

## “Behold, Bnei Yisrael have not listened to me, so how will Pharaoh listen to me? And I have sealed lips!” (6:12)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* raises the issue of his speech impediment. He feels that, as a result of his inability to speak eloquently, he is not qualified to serve as Hashem’s spokesman to Pharaoh. Furthermore, if the Jewish People had not listened to him, how could Pharaoh be expected to listen? *Rashi* cites the *Midrash* which notes that this is one of the ten *kal v’chomer*, a *fortiori* logical arguments, in the Torah. A *kal v’chomer* reasons: If a rule or fact applies in a situation in which we have limited reason for it to apply, certainly it applies in a situation in which we have clear reason for it to apply. The Jews should have absorbed every word that emanated from Moshe’s mouth. He was addressing the long-awaited subject of liberation from bondage. Surely, this was an issue upon which we would have expected them to be fully focused. Regrettably, they did not. Apparently, the people were not in a listening mood. If they, who wanted to leave, were not listening, what should be expected of Pharaoh, who clearly wanted them to stay? He would surely ignore Moshe’s request.

This *kal v’chomer* is fraught with difficulty. The issue to be resolved is: The Jews did not listen due to their *kotzer ruach*, shortness of breath, and *avodah kashah*, hard work (ibid 6:9). They were physically and emotionally spent. A wasted person has great difficulty believing that all of his troubles are coming to an end. The commentators –each in his own inimitable fashion – offer their explanations. In his *Shemen HaTov*, *Horav Zev Weinberg, Shlita*, suggests a practical explanation for Moshe’s argument. First, he explains that Moshe’s counter-response of *va’ani aral sefasayim*, “and I have sealed lips,” is not to be viewed as the *sibah*, causative reason, for the Jews’ lack of attention to Moshe, but rather, it is the *mesovev*, effect/ consequence, of their not listening to his words.

Moshe was telling Hashem that he had become *aral sefasayim*, tongue-tied, as a result of the Jews’ ignoring him. A *shliach’s*, agent’s, ability does not extend further than that of the *meshalei’ach*, sender. If Moshe sought to present the Jewish People’s case before Pharaoh, they first must believe in themselves and their ability to become free men; they must trust and have faith that Hashem will redeem them. If they lacked faith, then Moshe could not effectively present their case. He could have been the most outstanding orator, and it would have made no difference. If the people he was representing did not believe, then he was tongue-tied and would fail. The greatest *shtadlan*, intercessor, is as good as those who send him on the mission.

The story is told that *Rabbi Akiva Eiger, zl*, *Rav* of Posen and one of the most illustrious scholars of all time, refused to send an individual who himself did not have a beard to represent the Jewish community and lobby the gentile government to abolish their decree that all Jewish men be ordered to shave their beards and *peyos*. The *Rav* asserted his ruling, despite this man’s amicable relationship with the powers that be and his own distinguished service to the crown. He cited the *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* 146:3, *Al tiv’techu bi’nedivim, b’vein adam she’ein lo s’shuah*, “Do not rely

on nobles, nor on any human being, for he holds no salvation.” He interpreted the *pasuk* in the following manner: “If the messenger sees no success in his mission – if he does not feel certain of his success – then his words will have no efficacy.” One must believe in what he is doing. This applies across the board to any endeavor he undertakes. He must believe in what he is doing; believe in the organization he represents; believe in the *tzedakah*, charity, for which he is collecting –or he will fail in his mission.

The *Noam Elimelech* applies a similar thought in his explanation of Hashem’s statement to Moshe and Aharon describing the scenario in which Pharaoh asks them to present a miracle which demonstrates Hashem’s supernatural powers: “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Provide a wonder for yourselves’” (Ibid. 7:9). The word *la’chem*, “for yourselves,” seems to be out of place. The miracle is to impress Pharaoh and his people – **not** Moshe and Aharon. *Rebbe* Elimelech explains that, indeed, Moshe and Aharon had to be impressed. **They** must see and appreciate the wonders, or they will not be able to imbue others with this belief. *Tenu la’chem*, “provide for yourselves,” it is important that **you** believe, or else *Klal Yisrael* – and certainly Pharaoh –will never believe.

This is a powerful statement. How often has a person attempted to convince someone to join in an endeavor – be it a spiritual venture, financial venture, or communal venture – only to fall flat on his face? It is because he is not certain of its success. His own belief in the endeavor is, at best, shaky. Such circumstances comprise a recipe for disaster.