



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Two-Letter Words

By the time the sidra opens, seven plagues have attacked Egypt. The country is approaching collapse. Yet Pharaoh is still adamant: "The Israelites will not leave! I will not give in to Moshe!"

Moshe knows the king is furious. He can guess what reception he will get next time he goes to the palace. But it has to be done. So God decides to lift Moshe's spirits. Hence the sidra begins, "G-d said to Moshe, BO EL PAR'O."

The translation says, "Go to Pharaoh." But the two-letter word BO doesn't mean "go". Another two-letter word, LEICH, means "go". BO means "come".

God says, "Come to Pharaoh; I will be with you!" And with this assurance Moshe can carry out his task. He will not be alone!

There is a question we all need to ask ourselves. Do we say "go" or "come" when others are facing a challenging moment?

Do we say to a fellow Jew, "Go - be a better Jew" or "Come - let us work on our Judaism together"?

Do we say to a communal cause, "Go - if you're short of funds cut down on your activities!" or "Come - let us work together to find means for you to keep going"?

When Shabbat comes do we tell our children, "Go to shul on your own!" or "Come - let us come to shul together as a family"?

When our children become adults do we say, "Go - run your lives decently and honestly!" or "Come - let's join forces and commit our whole family to do what is right"?

When someone is plunged into illness, despair, doubt or bereavement, do we say, "Go - it's your problem!" or "Come - let me be with you and share your load"?

Saying "come" and not "go" is the beginning of being a mensch.

Mixed Multitude

The Israelites were not alone in yearning to break free from Egyptian bondage, nor were they the only ones to escape in the Exodus.

With them went the EIREV RAV, "a mixed multitude", many of whom were members of other races who had also suffered at Egypt's hands - and probably a number of the Egyptian native population who were sure they would enjoy a better life away from their homeland.

One wonders why Moshe showed no apparent interest in incorporating the EIREV RAV into the ranks of his own people. It would increase the Israelite population and be a generous gesture to the people concerned.

It does not answer the question to say that the Torah was not interested in the future of the EIREV RAV and so they faded from the story.

The better answer is that both Moshe and the Torah had no wish to be deflected from the task of Israelite nation-building.

God had promised to make them a distinct nation with their own traits and tasks. Integrating a motley throng of fellow-travellers who shared neither the family history nor the religious and cultural tenets of Israel would create countless problems for the future. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH