



## *Parshas Va'era 2019, the responsibility of freedom*

Our Parsha begins with G-d revealing one of His most holy names to Moshe Rabbeinu, a name that He did not reveal to even our forefathers. G-d tells Moshe that He heard the Jewish people's cries and will avenge the Jewish nation and take them out of Egypt.

This week's Parsha contains seven of the ten plagues that G-d struck the Egyptians with *Blood, Frogs, Lice, Wild animals, Death of cattle, Boils, and Fiery Hail*. Each plague's cycle lasted one month. Moshe and Aaron would warn Pharaoh about the upcoming plague for the first three weeks, which would last one week.

However, a question comes to mind: By each of the first five plagues, Pharaoh hardened his own heart, as the Pasuk says (7:13), "*Pharaoh hardened his heart and did not listen to them (Moshe and Aaron).*" But by the sixth plague of Boils, as the Pasuk says (9:12), "*G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them (Moshe and Aaron) and G-d's words.*" What changed from the first five plagues to the sixth one? Why now did G-d harden Pharaoh's heart?!

Furthermore, how can G-d now hold Pharaoh accountable for his actions? G-d was the one who forced Pharaoh to continue holding back the Jewish people by hardening his heart?!

One of the many answers given is that G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart as a punishment for not listening to Him during the previous five plagues. At this point, Pharaoh will have to work harder to overcome his stubbornness, make the correct decision, and set the Jewish people free.

However, a deeper and more profound explanation is that G-d was actually leveling the playing field. G-d hardened Pharaoh's heart, making him more stubborn because he was under ever-growing pressure from the Egyptians. The Egyptians were pressing Pharaoh to set the Jewish people free. As it was mainly the Egyptian people and not Pharaoh suffering from the plagues.

However, Pharaoh still had a choice whether to continue to oppress the Jewish people or not. This is why G-d still held him responsible, even though He hardened Pharaoh's heart. For Pharaoh continued to defy G-d's demand during the warning period of each plague.

The Rambam writes in Mishnah Torah (*Laws of Teshuvah 5:4*) that one of the fundamentals of creation is that G-d created each human being with the inherent opportunity to choose between right and wrong.

Each day we are free to choose between bringing G-d closer, back down to this physical world, or the opposite, G-d forbid. As the Pasuk says (Devarim 30:19), *"I have placed before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so you and your children shall live"*.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we understand that the freedom to choose between right and wrong is the basis of a moral and ethical world. Since we were given this power of choice, we are accountable for our decisions irrespective of the given situation.

Thus, it is essential that we consider the consequences of our actions before we act. Hopefully, we will make the correct decision leading us closer to accomplishing our goals, dreams, and potential.

***"You can't escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."***

*Abraham Lincoln*

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,  
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*