

<p>וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בֶּן אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִקָּצֶר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: (ו:ט)</p>	<p><i>Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel. But they did not hearken to Moshe, out of shortness of spirit and out of hard servitude. (6:9)</i></p>	<p>When Moses delivered God's grand message of salvation and redemption, (see the opening verses of the parasha, Exod. 6:6-9), the people barely listened to him. Who could pay proper attention? We all understand what it means to be overburdened by hard servitude, but what does it mean to have shortness of spirit?</p>	
<p>כָּל מִי שֶׁהוּא מְצָר, רוּחוֹ וְנִשְׁמֹתוֹ קָצְרָה, וְאֵינוֹ יְכוּל לְהֵאָרִיד בְּנִשְׁמֹתוֹ</p>	<p>Rashi: <i>Anyone who suffers, is short of spirit and breath, and cannot breathe deeply (ie. they are hyperventillating).</i></p>	<p>They have dyspnea. They are literally short of breath. Panting from the hard work.</p>	<p>The commentators give us a variety of answers: shortness of spirit = dyspnea, despair, distress, disbelief, depression, and disappointment.</p>
<p>כִּי קִצְרָה רוּחָם בְּאוֹרֶךְ הַגְּלוּת</p>	<p>Ibn Ezra: <i>Their spirit is short because of the length of their exile.</i></p>	<p>They despair that their servitude will never end.</p>	<p>And impatience.</p>
<p>וְקוֹצֵר הַרוּחַ הוּא פֶחֶד שֶׁלֹא יִהְרַגְם פֶּרַעַה בַּחֶרֶב כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמְרוּ שׁוֹטְרֵיהֶם אֶל מֹשֶׁה,</p>	<p>Ramban: <i>Their shortness of spirit was their fear that Pharaoh would kill them by the sword as their officers had told Moses.</i></p>	<p>They have distress. They fear that they will not survive the terror of Pharaoh.</p>	<p>Now consider Moses' predicament. As all public speakers say, You're only as good as your last speech. And here, on his last speech, Moses bombed. This was to be the biggest speech of his career whose purpose was to lay out God's plan and get the people's buy-in.</p>
<p>כִּי לֹא נֹאמְנָה אֶת אֵל רוּחָם, וְלֹא נִתְּנוּ לֵב לְהִתְבּוֹנֵן:</p>	<p>Sforno: <i>[what Moses said] was unbelievable to their spirits, and they could not pay attention enough to think about it.</i></p>	<p>They have disbelief. They do not have patience for Moses or his fantasies.</p>	<p>But by not sensing their physical and spiritual exhaustion, Moses broke the first rule of public speaking: Know thy audience. Did God set him up for failure? Maybe yes, maybe no.</p>
<p>כְּאֲדָם הַמִּשְׁתוֹקֵק שִׁימוֹת בְּצַעַר אֲשֶׁר הוּא בּו וְהוּא מוֹאֵס חַיּוּ.</p>	<p>Bahya: <i>[they became] like someone who falls silent, who dies in the torment, in which he finds himself and he despises his life.</i></p>	<p>They have depression. They are dispirited, dyspeptic and despondent.</p>	
<p>עֵתָה, אֵעֶפֶי שֶׁהָאֵמִינוּ מִתְחִלָּה, כְּדַכְּתִיב: וַיֵּאֱמֵן הָעָם. שֶׁהָיוּ סְבוֹרִים לְנוֹחַ מֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה וְהִנֵּה עֵתָה הַכְּבִיד עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹתֵר.</p>	<p>Rashbam: <i>[They are disappointed] now, even though they believed [Moses] at first, when it says, "The people believed"(4:31) when were convinced that they would be relieved of their hard work, but now, it was heavier.</i></p>	<p>They have disappointment. When Moses first appeared before the people, he raised their expectations. But since then, nothing has happened.</p>	

So naturally, when God instructs him to speak to Pharaoh in the verse below, Moses demurs. His reasoning is sound:

<p>וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: בֹּא דַבֵּר אֶל-פַּרְעֹה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיִם וַיִּשְׁלַח אֶת-בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לֵאמֹר הֲיֵן בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פַרְעֹה וְאֲנִי עֶרְל שְׂפָתַיִם: ו:י-יב</p>	<p><i>God spoke to Moshe, saying: Go in, speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he may send free the Children of Israel from his land. Moshe spoke before God, saying: Here, [if] the Children of Israel do not hearken to me, how will Pharaoh hearken to me? And I am of foreskinned lips! 6:10-12</i></p>	<p><i>if the exhausted, powerless, desperate people won't listen to me, why would the mighty, and powerful Pharaoh? And on top of that, I am of foreskinned lips,</i> which means that he stammered or had some kind of physical impediment. Or maybe he is just conveying his lack of experience and confidence similar to what he said last week, I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue. Consider the paradox in this opening scene: the perfect</p>
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word of God is being conveyed through an imperfect human instrument. It would be like playing Bach on a kinderklavier (a toy piano). Who would take that seriously? Who would listen? The purpose of this back and forth between God and Moses, is to locate of all the characters at the outset of this story. Pharaoh is at the height of his power. Moses is at his lowest in relation to Pharaoh or the Israelites. He still has a lot to prove. God knows the people, but the people do not know God. By the end of the story, Moses will be at the height of his power; Pharaoh and Egypt will be destroyed. God will have delivered his people into freedom, and Pharaoh will have delivered his people into destitution. The people will know and trust God, as well as Moses. We are only getting started. It's going to take a few plagues to make it happen.

