

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

VA'EIRA

Moshe spoke accordingly to the Children of Israel. But they did not heed Moshe because of shortness of breath and because of hard work (6:9).

The opening texts of the Parasha relate G-d's telling Moshe that the Geula from Egypt will take place in four stages:

1. Physical redemption - 'I will bring you out from the burdens of Egypt' (6:6).
2. Social redemption - 'I will rescue you from their service' (6:6).
3. National redemption - 'I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments' (6:6).
4. Spiritual redemption - 'I shall take you for me as a people, and I shall be G-d to you'. (6:7).

To which He concludes: 'You will then know that I am G-d who took you out of Egypt.'

Then He adds: 'I will bring you to the Land... it is an inheritance. I am G-d'. (6:8)

Phenomenal assurances promising a phenomenal destiny to a subjugated and enslaved people! And indeed, the Israelites took no heed of Moshe and his words of vision 'because of weak-

ness of spirit and because of hard work'.

The Meshech Chochma reasons that such apathy might be expected. Those who endure prolonged suffering and seemingly hopeless future do not imagine that their situation will ever radically improve. Their hopes go no further than desiring some immediate relief from their constant distress and misery. Offering anything more is meaningless, and perhaps a mockery of their afflictions.

Which raises the question of why G-d asked Moshe to present such a grandiose vision in the first place. What was the point of painting a wonderful future to a people unable to take it in?

According to the Meshech Chochma, the succeeding: "G-d spoke to Moshe and Aharon commanding them regarding B'nei Yisrael and with Par'o ... to take the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt" (6:13) indicates that G-d indeed subsequently moderated His instructions to what was then practical. The focus would not be their great destiny, but the matter in hand: Exodus from Egypt. "We're getting ready to leave." That much they could grasp.

Alternatively, as the Ralbag suggests, Moshe himself was not at his best when he delivered his phenomenal promises of a phenomenal destiny.

He was recoiling from G-d's severe rebuke, where (following Rashi) He adversely contrasted Moshe's complaint that He was not saving his people with the sterling emuna demonstrated by his ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov during the extremely trying situations that they went through. The suffering Israelites picked up on his less-than-perfect delivery and perhaps sensed a slightly hollow and not fully convincing tone in his words. Perhaps Moshe as well as the people were enduring *kotzer ru'ach*, weakness of spirit.

This principle could also help to explain why the Torah brings the partial genealogy of Am Yisrael at this point. Partial, in that it mentions only the descendants of Reuven, Shimon, and Levi. None of the others. Just the three oldest. Bear in mind that Reuven, Shimon, and Levi all made mistakes: Reuven interfered with his father's domestic arrangements, Shimon and Levi put the people of Shechem to the sword. Ya'akov Avinu rebuked all three on his deathbed, the latter two with a resounding 'Cursed be their anger... I will divide them... and I will scatter them' (B'reishit 49:7).

Harsh words indeed. Yet, the Torah reassured, Reuven, Shimon, and Levi all prospered to have imposing lists of heads of families as their descendants. As the Torah declares

by listing them. Things recovered, and things went forward. For genuine people seeking to do their best do err and suffer sharp rebuke, but that does not necessarily put them into permanent disfavour with G-d. 'Seven times the Tzadik may fail, but he gets up and he moves on' (Mishlei 24:16).

So the listing of the impressive descendants of Reuven, Shimon, and Levi was effectively encouraging Moshe to put G-d's rebuke for momentary lack of faith behind him, and to strive for effective and convincing leadership with emuna in having his support at all times. 