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With  
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ב"ה

Parshas Va'eira

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## The Ancient Egyptian Stockholm Syndrome

The parshah starts off with the Jews being in one of the lowest places the Jews have ever been. Worked to the core. Beaten to a pulp. Terrorized and abused. The Jews have seen some pretty dark times in their life, but this might have been the darkest. So, one would think that when Moshe approached them and declared that there is an all-powerful God Who promised their grandparents that He would make them great, give them their own land and make them into a holy chosen people, there would be an outpouring of relief. One would expect a tremendous celebration. One would think that the Jews would eagerly tune in to listen to every word as to how to get out of the brutal Egyptian workload.

But what in fact happens is puzzling. In perek 6, pasuk 9 it says that Moshe went over to them and relayed this message, but they refused to listen. The pasuk says it was because of the "*kotzer ruach umei'avoda kashah*," which literally translates to mean from a shortness of breath and difficult work.

Now, why would that be the reason they did not listen? Shouldn't it be the exact opposite? Shouldn't the overwhelmingly difficult work regimen and brutal conditions propel them to listen to any glimmer of hope they could find? Weren't they desperately looking for a savior to release them from their misery? This was it! Why did Moshe's words fall on deaf ears?

Even stranger, in perek 2, pasuk 23, it says that when Pharaoh died, the Jews cried out in pain. Why did Pharaoh's death prompt tears? Shouldn't they have celebrated? Perhaps a new king would replace the old Pharaoh and bring peace – why does Pharaoh's death lead to cries and pain from the Jews? They should have been thrilled!

### The Hustle of Life

The Seforno (Ovadia Ben Ya'akov Seforno, Italian Rabbi 1470 - 1550) says something that gives us great clarity. He writes that the reason the Jews didn't listen to Moshe was not out of disbelief. The reason the Jews did not listen to Moshe was because their life did not offer them even a second to think and consider that what Moshe was saying may be true. They had no mental space to consider that their lives were horrible and Moshe could be the ticket to freedom. They suffered from a degree of Stockholm Syndrome; after working in brutal conditions for so long they conditioned themselves to think that it was normal. They told themselves that this is life. Life can't get any better. We have to run to work. We do not have time to listen to a prophet's claim that there is something more to life than laying bricks. We do not have time to listen to his speech about how there is a loving God Who wants to have an exclusive relationship with us. We don't have time to listen, for we simply have too much work to do.

The Ha'emek Davar (Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, Lithuanian Rabbi, 1816 - 1893) adds that when Pharaoh died, there was a national day of mourning throughout Egypt. For once, the Jews were given a day off. The Jews finally had a day to think. To contemplate. To ponder. The realization hit them like a ton of bricks. For

the first time in a long time, they realized that perhaps life could get better. Perhaps there was a more meaningful life. Perhaps this endless work wasn't something to get used to. This epiphany led them to tears. It opened up their eyes to the life they had been living and the life they had been missing out on. Hence, they could do nothing but cry.

Sometimes we, too, get so caught up in the game of life that we forget that life could be even better. We let life get in the way of life. We let the hustle and bustle of the everyday prevent us from enjoying the meaningful sides to life.

Someone once asked the Chofetz Chaim's son-in-law what his father-in-law's most impressive character trait was. One would have thought he would respond that it was his refraining from *lashon hara* or his zealotry in *halacha*. Nope. He said it was his *yishuv hada'as*, his ability to remain mentally calm despite a hectic life around him.

The great rebbe, the Avodas Yisrael (Rav Yisrael Hopstein, Rebbe of Kozhnitz 1737 - 1814), once said that the term the Torah uses to describe the ultimate impure animal is the word *sheretz*. Creepy crawling insects. Where does the word *sheretz* come from? He said it comes from the word *she'ratz*. It is always running. It never stops for a second. Always on the run, coming and going. He said that this is the source of all bad. The inability to stop and to ponder and to take stock and meditate is what can prevent tremendous spiritual growth amongst people.

### **Why Does Man Age?**

Ever wonder why Hashem made man age? Why did Hashem make humans slowly deteriorate over time? As the years move along, people begin to lose energy. Walk slower. Move slower. Why doesn't Hashem give us the energy of a seven-year-old until the day we die? Perhaps the answer is because we would never stop to think. We would never take time to sit with our children or grandchildren. We would never take stock of life and its meaning. We would never have time to enjoy the beautiful small things in life. We would be forever running from here to there to there to here.

This parshah teaches us the great lesson to take life slow. To live life with depth and meaning. To constantly contemplate if one is living too superciliously. To occasionally take a step back in order to take two real steps forward.

A Slonimer chassid once asked Reb Moshe of Kobrin for a beracha. He said, "I just want a small beracha. I am not asking for wealth. I am not asking for kids. All I want is *yishuv hada'as* – mental calmness." Reb Moshe responded with a laugh. "That's what you call a small beracha! That is the biggest beracha of them all."