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## **Parashat Va Eira** **28 Tevet 5783 – January 21, 2023**

What is a plague? Most of the time when the term plague is used it is about the Black plague or the Bubonic plague. Plague, used as a noun; is a contagious disease-causing fever and delirium, infection, and often death. A plague can mean so much more when it is used as a verb. If I afflict you or curse you, torture, torment, or persecute you, I am plaguing you. That form is not necessarily a physical plague. It can be a plague on your emotional, spiritual, or religious well-being.

In Parashat Va Eira, G-d metes out the first of seven plagues upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians. After each of the plagues, G-d “hardens Pharaoh’s heart”. Why does G-d harden his heart? G-d strips Pharaoh of his free choice and Ramban explains that the loss of free choice was itself a punishment. One could ask; if G-d had not “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” would Pharaoh, of his own volition, have responded to Moses and Aaron the way he did? In the “true” personality of a person G-d will give them a little push. Five times Pharaoh turns away from Moses’ call and the suffering of B’nei Yisrael. Five times he has opportunities to “do something good” and repent. Pharaoh chose to harden his heart, not to repent, and deny G-d on his own telling us that Pharaoh sealed his destiny in his relationship with G-d. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (18th century) writes; “Our external actions have effect on our inner feelings”. We have more control over our inclinations than we may think. If we use that control, we will indeed acquire what is not as much in our power.

True freedom of choice is understood when one has faith in G-d. One can choose to continue a path of hardened heart treachery, as Pharaoh, or one can choose to empathize, with G-d, in positive change. Your direction is up to you, and with hope, it will be the good direction that G-d will “push” you in.

Shabbat Shalom! Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Nathan W. Langer

