

GOOD THINGS COME...

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, "Come speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt - that he should send the Children of Israel from his land." Moshe spoke before Hashem, saying, "Behold, [even] the Children of Israel didn't listen to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me?" (6:10-12)

Moshe's response seems to equate the Jews unwillingness to accept his message with Pharaoh's - they didn't listen, and neither will he. His comparison requires some examination. Although the message to Pharaoh was ostensibly the same as the one to Israel - that the Jews must be allowed/will be leaving - to the Jews it was a message of redemption, while to Pharaoh it was one of surrender and submission. There also seems to be a marked difference in their refusal to listen: The Torah attests that the Jews were unable to digest Moshe's words, "from shortness of breath and hard work. (verse 9)" When Pharaoh doesn't listen, it's out of arrogance and insolence. What is the relationship between Hashem's message to Pharaoh, and his not listening, and that of Israel?

Parshas Va'eira begins with Hashem criticizing Moshe for his impatience. At the end of parshas Shemos, Moshe complains to Hashem from what seems to be a lack of success in his mission. Instead of things getting better since he came, they've gotten worse. Hashem allays Moshe's concerns by telling him that things are just getting started. Then (according to Rashi's understanding) He begins His reproach:

The Almighty (Elokim) spoke to Moshe - He spoke with words of harsh judgement (using the name Elokim), because Moshe complained (about the Jews' situation). And He said to him, "I am Hashem" - I can be relied on to [keep My word], and to reward those who go in My ways. I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov as E-l Shaddai, but My name Hashem I did not make known to them - they never experienced My name Hashem, which denotes that I can be trusted to keep My promises. I established a covenant with them to give them the Land of Cana'an - yet they never saw the fulfilment of My promise in their lifetimes...

After this, Hashem reasserts His promise to take the Jews out of Egypt, give them the Torah, and bring them to the Land of Israel.

Hashem's message to Moshe is obvious: While the forefathers demonstrated great patience in awaiting the fulfilment of My promises, you balked at the first sign of adversity. Was Hashem upset with Moshe's lack of patience, or with his audacity to verbalize it? From His words, it seems the criticism is not only with Moshe's remarks, but with his attitude. Yet isn't it natural to feel put off if,

after announcing yourself (at Hashem's behest) as the "saviour," things only get worse? And why indeed did Hashem have Moshe announce their "impending" salvation, only to have them undergo a frustratingly long time lapse before things really start to move?

The Mishnah (Avos 6) lists 48 qualities one who desires to study Torah must strive to acquire. Way number 13 is Be-yishuv - by sitting.

Western culture has taught us to look for immediate results. "Lose 30 pounds in 30 days." "Remember the names of everyone you've ever met in 4 short lessons." "Teach yourself to program computers in 21 days." "Turn \$1,000 into \$100,000 in just minutes a day." Something inside says it's too good to be true, yet the allure of almost instantaneous satisfaction is difficult to resist.

With Torah (as with most other things in life) there is no free lunch. "If someone tells you, 'I have not toiled, yet I have acquired [Torah knowledge] - don't believe him. (Megillah 6b)" The only way to become a true connoisseur of Torah is to "sit on the bench." It's no wonder that the Yiddish expression for patience is zitz-fleish! One who expects Torah study to be like a good novel - just open it up and start turning the pages, is likely to be sorely disappointed. Today we can load Shas onto our Palm's, and learn the daf while driving to work, but to true Torah knowledge there are no shortcuts.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 85a) tells how R' Chiya taught Torah to young children. He would plant flax, spin thread from the flax, weave nets, trap animals, skin the animals, and make parchment from their hides, upon which the words of the Torah would be inscribed. Why not just buy the parchment, or even better, a Torah scroll. Perhaps R' Chiya was trying to impress the students with the correct posture towards Torah study: If it comes too easily, it's not worth anything. If you want your Torah to be meaningful, you've got to toil with patience and with unending diligence.

Perhaps this is why Hashem made things happen so slowly at first. If He so desired, He could have delivered us on a moment's notice. But doing so would just have served to reinforce our perpetual quest for things to happen in an instant. Hashem needed us to know that becoming the People of the Book (i.e. Torah) meant measuring success in small, consistent steps, not by leaps and bounds.

This is why Hashem takes such issue with Moshe's lack of composure: The Torah is to be given through Moshe, yet he lacks the very trait which is so crucial to its acquisition.

We can assume that Moshe understood Hashem's message. When he went back to the Jews, he tried to appease them by explaining that things are going exactly according to [Hashem's] plan - it's just that Hashem's plan is to do things more slowly that they might have liked.

They couldn't accept this. They didn't listen to Moshe from shortness of breath [spirit] and hard work - perhaps the Torah is explaining that their refusal to accept Moshe's message stemmed from their own impatience: They were short-spirited - and lacked the patience to take things slowly, claiming that sitting around waiting "indefinitely" while things seemed to go nowhere was hard work -

something they just weren't prepared to do.

Perhaps Pharaoh's arrogant refusal to give heed to Moshe's message was indicative of the same lack of patience and obsession with instant results. When Moshe approaches Pharaoh with Hashem's message to let the Jews go, his immediate reaction is: "Give me a sign! (7:9)" Prove it to me. If your G-d really runs the show, let Him show me what He's got - now!

At Hashem's behest, Moshe takes his stick and tosses it to the ground - it becomes a snake. Why a snake? The Gemara (Bechoros 6a) says that the gesticulation period of the snake, at seven years, is the longest of any animal. Perhaps Moshe's message to Pharaoh is this: You believe that either Hashem takes them out right now, or else He can't. That is not how Hashem plans to do things. Like the snake, who carries its young for 7 years before finally giving birth, the Jews will be removed from your land, and you will be punished, even if at first it may seem things are going nowhere.

Like the Bnei Yisrael, Pharaoh is misled by the gradual trickle of change taking place under his nose, and continually refuses to acknowledge Hashem. Perhaps this is why the Torah equates Pharaoh's lack of heed to that of the Jews - both of them lacked the patience and equanimity to realize that great things don't always happen in a flurry.

A revered sage once said, "Everyone wants to become great overnight - and get a good night's sleep too!" Ask any chronic dieter, they'll tell you: The only pounds that stay off are those that come off gradually and diligently, with a commitment to change. We must constantly remind ourselves not to be led astray by the quick-fix pleasures and accomplishments of a high-octane society; the only achievements that really last are those that come with patience and diligence.

Have a good Shabbos.

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