of reward and punishment applies to human beings because they have the ability and therefore the responsibility and the credit for their choices. In the Sedra Bo, Hashem tells Moshe to go to Pharaoh "for I have made his heart heavy". Since Hashem caused Pharaoh's obstinacy and his refusal to let the Jews go, how can he be punished for this refusal? Is that fair? Did he have free choice? Moreover, why did Hashem send Moshe to Pharaoh altogether, after He made it into a mission impossible? Is that realistic?

The classical commentaries give a number of explanations why G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart. (The Ramban (Nachmanides) explains that the hardening of his heart corrected an imbalance. With all the wonders and plagues that he witnessed, Pharaoh's freedom of choice was strongly influenced in the positive direction. Hardening his heart redressed the balance.) The Rambam explains that in the first five plagues Pharaoh had the choice, and he chose to continue in the path of evil. For the last five plagues HaShem hardened his heart, but this was already part of the punishment for his past evil choices. In the Laws of Teshuvah (Repentance) the Rambam enumerates various categories of sin where the power to do Teshuvah is withheld from the person.

The first Chabad Rebbe explains in Tanya that even when it is withheld, with deep determination nothing can stand in the way of Teshuvah. It requires a deep determination, but it is possible. The Rebbe explains that in the same way, Pharaoh could have repented even after his heart was hardened. He still had the power to overcome the evil that had taken over his heart. That is why Moshe was sent to give him a warning.

We have all made mistakes, whether small or large or titanic. It may require superhuman effort, but we have the powerful blessing of free choice and can draw on it to transform ourselves and transform the world.

STORY OF THE REBBE

Mr Levi Yitzchak Fraiden was a prominent professional photographer in Israel. He heard about the Rebbe and especially about the month of Tishrei. He decided to join one year, and he recorded many of the events (on weekdays of course). Over the years he began to spend many weeks every year at the Rebbe. He became observant and a Chossid of the Rebbe.
He would make large exhibitions in Tel Aviv with photographs and videos recreating the atmosphere. These were viewed by many thousands of people who would never have the chance to visit the Rebbe. These included friends of his and professional contacts from the media who were not observant at all.

He also would have a prominent visitor's book and invite people to comment about their impressions.

One year a famous journalist wrote a comment in the book. He complimented the exhibition for giving a feeling of the energy and power of Tishrei by the Rebbe. He added: but I also felt that this reminded me of the "dark ages".

Mr Fraiden would submit the visitor's book to the Rebbe. That year, the Rebbe sent back the visitor's book with a message for that journalist. Please tell him three things.

First of all thank him for his candid comment. His comment is critical but honest, which is better than just a bland statement which doesn't tell you what the person thinks.

Secondly, tell him that not everything that existed in the so called "dark ages" was dark. There was plenty of light as well.

Third, remind him that not everything in the so called enlightened world is bright. Being involved in the media he is aware of lots of darkness in today's society. We should all be doing what we can to bring brightness into the world.

The Rebbe always shows that bringing light into our lives helps light up the whole world.

גוט שבת!