

“I am Hashem. Speak to Pharaoh...everything that I speak to you.” (6:29)

Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to go to Pharaoh and demand that the Jewish People be released from bondage. If Pharaoh would not listen, Hashem would punish him and his nation severely. In order to understand Moshe *Rabbeinu's* position fully *vis-à-vis* Pharaoh, we should consider their dialogue and the ensuing plagues in context. Imagine a family that was compelled to flee their country in response to a tyrannical king. Overnight, they escaped by train with whatever belongings they could gather. In the ensuing excitement and tumult, a small bassinet containing their infant fell off the train. Miraculously, a wealthy man happened by and heard a young baby crying. The wealthy man took pity on the infant and brought him home. Days became weeks, weeks became months and years as the child grew into adulthood in the home of his surrogate father. The wealthy man gave the child everything. He sent him to the finest schools and even found a wife for him. He supported them after their marriage, taking care of the young couple's every need.

One day this young man rebelled against his surrogate father. He beat him and destroyed his property. He set fire to his storehouses and abused his slaves. He forgot who his benefactor was, all the bounty he had showered upon him. He cared only about himself. This sounds like a shocking story. How could this young man repay his surrogate father in such a debasing manner? Where was his *hakoras hatov*, sense of appreciation and gratitude? Is this the way that one expresses his appreciation to the individual who saved him from certain death, sustaining and raising him to responsible adulthood? Yet, is this not what happened to Moshe *Rabbeinu*? He was thrown into the river with the hope that, somehow, he might be saved. Pharaoh's daughter happened by and noticed the infant Moshe. She took him home and raised him in the palace. He was, indeed, Pharaoh's prince. Suddenly, he rebelled against the one who had saved him. He brought terrible plagues against Pharaoh and his household, which devastated the people and the land. He struck without compassion. A debilitating darkness enveloped the land. The people were afflicted mercilessly time and time again, until all of the first-born in the land were smitten. This is not all. When Moshe and his people left Egypt, they were chased by Pharaoh and his cohorts. The final payback: they were all drowned in the sea.

Does this story sound familiar? When we look at both cases in their proper perspectives, it would seem that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was manifesting an extreme lack of *hakoras hatov* too. Did Hashem not have any other agents to liberate the Jews from Egypt? Is it right to compel Moshe to act in such a disparaging manner, to exhibit such ingratitude to the one who raised him? Indeed, Moshe was to refrain from striking the water and the earth for the first three plagues, since he personally had benefited from these creations. What happened during the rest of the plagues? Did his obligation of *hakoras hatov* end prematurely? There were other great men among the Jewish

People. Why did Hashem send Moshe, thereby placing his *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov* in jeopardy?

In the ethical discourses of *Yeshivas Bais Shalom Mordechai*, it is explained that Hashem always repays *middah k'neged middah*, measure for measure. What goes around, comes around. Pharaoh had a short memory. He conveniently forgot that a Jew had preceded Moshe, who had helped him, an ancestor of the current Jews in Egypt. In fact, most of Pharaoh's wealth could be attributed to Yosef's acumen and integrity. Without Yosef, the entire Egyptian people would have perished from hunger. Pharaoh forgot who had interpreted his dreams, who had rightfully attributed his own ability to Hashem, whose humility and veracity never permitted him to take a thing for himself. Pharaoh forgot – Hashem remembered. Pharaoh did not “remember” Yosef, so Hashem sent someone whom Pharaoh would raise in his own palace, who would not remember him. Who was better than Moshe *Rabbeinu* to teach Pharaoh a lesson in appreciation and gratitude?

David *Ha'melech* asserts in *Sefer Tehillim* 121, “*Hashem tzilcha*,” “Hashem is your shadow.” The *Baal Shem Tov* explains that the Almighty is to us like a shadow. He acts towards us the way we act towards others. Furthermore, the way we act in this world mirrors the way He will act towards us in the Eternal World.

We are always quick to question Hashem: Why me? Why this? What did I do? If we focus on the punishment, we might develop a perspective on what we did. In the *Talmud Berachos* 5a, *Chazal* say, “If one sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. If he examines and finds nothing objectionable, let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of *Torah*.” In his *Nefesh HaChaim*, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner z.l.*, asks, “What do *Chazal* mean when they say, “He finds nothing objectionable”? Is not “*bitul Torah*,” the neglect of *Torah* study, something objectionable? Is this sin not sufficient cause for punishment? He explains that the person does not find a sin that is similar in nature to his punishment. He is not able to equate his punishment with any specific negative action that he has committed. Yet, the study of *Torah* corresponds to all the *mitzvos*. One who does not study will not observe. Consequently, for the sin of neglecting the study of *Torah*, painful sufferings will be visited upon him. One who does not study does not *daven*, pray, very well. One who does not study does not perform *chesed*, kindness, in accordance with the *Torah's* perspective. In fact, he does not carry out any *mitzvos* properly. He becomes deficient in all areas. One is free to do what he wants in this world. He will, however, ultimately pay for his choices.