

# Mussar HaTorah

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Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Bo

“AND HE TURNED AND LEFT PHARAOH’S PRESENCE.” (SHMOS 10:6)

## **Moshe quickly left**

MOSHE AND AHARON came before Pharaoh and described the destruction that would befall Egypt with the plague of locusts. Immediately after delivering this warning, Moshe and Aharon turned and left. The Midrash Rabbah (Shmos 13:4) explains their hasty departure from Pharaoh’s court: Moshe saw that the members of Pharaoh’s court were looking at each other and believing Moshe’s warning. Moshe quickly left, the Midrash tells us, so that in his absence the Egyptians would continue discussing the warning and how to do *teshuvah*.

## **Wouldn’t this undermine Hashem’s grand plan?**

Moshe knew that Hashem’s ultimate plan was for Pharaoh to refuse to let the Jews leave so that Hashem could show His miracles and wonders. Hashem told Moshe he was hardening Pharaoh’s heart to allow the maximum display of His power. Granted that Moshe perhaps shouldn’t actively make it more difficult for Pharaoh to do *teshuvah*, but here, Moshe’s presence was a normal part of the warning process. Why must he abruptly depart to make it easier for Egyptians and Pharaoh to repent? These miracles would serve as everlasting proof to the future generations of the Jewish people that Hashem was truly Almighty (see Shmos 10:1-2). If this was the plan, why should Moshe take unusual actions to help the Egyptians do *teshuvah*? Wouldn’t this undermine Hashem’s grand plan for future generations?

Moshe’s actions teach us a fundamental Torah outlook on human effort versus Divine providence. Hashem is guiding the universe and He is responsible for the destiny of every nation, group, or individual. He will intervene when His wisdom dictates and direct the unfolding of world events according to His master plan. We, on the other hand, have a different mission. In any given situation, our job is to do what Torah law demands. We are not ultimately responsible to save the world or the Jewish people or even to implement Hashem’s global plans for world history, if that would violate our obligations according to the *Shulchan Aruch* – code of Jewish law. Moshe’s responsibility at that time was to offer the Egyptians the kindness of warning them of their impending doom if they did not do *teshuvah*. Moshe needed to give them the best opportunity to repent and allow B’nei Yisrael to leave.

Reb Dovid Leibowitz zt"l was often faced with situations where it seemed that violations of *halacha* were required in order to save his yeshiva. For example, there were many students who complained about the yeshiva’s cook and urged that she be dismissed from her job. Reb Dovid held that it was not *halachically* permissible to fire the woman, a widow whose *parnassa* depended on the job. The students threatened to leave the yeshiva, imperiling its existence. “Close the yeshiva, rather than violate a single prohibition” he would say. Questionable financial transactions that would raise desperately needed funds were likewise rejected without question. “Hashem doesn’t need me to bring Torah to *Klal Yisrael*. If I am not worthy, He has many other emissaries to do the job.”

## **Ultimately, Hashem is in charge of running the world**

We must at all times remember that we are here in this world to do our job and to fulfill our personal responsibilities. Ultimately, Hashem is in charge of running the world. Let us humbly accept our mission in life, and by keeping the laws of the *Shulchan Aruch*, we will bring about the greatest *kiddush Hashem* possible.