

“Pharaoh rose up at midnight.” (12:30)

After Moshe notified Pharaoh of the impending death of the firstborn Egyptians, the Torah states that “Pharaoh rose up at midnight.” From where did he rise? Rashi responds, “From his bed.” Anyone who had been following the narrative knows that Pharaoh’s time was up. Everything that Moshe had said would occur had been realized. Nine devastating plagues had come and gone. What more did Pharaoh need to make him face the reality that Egypt was doomed? He was being told about the tenth and most devastating plague – makas bechoros, death of the firstborn. What did he do the night before he was likely to die? He went to sleep as if nothing had happened or was going to happen! What possessed a human being to have such insolence. Pharaoh’s incurable arrogance was absolutely mind-boggling!

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, explains that it is necessary to maintain a balance between the forces of good and evil. Otherwise, the concept of bechirah chafshis, free-will, has no meaning. Consider an individual of exceptional kedushah, holiness, whose unstinting devotion to Hashem is his benchmark. When told he is to sacrifice his beloved son, for whom he has waited nearly a life-time, he is prepared to do so without question. There must be an antithesis to him among the forces of tumah, impurity. If, on the night before he is to leave to slaughter his son, Avraham Avinu went to bed, then there must be a representative of the forces of evil, who, when told he and the other firstborn of his kingdom will die, would likewise go to sleep, ignoring Hashem’s warning. If Avraham goes to sleep, then Pharaoh must also have been evil enough – or foolish enough – to go to bed.

Avraham Avinu’s power of kedushah was so great that he transcended human nature and emotion in order to fulfill the word of the Almighty. As a counterpart to Avraham, there had to be a Pharaoh, whose evil and defiance of Hashem would likewise transcend human nature. Avraham went to sleep secure and trusting in Hashem’s command. Pharaoh went to sleep demonstrating his obstinacy and hostility to Hashem’s command.

Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, supplements this thought with another case in which one’s trust in Hashem overcame his natural tendency towards fear and anxiety. Yonah Ha’navi was on a ship, being thrown around the sea in the midst of a dangerous storm. The waves were shaking the ship and its passengers. Everybody was screaming, frightened for their lives. Yet, Yonah descended to the ship’s hold and went to sleep. Is this a typical response to a life-threatening situation?

Klal Yisrael was not created today or yesterday. We have been around for awhile and have endured the most formidable challenges to which human beings have been subjected. We are still here because Hashem protects us and wants us to be here. As He has protected us from our external enemies, He will also protect us from our enemies from within. Yonah goes to sleep trusting in Hashem, knowing that this storm is Hashem’s work. Whatever will be – will be.

Horav Yitzchok Zilberstein, Shlita, attributes the rise in tension among Jews specifically to the

above thesis. There has never been such a surge of Torah growth. Thousands upon thousands of young men and women are returning to Torah Judaism. The Yeshivos and Kollelim are filled with bnei Torah studying b'kedushah u'betaharah, with holiness and purity. Yet, in contrast, we find a world filled with moral decay unparalleled in history. There is a virulent animosity towards the observant Jew, regrettably, from some of our own brethren. That, however, is only a sign that the forces of kedushah are on the rise. To abate this elevation in holiness, there has to be a balanced rise in the forces of tumah, impurity. It is tragic that this has to be emanating from among our own People. We have to hope that one day they will come to their senses and realize that there is only one way for a Jew to live.

The situation seeks equilibrium. The Midrash relates that when the angel struck Sancheriv the king of Ashur's camp, during his battle against Chizkiyahu Ha'melech, all of his soldiers died. He was left alone with his two sons. When the wicked general saw this, he bowed down to his idol and said, "I am prepared to slaughter my remaining two sons to you, if you will help me." Before he had the opportunity to carry out his ill-fated plan, his two sons, who had overheard his prayer, killed him. The question is glaring – Sancheriv saw his own folly. He clearly saw that he was no match for Hashem. He had the strongest army, the most powerful weapons, and they were all transformed into nothing. Yet, he was prepared to slaughter his two children to an idol which had proven itself time and time again to be a worthless piece of stone. How irrational and senseless can one be? The answer is as mentioned. If Klal Yisrael possesses individuals whose level of kedushah, coupled with their overwhelming devotion to Hashem, is incredible –there has to be a balance. Sancheriv represented the balance.

In contrast, we offer the following story that demonstrates the kedushah of our People. In Russia, during the reign of the N.K.V.D., Russian secret police, who were notorious for their ruthlessness, it was forbidden to perform a bris milah, circumcise Jewish boys, or to shecht, ritually slaughter animals. Heaven-help he who was caught in such "defiance" of the state. Rav Aizik Roth, zl, was a mohel, ritual circumciser, who shared an apartment with another chasid who happened to be a shochet, ritual slaughterer. One night there was a loud knock on their apartment door. They knew that such a knock could only be a sign of trouble, since they were both "employed" in vocations that were strictly prohibited by the government. Rav Aizik told the shochet to gather his knives and leave through the back door. He would deal with the police.

He opened the door to be greeted by a major in the Secret Police. "Where is the mohel?" he asked somewhat forcefully. Rav Galinsky, who happened to be in the apartment, looked at the officer and innocently asked, "Do you think, Major, that we would circumcise our children knowing that it goes against the government? No, we would never do this."

The Major was relentless; he would not budge: "Where is the mohel?" He walked through the apartment and saw that no one was there but himself and the two rabbanim. He turned to them and said in Yiddish, "I am also Jewish. My wife has given birth to a little boy, and I need a mohel to circumcise him." Imagine what was occurring. There is no doubt that if it had been discovered that

this Major was circumcising his son, there would not be a gallows high enough for him. The Russian Secret Police would make him their paradigm of one who commits treason. His death would be slow and torturous. Yet, his overwhelming devotion to fulfill a mitzvah for which Jews have died throughout the ages superceded all of his fears.

There must be a balance. In contrast to the malevolent evil of a Sancheriv there has to be an individual whose devotion to Judaism transcends even their basic desire to live. We should note that this major was not observant. He knew, however, that Bris Milah is a defining mitzvah in Judaism. He was prepared to die for this mitzvah. Regrettably, today some of our co-religionists who have alienated themselves from the faith, refuse to live with this mitzvah.