ויפן פרעה ויבא אל-ביתו ולא-שט לבו גם-לזאת: ז:כג
So Pharaoh faced about and came into his house; neither did he pay any mind to this either. (7:23)

Aaron has struck the Nile with his rod, and the Nile turned to blood. But interestingly, the Egyptian magicians replicate the plague. Being unmoved by all of this, Pharaoh **goes into his house**. Why does the Torah bother with this little detail? It is drawing our attention to the way Pharaoh, and by extension all despots, relate to crisis. They are interested

first and foremost in themselves, and not at all in the welfare of their people. Instead of running toward their people, they run



Winston Churchill inspects bomb damage in 1941

away from them. Contrast this with Churchill who habitually toured the sites of bombed out buildings during the London Blitz. Or Lincoln who often visited his officers during the Civil War. When the war in Ukraine started Zelensky went into the streets of Kyiv and made a point of posting a video declaring: *We*



are here, the leadership is here. The leader of the party is here, the head of the

presidential administration is here...the president is here. We are all here, our soldiers are here, the citizens of the country are here, we are all here protecting



All of us are here protecting our independence of our country

our independence, our country, and we are going to continue to do so. Putin, on the other hand, has numerous retreats including this \$1.2 billion, ~200K sq. ft. one on the Black Sea. Nothing signals leadership more than being with the people. And



nothing signals cowardice and indifference more than retreating to one's palace. Instead of taking the suffering of his people seriously, Pharaoh heads to his palace.

Instead of convening an emergency council to manage the looming crisis, Pharaoh seeks solace in solitude.

<p>ויקרא פרעה למשה ולאהרן ויאמר העתירו אליה ויסר הצפרדעים ממני ומעמי ואשלחה את-העם ויבקחו לה: ויאמר משה לפרעה התפאר עלי למתיו אעתייר לה ולעבדיך ולעמך להכרית הצפרדעים ממך ומבתיך רק ביאר תשארגנה: ויאמר למחר ויאמר כדברך למען תדע כי-אין פה אלהינו: ח:ד-ו</p>	<p>Pharaoh had Moshe and Aharon called and said: Plead with God, that he may remove the frogs from me and from my people, and I will send the people free, that they may sacrifice to God! Moshe said to Pharaoh: Be praised over me: For when shall I plead for you, for your servants, for your people, to cut off the frogs from you and from your houses, [so that] only in the Nile will they remain? He said: For the morrow. He said: According to your words, [then]! In order that you may know that there is none like God, our God. 8:4-6</p>
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The Plague of Frogs. Seven days have passed since the plague of blood. God tells Moses to threaten Pharaoh that if he doesn't allow the Israelites to leave, frogs will swarm Egypt. The frogs come. They are everywhere. Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and makes a deal: *you get God to remove the frogs and I will free the people*. Then comes the interesting part. Moses asks Pharaoh, **When do you want the frogs gone?** And Pharaoh answers, **Tomorrow.** Tomorrow?! Why wait?! Why not say, **Get rid of them now!** Consistent with the theme above, Pharaoh couldn't care less about prolonging the suffering of his people. What he cares about most is appearing in control. By dictating the terms to Moses he can take credit for stopping the plague on **his** terms. Moses

(mistakenly) agrees. He (mistakenly) trusts Pharaoh to keep his word and it appears as if he is expecting to depart from Egypt once the frogs are gone. Moses intercedes. The frogs die. They pile up in heaps. The land stinks. But then the Torah tells us this detail:

<p>ויראה פרעה כי היתה הרוחה והקבל את-לבו ולא שמע אליהם כאשר דבר ה': ת:יא</p>	<p>But Pharaoh saw that there was relief and he hardened his heart, and did not heed them, just as God has spoken. 8:11</p>
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What did Pharaoh **see**? He saw chaos. He saw that the Israelites were not organized. He saw that he still had an advantage over them. He saw that he can play a double game with Moses, that he could tell Moses one thing, and then do another. But what Pharaoh didn't see, was God's larger plan. What **God had spoken** back at the beginning. According to what God said to Moses originally, Pharaoh was always going to be changing his mind and hardening his heart.

He was always going to relent and allow the Israelites to leave one minute, and then harden his heart the next. There would be a pattern of back and forth, with intensity increasing. In this way Moses' power would increase; he would gain credibility with the people; the people would be more able to anticipate departure and prepare for it properly. The ultimate purpose of all of this was to demonstrate that God was is in control, not Pharaoh. And no one else. **Shabbat Shalom! שבת שלום!**