

## **And Yaakov blessed Pharaoh. (47:7)**

The blessing that Yaakov *Avinu* gave to Pharaoh had an enormous effect on Egypt's agricultural bounty. Indeed, *Rashi* explains that, following Yaakov's blessing, the Nile River rose up to "greet" Pharaoh and then irrigated the land. The **Satmar Rav, zl**, related that, in the twilight of the life of his grandfather, the *Yismach Moshe*, the heads of the community approached him with a complaint. Apparently, the sage *davened* privately in a room off of the main *bais medrash*. This bothered them. They added a few more foolish critiques, which they felt granted them permission to refuse him his meager salary and to search for a replacement. Clearly, people have not changed in the last hundred years. Excuses for replacing spiritual leadership are becoming more transparent, but no one seems to care.

The *Yismach Moshe* replied to them, "I would like you to take a count of how many fires our community has experienced in the last eighteen years (that he had been *Rav*). Also, please confirm for me how many women have miscarried a pregnancy. You will discover that, during my tenure as *Rav* of this community, there has neither been a fire, nor has a woman miscarried. Thus, I feel you owe me a salary for protecting the welfare of the city."

People take their spiritual leadership for granted. To merit having the *gadol hador*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, as *Rav*, yet quibble about his practice at *davening* alone, bespeaks severe obtuseness of the mind. Yet, it is quite common, often fueled by an overactive ego, the result of wealth or other form of self-aggrandizement.

A similar idea may be gleaned from the *pasuk* which relates the Egyptians' request for seeds, so that they could plant and sustain themselves of the harvest, *V'sen zera v'nichyeh v'lo namus*, "And provide seed so that we may live and not die" (Ibid 47:19). *Rashi* explains that, according to Yosef's timetable, Egypt was destined for two more years of hunger, so that seeds would not grow. Once Yaakov *Avinu* appeared in Egypt, however, his merit brought an end to the anticipated hunger.

The story is told that when the *Shaagas Arye*, **Horav Arye Leib Gunzberg, zl**, arrived in Metz to accept the position of *Rav*, the community was effusive with praise and excited over its good fortune. As one of the generation's preeminent *gaonim*, brilliant Torah scholars, he overwhelmed the city's scholars with his encyclopedic knowledge of Torah and ingenious penetrating analytical skills. There was, regrettably, one sad note: He had already reached an advanced age (by the standards of the day). He was seventy years old.

The *Shaagas Arye* sensed the change in mood when they gazed at his aged body and his long, flowing white beard. The people seemed nervous, almost tense and upset. In an attempt to alleviate their fears, he shared with them the following *dvar Torah*: "The Torah teaches us that when Yaakov met Pharaoh, the king asked the Patriarch, 'How old are you?' The Patriarch replied that he was one hundred thirty years. He then added, 'Few and bad have been the days of my life,

and they have not reached the lifespans of my forefathers' (ibid 47:9). Why was it necessary for Yaakov to add this last statement, which comes across like an apology for appearing to be so old? Furthermore, why was Pharaoh concerned with Yaakov's age? Since when do we greet someone and immediately question him concerning his age?

"*Rashi* alludes to the explanation when he writes that, upon Yaakov's arrival, Egypt prospered like it never had before. The hunger that had been devastating the country ended. The Nile River was irrigating the land like it had never before. Pharaoh feared that it was all going to come to a halt – very soon. When he took one look at Yaakov, he became nervous. The Patriarch looked like an old man. This is why Yaakov told him that he had experienced an extremely difficult life. He had aged prematurely, and, in fact, he was much younger than his forefathers had been when they died. Pharaoh could rest assured. Yaakov was not 'leaving' in the near future.

"Likewise, my dear friends, I will have you know that I have had a very difficult life, which has taken its toll on my physical appearance. My body has sustained much travail. I assure you, however, that I will be *Rav* of Metz for at least twenty more years. You may rest assured."

We do not recognize the contributions of our Torah leaders to our physical and material existence. We think that we benefit from them only in the spiritual dimension, but what do they have to do with our material lives? Their mere presence provides merit which would otherwise be unavailable to us. This is something which we should never take for granted.