

## PARSHAS BESHALACH – R' ELI PICK

וחזקתי את לב פרעה ... ואת כל חילו וידעו מצרים כי אני ה' (י"ד:ד)

Hashem 'hardened the heart' of Pharaoh and his whole army. Rambam and Ramban explain that this means that their free-will was withdrawn.

We also saw that Hashem caused the 'hardening of heart' in most of the last 5 plagues. How could a heart be 'hardened'? How can free-will be withdrawn? Surely the whole purpose of Creation is to evoke free-will? There is no point in our existence, if people are not able to choose between right and wrong.

Rambam answers in Hilchos Teshuvah (6:3), that when Hashem exercises control over free-will, He is giving a punishment. If one freely chooses to sin repeatedly, then eventually one will sin against one's own will. During the first five plagues, the Egyptians did indeed have the free-will. They misused it. Only afterwards, when Pharaoh and his people continued in wickedness, did Hashem force them.

This climax, to withdraw the free-will, is described by Ramban in five simple words as the most amazing event – "ואין בכל המופתים כפלא הזה". In the whole story of yetzias mitzrayim, this was the greatest miracle of all.

Why should Ramban single out this miracle – of the 'hardening of the heart' – against all others? Every single miracle which Hashem does is amazing, and is beyond nature. Whether He changes the content of rivers, or sends wild animals into a back garden, they are all supernatural deeds.

The main reason why Hashem performs miracles is to teach us Emunah, so that we may believe in Him. Those unfortunate people who do not recognise Hashem's amazing deeds try to deny Him. The atheists of the world, who try to reject Hashem and His authority, believe in something else. In their opinion, the greatest thing of all is the human brain.

The atheist puts his confidence in the human mind. He regards mankind and its abilities as supreme in the universe. The Communists, the Richard Dawkinses and the 'humanists', who proclaim their atheist 'faith', believe only in themselves, and in their own mental achievements. Their arrogance knows no bounds.

The message Hashem gives is that He can control not only the flora and fauna. Not only animal life, and not only climate change, but He can control the best human brains. What the atheists regard as supreme – their own minds – Hashem can also control on a universal scale. What Hashem did to the Egyptian mind was not just to one individual person, but to a whole army. As the posuk says, that was when all the Egyptians realised and came to know Hashem. That was the greatest miracle of all.

לע"נ אבי מורי ר' שמואל חנוך בן ר' גרשון ע"ה ואמי מורתי מ' בילא בת הרב מרדכי ע"ה