

EXCEPTIONAL DEEDS, EXCEPTIONAL REWARDS

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Va'eira begins with Moshe's impassioned speech, in which he conveys Hashem's promise to take the enslaved Jewish nation out of Egypt. Despite the message of hope, the Jews' broken spirits left them unable to internalize Moshe's message, "from shortness of breath and from hard work." (6:9)

Moshe was then told to go to Pharaoh and demand that he release the Jews:

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 - and my speech is blocked." (6:10-12)

Moshe's logic appears flawed: The reason the Jews refused to accept his message is because they were overburdened by slavery. Pharaoh was not. He may or may not listen to Moshe (indeed, he didn't), but this outcome could not have been divined by the fact the Jews did not accept his missive. Also, why does Moshe tack his poor articulation ("my speech is blocked") on to his argument? He already had this discussion with Hashem in last week's parasha, and Hashem responded: "Who gives man speech? Who creates the mute, the deaf, the wise and the blind? Is it not I, Hashem?" (4:11)

In parshas Noach, Be'er Mayim Chaim explains why Hashem forced Noah to construct an ark to save his family, instead of a more explicit method of Heavenly salvation (see also Rashi, *ibid*). Chazal, our Sages, say that Hashem deals with us according to our own conduct. In their words, "Hashem measures for man with his own measure" (Sotah 8b). If we treat others kindly, Hashem treats us with an equal measure of kindness. If we are generous, Hashem is generous with us. If we are short-tempered, Hashem has less patience for our silliness.

This concept, he explains, is not binary - it works by degree: If we are very compassionate, Hashem is very compassionate with us.

But it goes even further than that: Humans are frail. At times, we get tired, irritable, hungry and thirsty. In moments of human weakness, our capacity to serve Hashem is reduced. Be'er Mayim Chaim calls this "serving Hashem within the limits of nature." We do what we can. We try hard, sometimes very hard. But we also acknowledge that there are times when we are overwhelmed, and need to catch our breaths before forging ahead.

Note that we are not talking about any slouch: "This man performs all of the mitzvos and serves

Hashem with great enthusiasm." But when he encounters an exceptionally difficult situation, he concedes defeat. "When studying Torah late at night, if he becomes extremely tired, then he goes to sleep. When giving tzedaka, he gives generously, but also makes sure he has something left in his pocket for himself."

Such a man warrants Heavenly assistance in like. Hashem cares for his needs, and watches over him. But He does not stop the sun in its track for him. He does not split rivers for him, or render his attackers miraculously paralyzed.

This is true for about 99.9999% of all humans. But then there are the exceptional, the righteous, who consistently overcome the limitations of their corporeality and serve Hashem "beyond the constraints of nature."

"He does not consider his body... He studies Torah more than is humanly feasible, with great self-sacrifice, like Ravah (Shabbos 88a), who was so engrossed in Torah study that when a heavy object smashed his hand and tore it open, he didn't even notice. This man removes his shirt off his own back to clothe the poor. He prays with great fervour, forgetting his bodily needs, desiring nothing more than to bear his soul before Hashem."

These rare individuals serve Hashem beyond the means of nature, and Hashem responds by removing them from the normal limitations of humans. Like R' Pinchas Ben Yair, who spilt a river (Chulin 7a). And like R' Chanina Ben Dosa, who said, "He Who says oil shall burn, will say that vinegar will burn" (Ta'anis 25a). And about whom people used to say, "Woe is to the man that encounters a wild donkey... and woe is to the wild donkey that encounters R' Chanina Ben Dosa."

He expounds with this the famous verse of the Shema, "And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your resources" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 6:5): One who serves Hashem with all his heart (not only does he use his positive character traits, but also harnesses his yetzer hara (the perverse aspects of his personality) and serves Hashem with completeness); and with all his soul (even in the face of death); and with all his resources (he's willing to give away everything he has) - for such a person Hashem (who created the universe and shapes history) is his G-d (he warrants exceptional Heavenly assistance and explicit miracles).

Noah, while a great tzaddik, is described (Bereishis/Genesis 6:9) as walking with G-d (Elokim, the name of Hashem that describes His having created nature (teva, which has the same numerical value as Elokim) and its constraints). Avraham, on the other hand, is described as walking before Hashem (which alludes to the fact that G-d is everywhere, at every time, and controls everything - and is not constrained by the physical world). Thus, Hashem saved Noah by natural means, and told him to build an ark.

The Jews had every reason to resist Moshe's missive. They were under extreme duress, and were uninterested in his promises of better times and Heavenly salvation somewhere in the future. Still, had they overcome their exhaustion and embraced Hashem's message; if they had dragged their

exhausted bodies and made a massive public le-chaim, and rejoiced in their faith that Hashem would not forsake them - then perhaps Pharaoh might have miraculously perked up and listened to Moshe's message, despite his obvious resistance, and despite Moshe's unusual presentation. And perhaps they would have already then been released from the oppressive slavery. But they didn't. (R' David Potzonovksy, Pardes Yosef)

It's never easy to go the extra mile - let alone the extra marathon. But it helps to know that the stakes are huge, and that one who consistently pushes himself beyond the limits of his own humanity will merit wondrous Heavenly guidance. Have a good Shabbos. Text Copyright © 2010 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**