

## "We will go on a three day journey in the wilderness, and bring offerings to Hashem, our G-d." (8:23)

Why did Hashem tell Moshe to ask Pharaoh for a three-day "pass" to serve Hashem in the desert? Did any obstacle preclude Hashem's "ability" to have Pharaoh permit *Bnei Yisrael* to leave indefinitely? Moshe should have simply told Pharaoh, "Our time of servitude is up; we are prepared to leave this country forever." Regardless of the demand, Pharaoh dissented. Only when he was "encouraged" by the effects of the plagues did he relent and "allow" us to leave Egypt.

Another question that confronts us is Pharaoh's obstinate refusal to permit *Bnei Yisrael* from taking this short three day retreat. The *pesukim* indicate that Pharaoh did not suspect that *Bnei Yisrael* planned to leave permanently. Indeed, after the seventh plague, Pharaoh allowed them to go in order to serve their G-d. He was still under the impression that they only wanted to leave for a short period of time. If so, why was he so adamant in denying their request?

*Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, z.l.*, posits that Pharaoh's opposition to *Bnei Yisrael's* departure was focused on one specific ideal -- serving Hashem. Pharaoh and his degenerate nation were apostates who fought against belief in the Almighty. "*Who is Hashem that I must listen to His voice?*" was Pharaoh's egotistic pronouncement. In his time, Nimrod opposed Avraham Avinu, doing everything within his power to prevent the spread of monotheism. Pharaoh, the "dean" of apostates, rebelled against the Almighty in a similar manner.

How did Pharaoh attempt to succeed? He sought to break the Jewish spirit via emotional and physical persecution, to deprive them of any form of spiritual sustenance, and to expose them to the moral depravity that distinguished Egyptian culture. Thus, he planned to expurgate any vestige of *ruchnius*, spirituality, from *Bnei Yisrael*. He could never permit the Jews to leave for a three day spiritual encounter. They might become spiritually regenerated, so that all of Pharaoh's toil would be for naught.

When Pharaoh began to capitulate due to the effects of the initial plagues, he first allowed the Jews to "sacrifice to Hashem -- in the land." He would not permit them to leave Egypt. He knew that serving Hashem amidst the degeneracy and spiritual defilement of Egypt would taint the integrity of the service. The ensuing plagues weakened his resolve, but he still insisted that the women, young men and children remain in Egypt. A service performed by the older generation would have little lasting influence, as long as the women and youth remained steeped in and influenced by Egyptian culture.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* responded, "No, they must all go -- men, women and children." We must effect a complete unequivocal break from Egyptian lifestyle. "Moreover," Moshe demanded, "you, Pharaoh, are going to contribute the cattle for the sacrifices." Only through Pharaoh's total subjugation to the concept of Hashem as the Supreme Ruler of the world would the purpose of the liberation from

Egypt be realized. The purpose of *yetzias Mitzrayim* was that we would become a holy nation, serving Hashem with our hearts and minds. If we believe in Hashem, then no nation in the world can have any dominion over us -- whatsoever!