

"And you shall say to him... 'Send out My people that they may serve Me in the wilderness,' (7:16)

Moshe gave Pharaoh no options; he gave Pharaoh no room for discussion or compromise in meeting his demand. The Jews must leave Egypt -- unequivocally! There must be a complete liberation. Why? Would it not have been sufficient to halt the labor and insist that the Jews be reinstated as common citizens?

The *Otzar Chaim* offers a simple, but profound, response. He recounts a comment made by the *Chasam Sofer, z.l.*, during the emancipation in Austria. The prejudicial laws were lifted, enabling Jews to hold positions of importance and granting them access to society in general. Everyone was excited about their newly found freedom. The ghetto Jew was history. The *Chasam Sofer*, however, was disturbed by the turn of events. His students could not understand why everyone was overjoyed, while their *rebbe* was weeping and depressed.

The *Chasam Sofer* responded with a parable. There was once a very powerful king who found his senior officer and close confidante guilty of a grave crime. Under the usual rules this officer deserved to be executed. The king, a dear friend of this officer, commuted his sentence to a long prison term. He told him that undoubtedly his tenure in prison would be extremely difficult, but there was ultimate hope. The king would one day liberate the officer from his incarceration. He would just have to be patient and wait for that day.

The officer was exiled to a horrible prison. He was placed into a filthy pit with scorpions and snakes. The officer was resigned to his misery amidst this hostile environment. The only thing that kept him going was the king's assurance that someday he would be released. One day the hapless prisoner heard sounds outside of his pit. Excited, he looked up in anticipation; perhaps this was the moment he had awaited so long. His heart pounded enthusiastically as the door was opened to allow the king's messengers to enter. "We have come from the king to alleviate your condition. We are going to clean up your pit and make a window for your dungeon to permit some light to enter."

As soon as the prisoner heard these words, he emitted a piercing cry and began to weep uncontrollably. The king's messengers asked him incredulously, "Why are you weeping? You should be overjoyed with the changes made to your dismal condition." "You do not understand," responded the prisoner. "The entire time I was incarcerated I knew that one day I would be freed. This awareness kept me going. It encouraged me, as it gave me a glimmer of hope that one day I would again have a normal life. Your coming to clean up my pit unfortunately indicates that I will be here for yet a long time. My hopes of leaving here in the near future have been shattered."

"I, too, am crying," said the *Chasam Sofer*, "for I fear that this 'wonderful' equality we have just been granted is regrettably a message that the end of our exile is not so near. We have just had 'citizenship' in *galus* conferred upon us, and I should not cry?" In the *Talmud Sanhedrin 98a*,

Chazal comment, 'If you see a generation whose persecutions flow like the river, wait for *Moshiach*.' Our suffering is part of a process which purifies us as it prepares us for the final redemption.