

These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh ... this was Moshe and Aharon. (6:27)

Prior to relating Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen's* visit to Pharaoh for what was to be the beginning of the end of the Jewish enslavement, the Torah digresses and offers a brief genealogical backdrop. The Torah begins by introducing Levi ben Yaakov, the Patriarch of the Levite families. This is followed by a detailed list of his children and grandchildren, and it concludes with Moshe and Aharon who came before Pharaoh demanding that he release the Jews. *Rashi* is bothered by the superfluous ending to the family history. He explains that the Torah intimates that *Hu Moshe v'Aharon mi'techilah v'ad sof*, from beginning to end. These two men grew up righteous, married righteous, and were now standing before the evil Pharaoh. They had transcended the spiritual wasteland in which they had found themselves.

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, posits that the Torah's praise of Moshe and Aharon is actually a charge to all of us to complete our mission, to go through life living a morally upright, ethically correct, G-d-fearing life – regardless of where we find ourselves. One should not think, “My background leaves much to be desired, “Where I live is not conducive to spiritual growth” or; “Whatever I accomplish is fine.” These thoughts are a representation of an attitude of someone who is unwilling to make an attempt at achieving success. We have a purpose in this world, a G-d-given mission which is exclusively ours to fulfill. What right does he have to give apathetic excuses for a lack of trying? Furthermore, even if one has successfully navigated life's hills and valleys, it does not grant him the excuse to retire and take it easy. *Chazal (Berachos 29A)* relate that Yochanan served as *Kohen Gadol* for eighty years (eighty times he entered the *Kodesh HaKadoshim* on *Yom Kippur*); yet, at the end of his life, something happened that provoked him to become an apostate and reject everything. For eighty years he had achieved and lived the life of the most elevated spiritual Jew – then he plummeted to infamy. He did not persevere. He retired and fell prey to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination.

The *Mashgiach* himself went through tribulation that would have destroyed a lesser person. When he was a *talmid* in Yeshivas Mir in Poland, prior to World War II, the Polish government made him leave because he had German citizenship. Germany was preparing to invade Poland; the last person they wanted to be present was a German national. For the next eight years, he lived in Sweden in such a spiritually-challenged environment that he did not even have a *minyan* of *shomer Shabbos* Jews. Nonetheless, he maintained his *sedarim* in Torah-study and adhered to the strictest standards of *mitzvah* performance. He had every excuse to take an eight-year hiatus from *Yiddishkeit*, but we do not do that. Our commitment and dedication is neither time -- nor location-centered. It is unequivocal and immutable.

In a similar situation, the *Mashgiach* once met a Moroccan Jew who, upon arriving in the Holy Land, was immediately brought to a non-religious *kibbutz*. (This was part of the secularists' war on orthodoxy.) They felt that they would not succeed in building an independent Jewish state unless the religious community would be disbanded. He refused to concede any of his religious

commitment to the secular lifestyle that was forced on the poor immigrants. He demanded kosher food which, for them, was an anathema. He was considered a “harmful” influence on the other immigrants and, thus, he was sent to another *kibbutz* where the same scenario was repeated. After being sent to successive *kibbutzim*, the secularists finally gave in and permitted him to enter a *yeshivah*, where he excelled. His devotion to *Yiddishkeit* kept him strong and unwavering in the face of religious aggression.

One's behavior is greatly influenced by his environment. Moshe and Aharon, as did Yosef *HaTzadik* before them, showed us the way and gave us the keys to navigating the almost constant challenges to our faith successfully. We must define our ideals and adhere steadfastly to them, regardless of the situation in which we find ourselves.

Reb Mendel Futerfas was imprisoned by the Russians for practicing his religion. This was during the Soviet era, in which the ruling Soviets imprisoned and sent many Jews to harsh labor camps for committing the sin of religious observance. Despite the misery, constant travail and isolation, *Reb* Mendel continued to observe *mitzvos* secretly. He made a makeshift pair of *Tefillin* and kept kosher with limited resources. His unwavering commitment inspired other prisoners – both Jewish and non-Jewish --- not to give in to apathy, but to continue doing whatever they could to maintain their religious dignity.