

Dear Friends,

Pharaoh's heart is heavy, very heavy. It did not happen in a day. It has taken years for his heart to harden, to shrink, to shut.

Our hearts, too, do not harden in a day, and therefore we do not take it to heart (excuse the pun!), until one day we realize that it has become too heavy to carry. Instead of making our heart lighter (no easy task!) we usually do the opposite: we close it even more.

This is the mechanism of fear. Pharaoh is in fear, just as we often are.

The heart shrinks in the face of fear. We seek to be strong, yet life teaches us time and time again that we are fragile. We seek honors, yet there is shame. We seek power, but often find that our power is very limited. The fear of our own fragility, of our own deaths and that of our loved ones. In Pharaoh's case (as well as ours, of course), it is the fear that the will and desires of others will be at our own expense; that all we have worked so hard for, and even achieved, will crumble.

And the more we fear, the more we close our heart: "Don't let it break!", we whisper to ourselves, "don't let it even crack!".

...Until we can no longer bear it, as it says in this rich story, "and as they were tortured, so they grew and (literally) burst forth!" (Sh'mot 1, 12). That is when the heart finally bursts, and the Exodus begins..

And when it does, we begin the process of repair and healing, because "God is close (only?) to those of broken heart" (Psalms 34, 19) and God is "The healer of those with broken hearts, (and) nurses them in their sadness" (Psalms 147, 3).

Yes! "There is nothing more complete than a broken heart" (The Kotsker Rebbe).

In the spiritual dimension, the center of our Being is the heart (opinions are divided as to whether this is actual or metaphorical). In contrast, man's intellectual awareness centers in the mind. Please notice (or take to heart - another pun!), where are you reading these words from, your heart or your mind? The mind will understand the literal and logical reasoning, but will never be able to make the true connections, to know the deeper truth, to empathize, to understand life in its entirety. The heart, in contrast, will! The heart will "get it".

The human mind is responsible for deciphering, categorizing, cataloging, comparing. This is a very important ability! It helps us organize our life neatly into small boxes that we can make sense of. Modernity and the scientific revolution that we all owe our standard of living to, as well as our health and our comfort, are all thanks to the wonderful ability of the mind to compartmentalize. But then, at some point the boxes that we packed life into get so small and narrow, that the flow of Life stops and life becomes very heavy! Narrow in Hebrew = Tsar, or Meitsar, hence Mitsrayim.

The mind separates. The heart sees the whole, the big picture, the wonder of it all.

In Egypt "a new king arose", we are told. This was a king who knew all too well how to identify and classify. He was the first to identify and classify the Hebrews as a People. Yes!!! He identified us as "the People of Israel" way before we even knew it. But sadly he did more than that. He knew how to identify us as the "ultimate Other", the "not-us", the Other who threatens his position. This is tyranny of the mind, tyranny that is entirely focused on "divide and conquer" as a way of life, as a means for survival and a decree of fear. In the face of fear of the other, the heart hardens, shrinks and shuts.

Where there is separation and division for the purpose of control (as in "divide and conquer") it becomes very narrow, like Mitzrayim.

But know, when the heart is too hard, it will end up breaking. This is a tough and often painful process, but it is also very good news: it is then that the process of healing and redemption can begin.

"God is close to those of broken heart". The heart needs to crack for God to come close. Therefore, "there is nothing more complete than a broken heart."

The poet Dalia Rabikovitz wrote: "I told you that rocks break suddenly, and so it is with people as well."

Va'era, and perhaps the entire story of the Exodus from Egypt teaches us that "the heart must break in order to grow. When the heart breaks and is laid entirely open, God can bring into it the entire universe." (Andrew Harvey, an author, religious scholar and teacher of mystic traditions.)

I was raised on the wonderful lyrics of the great Jewish singer-songwriter Leonard Cohen who wrote: "... Forget your **perfect** offering, There is a **crack** in everything, That's how the light gets in."

Sometimes we all have a heart like Pharaoh's - as individuals, as a society and as a people. If this heart does not know how to soften, its fate is to break. A broken heart is the beginning of healing.

Elisha