

Parsha Pearls

Beshalach 5768

And in the morning you will see the glory of Hashem, since He has heard your complaints against Hashem; and what are we, that you should complain against us? (16:7)

Rashi says that the word "talinu" (complain) actually means to cause others to complain. Thus, the Jews' complaint caused their wives and children and the Eirev Rav, the mixed multitude of Egyptian converts, to complain. This is strange: we usually find that the Eirev Rav were the ones who induced the Jews to sin, and not the other way around. For example, the Eirev Rav initiated the sin of the golden calf. G-d said to Moshe, "Go down, for your people have become corrupt..." (Shemos 32:7) Rashi explains, "Your people – the converts you accepted." And when the people complained about the lack of variety in their diet (Bamidbar 11:4), it was the Eirev Rav who started it. So how could it be that the Jews caused the Eirev Rav to complain?

When Pharaoh devised his plan to enslave the Jews, the Sages say that he consulted three counselors: Bilam, Iyov and Yisro. Bilam advised him to do evil against the Jews, and in the end G-d punished him with death. Iyov kept silent, and G-d punished him with suffering. And Yisro fled; his reward was that his great grandchildren served on the Sanhedrin in the hewn chamber of the Temple (Sotah 11b).

This passage raises many questions. 1) Why did Yisro flee? If he had stayed

and, together with the righteous Iyov, advocated good policies toward the Jews, perhaps they could have saved the situation. 2) Iyov was always a fighter against human injustice. In Iyov 29:12-17 we read of Iyov's righteous deeds: he saved the poor, the orphans and the widows; he helped the blind and the lame. He saved the victim from the teeth of the evildoer. So how could it be that Iyov was silent on the issue of enslaving the Jews? 3) Why did Pharaoh, who was wicked and wanted only to harm the Jews, choose such advisors as Yisro and Iyov, who were righteous? Perhaps he did not know that Yisro was righteous, but Iyov was famous as an upright and G-d-fearing man. At most Pharaoh would succeed in keeping him from protesting. But why did he need to go to the trouble? He should have picked evil advisors who would say whatever he wanted.

The answer is that, as the Ramban says on Shemos 1:10, Pharaoh wanted to disguise his decrees against the Jews in a cloak of moderation and fairness. To achieve his goal of lowering the Jewish population, he could have ordered his men to kill the Jews outright, or to throw the babies into the river, but that would have looked very bad – to make an official policy of killing an innocent nation who came by the invitation of an earlier Pharaoh. Therefore he said,

"Come, let us deal wisely with them" – let us act with wisdom and cleverness, so that the Jews do not notice that we are persecuting them. He secretly encouraged the Egyptian people to throw Jewish babies into the river, and when the Jewish parents came to the king or to the governor in protest, they said, "Bring witnesses that so-and-so killed your baby, and then we will prosecute him under the law."

Now we understand why he picked righteous counselors: this was part of the plan to cover up his wickedness. He would say, "Look, there are righteous men on my advisory panel and they agree to my policies." Pharaoh was powerful enough to have no fear that Iyov or Yisro could ever stop him from passing any of his decrees. He knew that they would not protest too much. At most they would keep quiet, and so at least to the outside world it would appear that these righteous counselors approved.

Yisro quickly understood Pharaoh's intentions and so he refused to sit on the panel; he fled. But Iyov did not realize that he was being used, and he stayed. Who knows, he thought, maybe I will be able to use my influence to improve conditions for the Jews in some way and save whatever can be saved. He had good intentions, but since he continued to be Pharaoh's counselor and cover up for him, all the wicked acts of Pharaoh and the Egyptians were counted against him. The Mishnah in Avos 1:7 says, "Do not join a wicked man," and Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his commentary that the punishment for this sin is very great. If a

man commits any other sin, he has one count against him, but if he joins a wicked man, he has a share in all the sins committed by that man. He is helpless to stop the man from sinning, nor does he get any benefit from the sins, yet he is punished for them. "Woe to the wicked man and woe to his neighbor!" (Succah 56b)

Perhaps Iyov did protest from time to time, and when the Sages say that he was silent, they mean that most of the time he was silent out of fear of the king. Even if sometimes he registered a weak protest, it was considered as nothing, since his words went unheard. His real sin was simply that he continued to sit on Pharaoh's advisory panel, and for this he was punished with suffering. By sitting there he enabled and strengthened the wicked to practice their wickedness, something they would not have been able to do without his support.

According to this, we can explain Rashi's statement that the Jews induced the Eirev Rav to complain. Certainly the Eirev Rav were always the first ones to complain, but they on their own did not have enough influence to affect the Jewish people. What good Jew would listen to the counsel of the Eirev Rav? But there were some Jews who joined the Eirev Rav in their complaints, and from this the Eirev Rav gained the prestige and ability to convince the other Jews. Thus, in effect, the Jews who joined the Eirev Rav caused the Eirev Rav to complain, for it was only by virtue of their joining that the Eirev Rav had any power over the Jews. (Divrei Yoel, p. 442)