



## The Challenge of Patience • Parshat Vaeira

After initially believing Moses' message of redemption in *Parshat Shemot* (Exodus 4:31), the children of Israel lost hope due to their oppressive enslavement and were no longer able to listen to Moses' promise of freedom at the beginning of *Parshat Vaeira*. They were physically exhausted and emotionally drained, unreceptive to Moses out of "a shortness of spirit (*kotzer ruach*) and because of brutal labor" (Exodus 6:9). The events in between these two verses clue us into the mental shift. Instead of listening to Moses' request to let his people free, Pharaoh intensified the workload. While they were originally excited about the prospect of redemption, Rabbi Moshe Alshich suggests that they expected to be liberated immediately. They had no patience for a long, drawn-out process to freedom.

"Shortness of spirit," according to both Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and his 19th century contemporary, Malbim, intimates impatience. The children of Israel were so burdened with work, they had no patience to listen to Moses, no mental energy reserved for forbearance. People who are patient can tolerate distress, they can regulate their emotions, and restrain pain to entertain the possibility of good news or a comforting word. Without patience, the children of Israel were only able to focus on the pain and were impervious to the hope of redemption.

Patience, argues psychologist Sarah Schnitker,

is a neglected virtue in modern philosophy and psychology. In trying to advocate for more research in this area, she points to the central role patience plays in religious traditions. Many, however, consider it an outdated value in the fast-paced modern world, where expedience is prized. Yet, preliminary research by Schnitker and colleagues indicates that patience is positively correlated with well-being and several other important psychological benefits, including spirituality. People who value patience tend to pray, read scripture, and attend religious services more than those who don't hold patience in high esteem.

This connection between spirituality and patience may inform Israel's response. Midrash Tanhuma (6:4) suggests that before Pharaoh intensified the decree, the children of Israel "had scrolls which they delighted to read from Sabbath to Sabbath, in which it is stated that the Holy One, blessed be He, would redeem them." Pharaoh noticed the hope these cherished scrolls were providing his enemies. He therefore overwhelmed them with responsibilities, forcing them to work on the Sabbath, leaving them no time to nourish the hopeful and patient perspective previously afforded to them from these scrolls.

While not relating to this Midrash, 18th century Moroccan Kabbalist, Rabbi Chaim ibn Attar, suggests that their impatience was exacerbated by the fact that they had not yet received the

Torah. The Torah would have served as a coping mechanism, broadening their minds and spirits, providing them with the requisite patience and hope to endure through exile.

Sefat Emet contemporizes the message. We also find ourselves amidst exile, a fact which unfortunately resonates all too much as we approach the 100th day of the war in Gaza.

*Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman is an assistant professor at the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, associate faculty at the Sacks-Herenstein Center, and the author of *Psyched for Torah: Cultivating Character and Well-Being through the Weekly Parsha*.*

However, we, unlike the children of Israel in Egypt, are provided with the tools for forbearance. We are blessed with the Torah, and the restorative, revitalizing, and rejuvenating Sabbath. It is up to us to avail ourselves of these spiritual gifts, promoting patience even amidst darkness, nurturing hope and fostering faith in God's ultimate redemption.

**Character Challenge:** Think about a time you were impatient. What spiritual strategies can you invoke to help cultivate hope, faith, and patience?

**Quote from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l:** "Hope is the ability to combine aspiration with patience; to be undeterred by setbacks and delays; to have a sense of the time it takes to effect change in the human heart; never to forget the destination even in the midst of exile and disaster" (*The Chief Rabbi's Haggadah*, p. 81).