



VA'EIRA

In this week's reading of Va'eira, we read about the first seven of the ten plagues which were inflicted upon the land of Egypt. We know that after each of the first nine, Pharaoh's heart was hardened (either by G-d or on his own, which is the subject of a different discussion) and he refused to let the Hebrew slaves leave the land.

At the very end of the parsha, we read about plague number seven, that of Barad (hail). The hail is unbearable, and as it is falling, Pharaoh calls Moshe and says that "This time I have sinned, it is me who is wicked and G-d who is righteous! Get rid of this hail and death, and I will let you all go!" Of course, we know what happened after the plague stopped. So are we to simply believe that Pharaoh was lying when he made the above statement?

Not necessarily. We are all familiar with a common phenomenon; when we are in trouble or in distress, and we find ourselves in a difficult situation, we tend to make all sorts of promises, both to G-d and to ourselves. "G-d, if you will only get me through this, I'll start....I'll do...I'll be..." etc., etc. But when He does help, and the situation improves, we forget or even regret what we said or promised to do. We return to the way we were. Pharaoh simply did the same thing here, many times over.

On the secular calendar, we recently began a new year. This is a time when countless people make for themselves "New Year's Resolutions", and the big joke in the media is to comment on how quickly people tend to break their resolutions. It's no surprise that people do this, most people make these promises to themselves under no duress at all! If people tend to break promises they made during difficult situations, how much more so is the case with these relatively stress-free New Year's Resolutions?

If G-d puts us in trying times, we should use these as opportunities to actually make self-improvements. If we make promises and resolutions, we should make an extra effort to keep them after the situation has passed. For example, I belong to a group who gets together for a weekly Torah study session which was formed by one individual because he had suffered a family tragedy. The unfortunate event took place many years ago, but the weekly learning group continues to this day! The person used the difficult circumstances as an opportunity for personal growth in Torah study, and involved other people as well!

May we see the day that we don't need tough situations and tragedies to "wake us up," but let us also use these opportunities to not only make promises to improve, but to keep them!

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Cohen