

TORAH WEEKLY

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20-20 Hindsight

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions (Originally Published 2016)

Did you ever wonder why certain things that are givens for adults are impossible for a child? Why can't a child understand that the cake he craves is still unbaked, or the toy she needs right then doesn't yet belong to her? An honest observer will realize that this phenomenon isn't limited to children; we all possess these qualities, to some degree, within ourselves. In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, we're told of Hashem's answer to Moshe's complaint. The very end of last week's reading relates Moshe's questioning his apparently failed mission to Pharaoh. Moshe's delegation, following Hashem's direct command, pleaded with Pharaoh for a reprieve from the slavery of the Jewish People. In response, they were ridiculed by Pharaoh, their objective overruled and the slavery intensified. Moshe is understandably dejected and cries out, "Why?" Hashem answers him by assuring him of the impending redemption. Rashi, quoting the Gemara (Sanhedrin 111a), understands these verses as a rebuke to Moshe for questioning Hashem's ways. The Patriarchs, says Hashem, also faced challenges, yet didn't question; they trusted Hashem's words.

The lesson for us seems obvious and simple: Not everything is always obvious and simple! To better illustrate this idea, a parable of Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (1874-1941; Dean of the Baranovitch [Poland] Yeshiva; murdered during the Holocaust) comes to mind. A first-time visitor to a farm is astounded to witness his host, the farmer, ripping up the nice, smooth ground with his plow. When he questions the farmer, he's assured that the outcome will justify this actions. The visitor shrugs his shoulders at the strange farm customs and resigns himself to wait. However, his curiosity is again piqued when the farmer begins to put edible grain into the ground, covers it with dirt and pours precious water on top of the brown dirt. All of his questions are answered with, "Just wait and see." Months later, he finally realizes just how necessary all those "strange" customs were, and how the loss of a few grains were the key to the full harvest of many.

This idea is true in many aspects, but definitely in regard to galus (exile). While we aren't privy to all of Hashem's master plan, we know that the galus is necessary to prepare our nation for future redemptions. It is a way of plowing and planting in order to harvest something even greater than before. Even when the heat of galus gets turned up, we must remember that this is a necessary step to the finished product. Sometimes, in hindsight, we can appreciate why these pains were necessary. Our Sages teach us that in the case of the Egyptian exile, the intensity of the slavery helped remove some of the pre-ordained years of the exile. Instead of the original 400 years decreed, the Jewish Nation now only had to endure 210 years; a crash course to arrive at the redemption. I once heard an explanation of a verse in Hallel (Psalms 118:21) based on this concept. "Odcha ki anisani vatihi li li'shua," which the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leibush Wisser; 1809-1879) translates to mean, "I thank you, Hashem, for having afflicted me, and it was a salvation for me." The affliction itself is the source of the salvation! Once the salvation has come, we can, at times, look back and thank Hashem for the birth pangs which lead us to the final finished product. May we experience the final redemption, speedily in our times.

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