

"PHARAOH'S HEART -- AGAIN"

This week, when I was plunged into apprehension and distress by the breakdown of the Kissinger talks, I leafed through the Haggadah in an attempt to find some inspiration, some source of encouragement, some sign of guidance. I found nothing. More accurately, I found that something is definitely missing -- a glaring omission of significance. And this negative discovery in itself gave me what I was looking for.

When we read the Exodus story in the Torah, one of the most interesting items that punctuates every stage of the drama is the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh. As soon as Pharaoh's head tells him that he ought to accede to the request of Moses and Aaron, there takes place an intervention by God, Pharaoh's heart tightens up, and he reneges on his compromise and stands firm. Again and again we come across this phenomenon. Yet, when we read the Haggadah and all its elaborate descriptions of the Exodus, there is no mention at all of this hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Not a single word on it!

Moreover, in the same vein, another question presents itself. When we read the Biblical story, we discover that God reveals the hardening of Pharaoh's heart to Moses, but does not instruct Moses to tell Israel about it. Indeed, there is no mention at all that Moses shared this information with them. It remained the secret of Moses. Why is that so?

Now, I can answer each question by itself -- the secret of Moses and the omission in the Haggadah -- but it would also be good to solve both problems with one solution.

I can understand why Moses kept it a secret. The Torah itself tells us why all but explicitly. The purpose of all the plagues was

וְלִמְעַן תֵּדַע כִּי אֲנִי ה'

"And in order that thou mayest relate in the ears of thy son and of thy son's son the series of deeds which I have wrought upon Egypt... so that ye may know that I am th Lord" (Exodus: 10:2). In other words, the tension had to be built up not only to make Pharaoh and the Egyptians learn a lesson, but the Israelites too had to learn "that I am the Lord." Only by means of this tension could the drama of redemption have its desired educational effect.

Indeed, one can imagine the state of mind of the Israelites during the protracted negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh -- the distress and the agitation as Pharaoh's stand stiffens, the feeling that Moses is being too stubborn, and a special apprehension and fear when Pharaoh breaks off the negotiations and warns Moses never to see him again.

Yet this hardening of the heart of Pharaoh is in itself the best way to highlight the meaning of the redemption to follow. So Moses kept all this secret, in order to insure that the resulting political

liberation would have the spiritual impact for which it came into being.

I can also explain the omission of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in the Haggadah. The reason is, because since it happened to the Pharaoh of the Exodus, it has not stopped happening to every Pharaoh whom Jews have had to face in the course of Jewish history! It is no longer a שד"ן, a novelty, no longer purely a Passover event. For 3500 years, Pharaoh's heart has not yet softened, his stubbornness not yet relented, his malice (רשעות) not yet abated; if anything, he talks even tougher today! That is why there is no mention of it in the Haggadah -- it is too ordinary, too every-day, too prosaic.

In the living memory of most of us, it has happened several times. To quote but a few instances: When Mr. Bevin was Prime Minister of England, he refused stubbornly to issue another 100,000 visas to Jewish DP's. This hardening of his heart insured the creation of a State of Israel. In 1967, the little king of Jordan was privately told by the Israeli Prime Minister to keep out of the battle and he would not be harmed. But his arrogant heart hardened, he joined the fray, and that is how we came in possession of Jerusalem. So the Haggadah need not mention something which is a perennial aspect of Jewish history.

But I believe there is one answer for both these questions, why Moses kept the secret and why the Haggadah omits the story. If we study the Mishnah on the asking of the questions and the answers, we read: וכאן רבן שואל אביו ואם אין דעת בן אביו יאמר... ואם אין דעת אביו יאמר

"The son asks the question, but if he has not sufficient knowledge, his father must teach him...and the father teaches the son according to the intelligence of the latter." The implication is that our Haggadah is essentially a response to the Tam, to the simple-minded son, whose father must teach him everything in easy fashion, whereas the Hakham, the Wise Son, has another and higher perspective!

