

And Yisro heard...that Hashem had taken Yisrael out of Egypt. (18:1)

Originally, Moshe *Rabbeinu* had taken his entire family with him to Egypt. Aharon *HaKohen* urged him to send them back to Midyan. His contention was very practical: The Jews in Egypt were already suffering; why should Moshe add to their number? Now, after hearing about all of the miracles, Yisro realized that the time had come for the family to be reunited. *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah*, *Shemos* 4:4) relate Moshe's response to his brother's admonishment. He said, "Tomorrow (in the near future), they (*Klal Yisrael*) will leave Egypt and stand at the foot of *Har Sinai*, where they will hear Hashem declare, *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*, 'I am Hashem, your G-d,' and my sons will not hear – *k'mohem*, like them."

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, observes that Moshe was underscoring the words "like them." This means that, while it is true that his sons would experience the Revelation at *Har Sinai*, would be privy to hearing the first two *dibros*, commandments, directly from Hashem, they would not "hear," experience the Revelation on the same spiritual plane as *Klal Yisrael*. This is due to their not having experienced slavery as did *Klal Yisrael*. There is no comparison between listening to Hashem's declaration after having just emerged from 210 years of suffering and misery and to being present as a spectator. Moshe wanted his sons to experience *Har Sinai* at its apex, something which only a slave could do. Thus, he wanted to bring them down to Egypt.

L'fum tzara agra, "The reward is commensurate with the pain," is a well-known aphorism of the *Tanna*, Ben Hai Hai (*Pirkei Avos* 5:26). The reward for observing Hashem's commandment is increased in proportion to the effect and discomfort one experiences in its performance. Idiomatically, it might suggest that success comes with a price. Here it means that the level of the *Har Sinai* experience increases with the level of slavery one suffers because, the more difficult the physical trek to the mountain, the greater the spiritual ascendancy one experiences when he arrives. All the pain will have been worth it when one sees the incredible reward.

While no one wants to feel pain, suffer loss, or experience disappointment, all too often, when attempting to avoid the inevitable, we become victims of emotional numbness. If one creates an environment in which he feels no pain, he will never understand the joy, the exuberance, of living, growing, succeeding. I saw an inspiring quote, "The bad part about being so numb is there will come a time when you will want to feel something, but you will not know how to." When there is no experience of pain, there is no experience of joy.

How we react to pain also defines us. If we become immersed in the suffering and pain that we experience, we end up wallowing in self-pity and depression. People suffer, but, at a certain point, one must move on. We must attempt to use the pain as a springboard for opportunity, for building, for spiritual and emotional growth. Yosef *HaTzaddik* was viceroy over Egypt. As a result of his royal position, he did not participate in carrying the coffin of his father, Yaakov *Avinu*. As a result, when

the Torah details the census (*Bamidbar* 1:32) and the division of *degalim*, banners, it writes: "For the sons of Yosef... for the sons of Ephraim." It does not say: For the sons of Yosef, for Ephraim." Yosef is moved aside as he is replaced with the sons of Ephraim. The *Baal HaTurim* explains that, since he did not carry his father's coffin, the banner representing his *shevet*, tribe, is attributed in name to his son, Ephraim. Thus, the Torah writes, "To the sons of Ephraim." True, as a king he simply could not participate, but... since he did not carry the coffin, he cannot gain the name of the banner. *L'fum tzara agra*.

Often times, it is very likely that the pain, the challenges and the problems that arise are really the solution for which we are waiting. With time and patience, we will see how everything turns out satisfactorily. The following story expresses this idea. There was an astrologer who claimed that he could foresee the future by reading the stars. The king had great respect for this astrologer and accepted all of his forecasts. As happens often, when one person finds favor in the eyes of the king, another advisor, usually someone who is quite insecure, becomes obsessed with envy and slanders the king's favorite. An advisor told the king that his favored astrologer was a sham artist who was fabricating his forecasts. The king became angry. No one wants to be manipulated. The king had the astrologer picked up and, in no time, passed judgment to have him executed.

The astrologer was led outside and told to stand against the wall. The king said to the executioner, "When I give the signal, you will shoot." The king then approached the astrologer and said, "You say that you know everything. Tell me, how are things with you right now?" The astrologer replied, "Things are far from good."

"When do you think you will die?" the king asked.

"I do not know, but I do know that, whenever it will be, I will die exactly three days before the king," the astrologer replied.

When the king heard this, he began to shudder with fright. Instead of signaling the executioner to kill the astrologer, he put him in charge of the man's safety. It was vital that the astrologer be protected from all harm. The king felt that his life was bound up with that of the astrologer. The astrologer now realized that what he thought was a life-ending problem had actually become his salvation. He now had a full-time body guard to protect him from harm. We derive from here that the problems which seem to envelop us, which we fear will consume us, are actually Hashem's way of solving what could have developed into a serious problem.

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Family is the most important unit in Judaism. It is the center of Jewish life. Indeed, the early collapse of traditional Judaism in this country, a collapse which led to the growth of the secular streams with their own brands of Jewish perspective, was followed closely afterwards by the

collapse of the Jewish home. The traditional Jewish family had been secularized as a result of the powerful draw of assimilation,” this led to the breakdown of the synagogue, and the rest is history. It is, therefore, amazing that Moshe *Rabbeinu* did not spend more time with his newly-arrived family from whom he had been separated for some time. I quote the following commentary from the *Abarbanel* (free translation):

“The Torah found it necessary to make known that Moshe sat down in judgment immediately, on the following day (after Yisro’s arrival). For a number of days, he did not occupy himself with his father-in-law, his wife and sons. On the day of their arrival, he spent time with them, but, immediately, on the very next day, he returned to his position as leader. He spent the entire day, from early morning until late at night, in judgment. His primary focus was on his position as leader – not as husband, father, and son-in-law.”

Imagine this happening in contemporary society. One’s wife and children arrive after a lengthy separation; the leader will most certainly take some time off to spend with his family. They need time to catch up, to talk about what has taken place in their individual lives. Moshe *Rabbeinu* was different. His focus was on *Klal Yisrael*. True, he had a family, but the members of *Klal Yisrael* were also his family and, as leader, he had a moral obligation to address their needs, to listen to their grievances, to soothe their nerves, to engender hope within them. That is the job of a leader. Personal time for personal issues was kept to a minimum. The nation came first.