

## It happened when Pharaoh sent the nation. (13:17)

In the *Talmud Megillah* 10b, *Chazal* state that the word *vayehi*, “and it was”, implies sadness. The *Midrash* says that *Vayehi* is a combination of two words: *Vay* – woe; and *v’hi*, as in *nehi*, which means mourning. These two words describe anything but joy. This brings us to ask: What about the Exodus engendered sadness? This was *Klal Yisrael’s* finest moment; surely nothing about it would provoke sadness. Furthermore, the phrase *beshalach Pharaoh*, “when Pharaoh sent (the people),” raises a question: When did Pharaoh send out the people? He had nothing to do with it! It was Hashem throughout Who manipulated and orchestrated the events of that evening. Pharaoh was a mere spectator. Why should he receive any mention?

**Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita**, suggests that the latter questions actually answer the former. Clearly, it was Hashem Who orchestrated all of the events of that night. Pharaoh, however, thought it was all about him: he was making the decisions; he allowed *Bnei Yisrael* to leave. Is this true? Absolutely not! Pharaoh fought them every step of the way. Yet, in all reality, we must face it. The next day, the headlines of the local Egyptian newspaper screamed: “Pharaoh allows the Jews to leave!” No mention of Hashem – only Pharaoh. This is the meaning of *Vayehi*. A seminal event, unparalleled in the history of mankind, whereby an entire nation of slaves leave their masters after being subjected to 210 years of brutal persecution, and the headlines attribute their exodus to Pharaoh’s benevolence! How ludicrous!

*Rav Galinsky* takes this bizarre development one step further. Perhaps the degree of lucidity required of a secular Egyptian reporter might be less than expected of a Jew, but regrettably, the facts do not support this premise. The *Maggid* relates the following episode: The village of Mir, Poland, was a tiny hamlet situated on the outskirts of Grodno. Every week, the peasants of the surrounding area would travel to the village to sell their wares. An old battered bus that had seen better days was driven by each farm, picking up the peasants and depositing them in Mir. At the end of the day, they returned home with the few rubles which they had earned. One day, the rickety bus carrying a full complement of peasants crossed the bridge. For years, people were warned not to cross the bridge for fear that it might snap – well, it did, and forty peasants plunged to their untimely deaths.

Immediately following the tragedy, the blame game began in earnest. The bridge was faulty; the bus driver was drunk; the bus was overloaded. At the end of the day, they sought everywhere for a sacrificial goat upon whom to lay the blame. Hearing this, the *Mirrer Mashgiach*, the venerable **Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl**, spoke to his students to give them the Torah’s perspective on this incident.

“On *Rosh Hashanah* we recite the words: ‘On *Rosh Hashanah* it is written and on *Yom Kippur* it is signed. Who will live; who will die; who according to his predestined time and who not on his predetermined time.’ The method of death is also determined whether by water, fire, sword or wild animal. This judgment applies *l’chol bnei olam* – all members of the world – everyone – Jew and

gentile alike.

“This past year, it was decided that forty peasants from different villages were to die by drowning. These were people from all walks of life and various areas of endeavor. How did they all come together? How was this Divine decree to be facilitated? By bus! A bus was sent to pick up the peasants, gather them together, so that the execution could be carried out.

“Now, if we were to make the following test: One group of students would read the popular *Mussar sefarim*, ethical discourse, before *Maariv*, while the other group would read a newspaper. Whom do you suppose will pray with greater *kavanah*, intention/concentration? Certainly, the group which studied *Mussar*. The other group – the newspaper readers – would invariably focus on, ‘It happened that Pharaoh sent out the people’ – rather than on, ‘G-d took them out of Egypt.’

“This is human nature. We see what we want to see – and it usually is not the Hand of Hashem that enters our limited line of vision. This is the *vayehi* of our generation, of our lives. It is always the physician, the driver, the illness, the business partner, the husband, the wife. It is never about Divine decree. It is never about Hashem. It should be. What we thought about on *Rosh Hashanah* should remain in our minds throughout the year.”