

Execute Four

“Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Israel?” (Shemos 5:2). With these words, Paroh committed a heinous crime. He spoke *loshon hora* against the Creator of the World. What is the punishment for such a sin? The Gemora (Erechin 15b) states that one who speaks *loshon hora* transgresses the equivalent of all three capitol crimes: idolatry, immorality, and murder. Those who commit these crimes receive four types of death penalties: stoning, burning, decapitation, and strangulation.

The Keli Yakar (Shemos 9:14) relates that the plague of *borod* (hail) came as a punishment for the *loshon hora* that Paroh spoke. He goes on to explain how the *borod* corresponded to the four death penalties. The hailstones came down and stoned the people to death: stoning. They cracked open, fire came out, and burned people to death: burning. “The *borod* beheaded their grapevines (Tehillim 78:47). Is it possible to cut off the head of a grapevine? Surely not. The verse refers to the elite of Mitzraim, who are compared to grapevines. They were killed by the *borod*: beheading. Torrents of rain fell along with the hail. Fields were flooded and Mitzrim may have drowned. Drowning is a form of strangulation. And so, we see a horrible punishment for a terrible crime.

Kinderlach . . .
How bad can loshon hora be? After all, everyone lets a bad word slip out here and there. Our sages tell us that it is as bad as the worst crimes. That is truly frightening. In the days of the Beis HaMikdash, people were stricken with tsoraas, a terrible disease. Mitzraim was plagued with borod. These do not exist in our days, but Hashem has His ways. The Chofetz Chaim relates that one who guards his tongue will have a good life in this world and the next. Watch what you say, and enjoy the good life.

Honor

Who can contemplate the terrible deeds that Paroh did? Rav Leib Chasman zt”l in his sefer Ohr Yohel illustrates as follows. Paroh spoke with *chutzpah* against Hashem. “Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice to send out Israel? I do not know Hashem and I will not send out Israel” (Shemos 5:2). He tortured the

Jewish people with back breaking labor and horrible atrocities. For this, he was punished with the *eser makkos* (ten plagues). Each *makko* was more humiliating than the next. Try to imagine the *makko* of *tsefardeah* (frogs). They were everywhere, in the homes, in the ovens, even in people’s stomachs. The noise from their croaking was deafening. Paroh, the King of Egypt, in his entire splendor, is sitting on his throne in his royal garments, surrounded by his officers. He opens his mouth to speak, but you cannot hear his voice. It is drowned out by the croaking of the frogs in his stomach. Can you imagine anything more disgraceful than that? Is there any honor to his kingship?

How was Moshe Rabbeinu commanded to treat Paroh? After nine *makkos*, Paroh had the *chutzpah* to say to Moshe Rabbeinu, “On the day that I see your face you will die” (Shemos 10:27). Moshe Rabbeinu left Paroh’s presence in burning anger (Shemos 11:8). Before he left, however, he described the last plague of *makkos bechoros* (killing of the first born). It would be so horrifying that all of Paroh’s servants will come running to Moshe, begging him to take the Jewish people out of Egypt. Rashi comments that Moshe did not say that Paroh himself would come running to him. Why? Moshe still had to honor to the kingship of Paroh (Shemos 11:8). He was such an evil king, and he performed acts so horrible that he was terribly punished. Yet, he still was deserving of honor. Rav Chasman points out that this is a powerful lesson in respecting the honor of a human being. If Moshe Rabbeinu had to honor the evil Paroh, how much more so do we have to honor our fellow Jews.

Kinderlach . . .
Do you see how careful we must be to speak to others with kovod (honor)? You may think that this is difficult. If you think about the other person’s good points, then honoring him comes naturally. He is older, wiser, wealthier, more patient, or has more mitzvos or fewer sins than you. Honoring others is the basis of true derech erez and the sign of a real mensch.

The Voice of Peace

“Tzviki, you took my ball!”
“You gave me permission to play with it!”

“No, I didn’t!”

The two brothers begin to fight. Imma, who was listening in the next room, calmly steps in.

“Come, boys. Let’s not fight. There is nothing to be gained, and a lot to be lost. Making peace is the best thing.”

The boys calm down and Tzviki smiles at his Imma.”

“Imma, your soft words always make peace.”

“This was Aaron and Moshe to whom Hashem said, ‘Take the Children of Israel out of Mitzraim’” (Shemos 6:26). The Malbim zt”l comments that theirs was a twofold mission: the physical redemption from the slavery, and the spiritual salvation from the *tumah* (defilement) of the Egyptian society. Moshe Rabbeinu had the main responsibility for the physical redemption. He spoke to Paroh. He initiated most of the plagues. Aaron HaKohen shouldered the burden of the spiritual salvation. He uplifted the spirits of a downtrodden people who did not know the ways of Hashem. Why were his words heard? Because he was a lover and pursuer of peace. His soft words warmed their hearts.

Kinderlach . . .
To whom do you listen? To one who shouts at you and makes a fool of himself? Or to one who speaks softly and patiently. Aaron HaKohen was able to make peace between people. Therefore, his words were able to raise the Jewish people from the lowest levels of tumah. He is a role model for us to emulate. Speak kind words of encouragement and peace to everyone. Lift up your self and those around you.

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