Let us turn to the Haggadah: The Tam asks the simple question: מה זה?, what is it all about? We are required to answer him, with equal simplicity, בחימה יד הוציאנו ה' מצרים "God took us out of Egypt with a strong hand." The Simple Son can understand only the "strong hand." He can absorb only the outer trappings, the externalia; he is impressed by plagues, by aristocratic inclining, by strong hands and outstretched arms.

The Wise Son knows this too. He recites the Haggadah too. But he goes beyond it. He knows that all this is simply the consequence of the main element of the story: the act of Providence, the divine hardening of Pharaoh's heart, the fact that God works through individuals in His own invisible and quiet fashion.

Hence, the answer to the Wise Son is: אין יעבטירן אחר הפסח אכילין that one must not eat any dessert after the meat of the Passover sacrifice (or, in our days, the piece of Matzah that represents it). It is only the taste of the Passover that must linger on after the Seder. Why so? Because the "taste" of the Passover sacrifice, the essence of the Exodus story, that which must remain after all else is forgotten, is this: that God alone redeems; that He works in mysterious ways which sometimes are paradoxical and seem to go in the

wrong direction; that God's ways are surprising but certain. This is the אמת, the essence; all the rest is commentary, development, and dénouement.

So then, why did Moses keep it a secret? Why is there no mention of this fact in the Haggadah? Because most people are in the category of the Tam, the Simple Son. The term does not imply a person who lacks intelligence or wisdom or even sophistication in the worldly sense. It can mean a person who is very wise in the ways of the world -- but a bumbler in the perception of God's ways! The Tam or Simple Son does not understand that there "is a destiny that shapes our ends"; that events can have effects opposite of what they seem; that history is not an exact science. Because only the חכם or Wise Son knows that יֹשֵׁב בַּשָּׁמַיִם יִשְׁחַךְ ה' יֵלֶעַן לָמָד, "He that sits in heaven laughs; The Lord hath them in derision" (Psalms: 2:4); that when the heart of the tyrant is hard as stone, it is only so that it form a firmer toe-hold for the difficult and arduous but sure climb of the Children of Israel to the summit of ultimate redemption.

Since the Tam or Simple Son does not understand this, and since most people are in the category of the Tam, therefore Moses does not reveal it and the Haggadah does not relate it!

The Tam who sees only the externals, only the "strong hand," loses confidence quickly when the divine arm is not fully outstretched in front of his face. He loses heart, and falls into doubt and into gloom. But the Wise Son knows: When the enemy is most arrogant and most difficult, most unbending and most hostile, God is preparing His own "scenario" -- one that we shall be able to recite in the ears of our children and children's children, so that they will know "that I am the Lord."

The Simple Son panics quickly, he sees plots and assigns blame all at once. The Wise Son is never hysterical, he is possessed of an inner calm and equanimity.

Similarly, the Wise Son in our times will understand that the hardening of Sadat's heart is an act of God. He will be proud of Israel today. Israel is a small nation that has confirmed the honor of all small peoples, whether they know it or not, whether they appreciate it or not. It is a small nation which will not allow a Big Power to treat it like a colonial province and keep it in its back pocket. It has stood firm, on principle, and refused to be bullied by a hard-hearted Pharaoh. The Wise Son will see the events of our times in the perspective of the Afikomen, that the essence is that it is ultimately God who directs the events of man, and He does so in such mysterious ways!

I know that every situation is unique, that you cannot expect parallels between events today and those of last year, let alone of 3500 years ago. But one pattern does recur. We know this from experience, for it is the one constant in Jewish history. And that is: בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ  
"In every generation there are those who wish to destroy us." Our people is always a marginal people, threatened with insecurity and even destruction. It is no novel thing.

But what follows is equally true -- and it is no secret kept only by Moses, it is not censored in the Haggadah, it is common knowledge for the Wise Son and the Simple Son alike. It is that

וְיִקַּח אֱלֹהִים מִיָּדָם

in the end the Holy One will save us from their hands.