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**The Modesty of Moshe Rabbeinu**

Moshe Rabbeinu relays the message as commanded. He tells Klal Yisroel that Hashem has heard their cries and the time has come for them to be delivered from Egypt. But things don’t according to plan. Klal Yisroel aren’t listening. Their unbearable workload prevented them from accepting and even hearing Moshe Rabbeinu.

**וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל משֶׁה מִקֹּצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה**

And they did not listen to Moshe because of their shortness of breath and hard labour (Shemos 6,9)

Moshe Rabbeinu then goes on to make one of the ten “kal v’chomers” in Torah:

**וַיְדַבֵּר משֶׁה לִפְנֵי ה' לֵאמֹר הֵן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמָעֵנִי פַרְעֹה וַאֲנִי עֲרַל שְׂפָתָיִם**

And Moshe said to Hashem, “Behold, the children of Israel did not listen to me. How then will Pharaoh listen to me, and I am closed of lips.” (Shemos 6,12)

If the Bnei Yisroel, who have a vested interest to leave Egypt, are not listening, then certainly (kal v’chomer – how much more so) Pharaoh, who does not want the Bnei Yisroel to leave, will not listen to me.

But as many commentators note, the kal v’chomer has a basic flaw. The Bnei Yisroel do not listen to Moshe because they are exasperated. Not because of Moshe’s speech impediment! The Bnei Yisroel are short of breath and do not have the head space to listen. Pharaoh, on the other hand, is sitting in the luxury and tranquillity of his palace, may well indeed listen!?

Several answers are given to this problem.

One points to the arrogance of Pharaoh. Just as Bnei Yisroel couldn’t listen to Moshe because of the overwhelming pressure of work, so too Pharaoh couldn’t listen; he was distracted by his pursuit of kovod, his obsession with honour and his farce of pretending to be a G-d. Both were distracted by pressures.

Pharaoh’s ga’avah (arrogance) is well documented. There are many examples; I came across another example last year that I had not noticed before.

Pharaoh, and all of Mitzrayim, had been bombarded with frogs. Droves of frogs covered the land, entered all the houses in every nook and cranny.

It has caused chaos and turned their lives upside down. Pharaoh pleaded to Moshe and Aharon for them to stop and begged them to remove the plague.

Moshe Rabbeinu asked Pharaoh when the frogs should stop:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפַרְעֹה ... לְמָתַי אַעְתִּיר לְךָ וְלַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְעַמְּךָ, לְהַכְרִית הַצְפַרְדְּעִים מִמְּךָ וּמִבָּתֶּיךָ?

And Moshe said to Pharaoh, when should I entreat for you and for your servants and for your people, to destroy the frogs from you and your houses?

What did Pharaoh reply?

לְמָחָר – tomorrow

Tomorrow!! Meshugene, another sleepless and painful night of torment for the whole country!? End it now!!

Once again Pharaoh shows us his arrogance. As if to say, look, it’s actually not that bad, tomorrow is fine…

Another answer points to the humility of Moshe Rabbeinu. Picture the following scene. A teacher returns to the staff room after a particularly challenging class.

“I’ve never seen children like them,” she exclaims. “They’re impossible! Unteachable!”

Alternatively, the teacher returns to the staff room dejected but thinks to herself, “These kids need something different. I’m not engaging them. Let me consult my colleagues and come up with better classroom management techniques and more effective ways to engage these students.”

What is the difference between the two responses?

The first smacks of arrogance, where the teacher is essentially saying, “I’m a good teacher and the problem is the kids.” The second scenario displays a modesty and willingness to acknowledge that we are not perfect and can improve.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest of men. He attributed the Bnei Yisroel not listening to him to no one other than himself.

**וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמָעֵנִי פַרְעֹה וַאֲנִי עֲרַל שְׂפָתָיִם**

How then will Pharaoh listen to me, and I am closed of lips.

In this light, Moshe Rabbeinu’s words are understood and his kal v’chomer makes sense.

If the Bnei Yisroel, who have a vested interest to leave Egypt, are not listening because of me, because I am poor orator, then kal v’chomer – how much more so, Pharaoh, who does not want the Bnei Yisroel to leave, will not listen to me.

What’s notable is the contrast between the arrogance of Pharaoh and the humility of Moshe Rabbeinu.

This dichotomy goes down the generations until today. A friend of mine learned in the yeshiva of Rav Tzvi Kushelevsky, one of the great Rosh Yeshivos of our time. My friend told me of one time where Rav Tzvi was a guest speaker somewhere. The person introducing him did not hold back and gave a long and flowery introduction. Although deserved, Rav Tzvi was not comfortable with it and was whispering something under his breath.

My friend was curious and somehow got close enough to hear what the great Rosh Yeshiva was whispering. Over and over he was repeating to himself the mishna from Pirkei Avos (4,21):

**הַקִּנְאָה וְהַתַּאֲוָה וְהַכָּבוֹד מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם**

Jealousy, desire and honour removes a person from this world

This Rosh Yeshiva would not fall into the trap that plagued Pharaoh and instead emulated the modesty of Moshe Rabbeinu. A lesson for us all.

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