

**“G-d spoke to Moshe...So Moshe spoke accordingly to Bnei Yisrael; but they did not heed Moshe, because of shortness of breath and hard work...Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them regarding Bnei Yisrael.”
(6:2,9,13)**

Rashi explains that Hashem commanded Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon to lead the people gently, to sustain them. We wonder how the events described in the text follow one another. First, Hashem gave an introduction regarding the *Bris*, Covenant, that He established with the *Avos*, Patriarchs, promising *Eretz Yisrael* to their descendants. Moshe related this news to *Klal Yisrael*, who did not listen to him because of the suffering they had endured under Pharaoh. Why, then, did Hashem command Moshe and Aharon to lead the People gently? What was to be gained from leading them gently, if Pharaoh continued to torture them?

In a homily on *Parashas Vaeira* regarding the erosion of religious commitment as a result of overwhelming torture and suffering, the *Piazesner Rebbe, z.l.*, gives the following explanation. He first cites the phrase from *Tefillas Shacharis* which we recite daily: *V'sitneinu l'chein, u'l'chesed u'l'rachamim*, “Grant us today and every day grace, loving-kindness, and mercy in Your eyes.” We first seek grace, because grace is granted without regard to individual merit, as in *V'Noach matzah chein*, “Noach found grace/favor in the eyes of Hashem” (*Bereishis* 6:8).

Following grace is *chesed*, loving-kindness, a trait that has no limitations. It extends equally to the undeserving and to the deserving. Last is mercy, which contains an element of judgment. It is extended only to individuals who are deserving of it.

When we supplicate Hashem's favor, we pray in this order. We are quite undeserving. Indeed, because of our *tzaros*, troubles, we are so preoccupied that we cannot bear examination by a judgmental eye. Even under the most merciful eye, we are deemed so undeserving that we are compelled to entreat Hashem, begging for grace and freely given loving-kindness. All of this is a result of the terrible suffering which is integral to our lives. We, therefore, first pray for *chein v'chesed*, grace and loving-kindness. Experiencing these *middos*, attributes, will save us from the agony and suffering which make it impossible for us to attain any level of entitlement. Only then will we have the resources to become deserving of at least a little mercy.

The *Rebbe* then focused on their current circumstances. “The profound suffering of our current *matzav*, situation, makes it impossible for us to be *osek*, busy/involved, with Torah and performing the *mitzvos* in the proper manner and with the correct *kavanah*, intention/devotion. Furthermore, even those duties that we are able to carry out are devoid of any living spirit. They are done without good cheer, without joy and enthusiasm, begrudgingly, because we have to – not because we want to.”

Moshe came to *Klal Yisrael* saying that *Elokim*, the G-d of Judgment, understood their suffering, therefore He would grant them mercy and would, consequently, relieve the originally ordained amount of time they were to be in Egypt. They would not, however, listen. Their limited spirit and all the hard work had gotten to them. They could not even cope with mercy. It was necessary to lead them with a more gentle hand. Whenever the Jews earned Hashem's mercy only as a result of suffering, their response was cheerless and devoid of life. Hashem had to change the order from judgment followed by mercy. Due to their suffering, the Jews had to be led gently, with grace and loving-kindness from the onset. One of the many lessons that we learn from this powerful homily is that even to be granted mercy, one must be worthy.