

# Parshat Shemot – Moshe's Bounce Backwards

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January 4, 2024



One of the most significant highlights in this week's parsha occurs at the end, where Hashem instructs Moshe Rabbeinu, telling him that he will approach Pharaoh and demand, "Let my people go," forewarning Moshe that Pharaoh will not yield until Hashem displays His power through the ten plagues. This implies that Moshe Rabbeinu knew in advance, even before his

initial encounter with Pharaoh, that Pharaoh would not be receptive.

However, after their first meeting, Pharaoh unexpectedly intensifies the hardships for the Jewish people. He increases their burden by denying them straw for brick-making, requiring them to collect the straw themselves while still maintaining the same brick production quota. On the plain reading of the parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu reacts with a sense of astonishment, expressing in the third-to-last verse, "Lama hariaotah l'am hazeh," asking, "Why did you make it worse for them [the Jews]?"

This development catches Moshe Rabbeinu off guard because Hashem had forewarned him only about Pharaoh's resistance, not about the exacerbation of the Jews' plight. On the straightforward level of the parsha, Moshe, feeling the weight of his responsibility, bursts out to Hashem, questioning why the situation has taken a turn for the worse. This outpouring stems from Moshe's deep compassion as a leader. Rashi underscores this, noting that Moshe's concern arises from being sent by Hashem to fulfill a task, only to witness an escalation in the suffering.

Moshe's emotional response results in a form of frustration, and ultimately, he faces consequences for it. Hashem informs Moshe that he will witness the forthcoming actions against Pharaoh and Egypt, but he will not live to see the ultimate conquest of the Holy Land, as he will be barred from entering. This episode highlights the complexities and challenges that Moshe Rabbeinu encounters as he navigates the path set by Hashem.

On a surface level, why was Moshe Rabbeinu punished? What did he do wrong? Wasn't his reaction justified? Hashem had clearly informed him that Pharaoh wouldn't comply until the ten plagues were revealed. The exacerbation of the Jews' suffering by Pharaoh was unexpected and painful. Moshe, out of concern

for his people, approached Hashem with the plea, questioning why the situation had worsened. However, he faced repercussions for the manner in which he expressed himself. This raises the question: What alternative course of action was Moshe supposed to take? Should he have remained silent and accepted it as Hashem's will? Yet, being a compassionate leader, he couldn't stand idly by. So, why the punishment?

The Torah Temima provides a fascinating perspective, suggesting that Moshe Rabbeinu deliberately provoked this response. When the police officers complained to Pharaoh about the increased hardships, Pharaoh accused them of laziness and worsened their conditions. The righteous officers were distressed at seeing the Jewish people suffer more. However, the troublemakers, Datan and Aviram, added fuel to the fire.

Following their complaint, the officers encountered Moshe and Aharon, challenging and insulting them. They accused Moshe of causing a bad stench of the Jews in the eyes of Pharaoh, his people, and his servants, effectively putting a metaphorical sword in their hands to kill the Jews.

The Torah Temimah concludes that when Moshe observed the distress reaching an alarming level, compounded by the pressure from troublemakers like Datan and Aviram, he sought to atone and lessen the severity of judgment against the Jewish people. Intentionally placing himself in a situation where he spoke sternly to Hashem, asking, "Why did you make it bad?" and subsequently facing punishment. This deliberate act aimed to mitigate the difficulties for Am Yisroel, exemplified the role of a faithful leader. A tzaddik, especially one of Moshe Rabbeinu's stature, endeavors to ease the hardships for the Jewish people.

However, despite these efforts, the overarching picture remains that the path to redemption became more challenging. Rebbe Nachman teaches that this intensified difficulty before a major breakthrough is a common pattern. As one approaches a

significant salvation, there is a tendency for challenges to intensify unexpectedly, making it mentally and emotionally taxing. This process is akin to having the rug pulled out from under one's feet.

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The term "Pegi'ah," used when Datan and Aviram confronted Moshe and Aharon, holds a deeper meaning. Describing the encounter, the word "Pegi'ah" refers to those who were Nitzavim, initially troublemakers, as noted by Rashi.

Reb Noson, however, explains that "Pegi'ah" also signifies bouncing or hitting and bouncing back, specifically in the highest possible spiritual realm referred to as the "Makom." This Makom represents the Keter, the gateway to Hashem's infinite light, an unfathomable level impossible for finite beings to fully grasp. The bouncing back from this high level is a necessity for a Jew's spiritual growth, as elucidated in Likutey Moharan Lesson 24.

Accepting challenges and bounce-back moments positively determines the continuity of one's spiritual growth. The bounce-back creates vessels or chambers for receiving one's perception of the infinite light while acknowledging its incomprehensible nature.

This parsha serves as preparation for the impending 10 plagues, a significant chapter in world history and the rectification of the world.

The number 10 holds great significance throughout the Torah, evident in the Kabbalistic 10 sefirot, the 10 utterances during creation (Asara Mamarot), and the 10 plagues in Exodus, leading up to the the 10 commandments at Har Sinai.

With the Torah, including the 10 utterances and commandments,

the Jews eventually enter the Holy Land and construct the Holy Temple. As the Mishnah outlines, the Holy Temple marks the completion of the 10 levels of holiness in the world, with the majority, if not all, of these levels situated in Eretz Yisrael.

The parsha is particularly relevant as it paves the way for the 10 plagues, significant not only as a punishment for Egypt but also as miracles for the Jewish people. These plagues serve as prerequisites for receiving the 10 commandments at Har Sinai during Shavuot.

Thus, given the high spiritual breakthrough, a concept of "Pegi'ah" or bounce back is introduced in this week's parsha. The leaders, specifically Moshe and Aharon, experience this bounce back due to the unexpected intensification of the Jewish people's suffering. This frustration and setback are necessary for reaching the next elevated level, exemplified in the preparation for the upcoming 10 plagues presented in Parshat Va'era and Parshat Bo.

In essence, the parsha could have simply depicted the process of the Jews being in Egypt, their enslavement, and Hashem selecting Moshe Rabbeinu at the burning bush to lead them out. However, the narrative takes a different turn, illustrating that the situation worsened. This unexpected turn of events, where conditions worsen before improvement, underscores the necessity of facing challenges and setbacks on the path to spiritual elevation.

The lesson derived from this is that when faced with setbacks and frustrations (i.e. Pegi'ot) maintaining simple faith and joy is crucial. Recognizing these moments as part of a preparatory stage and exercising patience can help navigate through the challenges until the opportunity to advance arises once again.

Shabbat Shalom

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