

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שמות

ויאמר ה' אל משה במדין לך שב מצרים כי מתו כל האנשים המבקשים את נפשך
“Hashem said to Moshe in Midian: Go, return to Egypt, for all the people who seek your life have died” (4:19)

Why did Hashem command Moshe a second time to return to Mitzrayim? Furthermore, why did Hashem only tell him that his enemies were dead at this point in time and not earlier?

Ibn Ezra employs the principle of אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה, there is no order in the Torah. He says that this command was actually part of the earlier conversation that Hashem had with Moshe and is written afterwards.

Ramban dislikes Ibn Ezra's explanation because the Torah states that this command was given in Midian and the previous conversation took place at Har Sinai. Instead, he says that Moshe originally thought that he would go to Mitzrayim by himself for a short visit. He would see the state of the people and visit Pharaoh and afterwards he would return to Midian. Because this was his plan, he had no reason to fear his enemies during a short stay. However, Hashem instructed him that this was incorrect. Moshe was to “return to Mitzrayim” and live there until the time for the redemption. He did not have to worry about his enemies because they were dead and he could safely live in Mitzrayim for an extended period of time. After hearing this, Moshe decided to take his family with him, since this would lead the people to have greater faith in him and his mission. After all, why would Moshe take his family from the safety of Midian to the slavery of Mitzrayim unless he truly believed that the redemption was at hand? His personal investment in the freedom of the Jewish people would help gain the nation's trust.

The Or HaChaim writes that Moshe never asked Hashem how he would be able to avoid his enemies if he returned to Mitzrayim. His only questions were about his worthiness for the role but not about his personal safety. The Torah relates this command separately to praise Moshe that he was willing to go even before hearing about the downfall of his enemies.

Rabbi Friedman elaborates on this explanation of the Or HaChaim and suggests that this may be why his enemies died. Moshe was ready to do the right thing without asking any questions of Hashem. When Hashem saw this, He cleared Moshe's path and made his life easier by taking care of his enemies. When a person tries to do the right thing, Hashem helps makes the person's job easier. This is an important principle – **הבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו** – he who attempts to purify himself receives heavenly assistance. Hashem repeated the command to return to Mitzrayim to tell Moshe that because of his initial willingness to listen to Hashem, his path had just become easier.

ויהי בדרך במלון ויפגשוהו ה' ויבקש המיתו

“It was on the way, in the lodging, that Hashem encountered him and sought to kill him” (4:24)

We see an amazing thing from this story. Moshe spoke to Hashem and was on an extremely high level, yet he almost lost everything because he neglected his son's circumcision. Despite his designation as the savior of the Jewish people, Hashem was ready to put him to death for this wrongdoing. Everything that he was destined to accomplish was almost lost in a moment. No person, no matter how important or great, is beyond punishment from Hashem for his misdeeds. As much as a person grows, there is always a chance that he may lose that which is destined for him if he falters, despite the levels that he has attained.

ויראו שטרי בני ישראל אתם ברע לאמר לא תגרעו מלבניכם דבר יום ביומו

“The foremen of the Children of Israel saw them in distress when they said: Do not reduce your bricks, the daily matter each day” (5:19)

Who are the people that the Jewish taskmasters saw “in distress” in this posuk? Rashi says that it refers to the Jewish slaves who were downtrodden by this new decree. The taskmasters witnessed the distress of their fellow Jews who were suffering under this new decree. If this is so, their confrontation with Moshe and Aharon, which is recorded in the next posuk, should precede this distress as they would have met Moshe and Aharon before seeing the slaves and delivering the news to them. Who, then, are the distressed persons referred to in the posuk?

The Malbim (as well as the Ibn Ezra) explains that they saw themselves in distress because they were now going to have to relay this bad news to their fellow Jews and cause them much pain and suffering. They were upset because they would have to say that the slaves would be required to maintain the same level of work without being provided with straw and they did not want this task.

Rabbi Friedman suggests a way to defend Rashi's understanding while resolving the order of the pesukim. They saw the distress of their fellow Jews without actually seeing them because they were able to feel their pain. They visualized the pain that they would suffer from this decree and their plight caused them great distress. This is a vital quality in a leader and may have contributed to the selection of these taskmasters as the seventy elders of the Jewish people later on. The ability to visualize and feel what another person is feeling is the mark of a person who can lead others.

*Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
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