

And I shall harden Pharaoh's heart...And Pharaoh will not listen to you...And I shall take out My legions, My People, the Bnei Yisrael, from the land of Egypt. (7:3,4)

Was it really necessary to harden Pharaoh's heart? Hashem could have simply "convinced" Pharaoh to let us go. That would have been much simpler. The *Baalei Musar* explain that even had Pharaoh one day released us from bondage, we would still remain indebted to him. After all, he would have "liberated" us from servitude. Now that Hashem has redeemed us, we have no debt of gratitude to anyone but Hashem. **Horav Chaim Friedlander, zl** supplements this idea. Had Pharaoh acquiesced to Moshe's demand that *Bnei Yisrael* be released from Egypt, we might be grateful in some manner to Pharaoh. Hashem wanted *Bnei Yisrael* not to become subservient to anyone but Him. Consequently, He created a situation where it was obvious that only Hashem -- without any "assistance" -- took us out of Egypt.

The problem of misplaced gratitude is real. All too often we thank everyone else and attribute our success to other sources, neglecting the true source of all good--Hashem. Nothing happens unless Hashem wills it. No man can achieve success unless it is Hashem's decree. All too often we are subjected to events and circumstances that do not seem related. We do not realize that every event that occurs has a distinct connection to the other. One day, however, we will see how it all fits together. In the **Talmud Kiddushin 70a**, **Chazal** say that in *Olam Ha'bah* there will be a history book which was written by Eliyahu *Ha'navi* and signed by Hashem. Mankind will be given the opportunity to study and understand the purpose of all events and circumstances of men's lives. Our life experiences will all be inscribed there. Every ambiguity will be clarified. All the events which we had thought were purposeless--or even tragic--will take on a new meaning as they are interpreted in light of the continuum of history. We will then become acutely aware that it is Hashem Who really deserves our complete and undivided gratitude.

A *Midrash* teaches us the significance of directing our gratitude to its true source. *Moshe Rabbeinu* was forced to run away from Egypt as a result of the action he took against an Egyptian who was striking a Jew. When it became known that Moshe had killed the Egyptian, he was forced to flee the country for fear of his life. He came to the land of Midyan. One day, as Yisro's daughters were being harassed by a band of ruffians, Moshe quickly stepped in and dispersed the would-be attackers. When the girls came home, they told their father, Yisro, that an "Egyptian man" had rescued them. The common explanation is that Moshe was dressed as an Egyptian. Thus, they thought that it was an Egyptian who had intervened on their behalf.

The *Midrash* interprets the expression in a somewhat different manner by first citing a parable. A man is bitten by a wasp and runs to the river to cool off the stinging bite. Arriving at the river, he sees a child drowning and jumps in to save him. The child tells the man, "If not for you, I would have drowned." The man replies, "If not for the wasp, I would not have been here to save you." When Yisro's daughters thanked Moshe for saving them, he told them, "Do not thank me; thank

the Egyptian that I killed. If not for him, I would not be here today.”

The message is clear: We thank everyone but the one who set the course of events to occur in such a manner that we would benefit. So who should we thank, the individual who was there or the one Who caused him to be there? If *Bnei Yisrael* had departed from Egypt with misdirected gratitude, it would have undermined the entire Exodus and distorted its historical and spiritual lessons.