

# Mussar HaTorah

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

8 Shevat, 5770 Vol. 11, No. 14

Parashas Bo

“GO IN UNTO PHARAOH; FOR I HAVE HARDENED HIS HEART.”  
(SHMOS 10:1)

**“Don’t let discouragement  
cause you to stop bringing  
My messages”**

THE RALBAG (ibid.) explains the underlying meaning of the verse above: Hashem was telling Moshe to not be disheartened by Pharaoh’s rejection of Hashem’s demand to free His people. As if to say, “Don’t let discouragement cause you to stop bringing My messages to Pharaoh. The only reason that Pharaoh is not listening,” Hashem is explaining, “is because I have hardened Pharaoh’s heart.”

Moshe was the dedicated servant of Hashem, who received prophecies directly from Hashem on a level unmatched in history. He loyally fulfilled all of the missions that he had been given previously. Nevertheless, the Ralbag implies that Moshe could have neglected (to some small degree) his duty to bring the word of Hashem to Pharaoh – due to the king’s refusal to listen. Should Moshe truly be influenced by Pharaoh’s reaction? Moshe’s job was to communicate Hashem’s words to the Egyptian monarch. Pharaoh’s response was determined by his own free choice. Wouldn’t any devoted worker follow Hashem’s command to the best degree regardless of the success or failure of his past missions? How is it conceivable that Moshe would allow discouragement to lessen his intensity to fulfill a direct command from Hashem?

**Frustration is the natural  
reaction, even when we  
know it’s wrong**

The Ralbag is teaching us the insidious power of repeated, constant negativity. “No!” is short but powerful word. Said often enough, it can wear the most dedicated person down and erode his enthusiasm to fulfill a command from Hashem, and even the greatest prophet in history, a *tzadik* beyond our comprehension, could have fallen prey, on some minute level, to its effects. At times, we are also called upon to undertake missions – at work, with our family or in our relationship with Hashem – that seems to be Sisyphean tasks: the inbox always seems full; piles of laundry, dirty dishes seem to only grow bigger; and there are days when our children just don’t listen to our reasonable requests. Frustration is the natural reaction, even when we know it’s the wrong way to deal with the situation. We see from this Ralbag that we need to fortify ourselves to overcome feelings of despair and to continue trying to fulfill our obligations. If Moshe Rabbeinu needed reinforcement to continue to properly obey the direct command of Hashem in the face of a negative response, how much more so do we need to strengthen ourselves to overcome our challenges?

**We can reframe it as a gift,  
a chance to polish  
our midos**

There may be a helpful technique we can apply, by adopting and adapting Hashem’s exhortation to Moshe: we can simply remind ourselves that it’s all part of Hashem’s plan to help us improve ourselves. Every annoyance we encounter, every stubborn adult or child that confronts us, is merely a test for us. Hashem is watching to see – can we have the patience and self-control to stay calm and on task, or will we give in to the temptation to lose our equilibrium? Instead of viewing the frustrating situation as a personal attack or disregard for our honor, we can reframe it as a gift, a chance to polish our *midos* and show our loyalty and love for our Creator. Just as Hashem was setting the stage with Pharaoh’s obstinacy to reveal His glory and might to the world, He is creating scenarios of difficulty for us on a daily basis that challenge us to reveal our hidden potential and show our true greatness. May we see these tests for what they really are: not frustration and misery, but rather opportunities to let our inner grandeur shine forth as we attain new heights of self-perfection.