



RABBI MOSHE HAUER ZT"L

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Enhancing Jewish Life

Humble Determination

The world is spinning at high speed. As we wonder how to react to it all, the enigmatic opening of our parsha presents an excellent frame to help us orient ourselves to where we stand.

When Pharaoh sent the people out, G-d did not lead them via the land of the Philistines which was nearby, for G-d said, "The people may have a change of heart when they see war and return to Egypt." (Shemot 13:17)

While some understood that G-d was protecting the Jewish people from facing a new conflict with the Philistines, the Midrash, as conveyed by Targum Yonatan ben Uziel, explains the concern of a change of heart due to a confrontation that had occurred 30 years previous. At that time, precisely 400 years after G-d had told Avraham that his descendants would endure exile for 400 years, a contingent of 200,000 well-armed members of the tribe of Efrayim left Egypt,

mistakenly confident that the time of redemption had come. Tragically, they were slaughtered by the Philistines. The remains of that war's fallen littered the desert near the land of the Philistines and G-d worried that if the Jewish people would now encounter those remains upon leaving Egypt, they would become discouraged and turn back in fear and overwhelming doubt about their own likelihood of future success.

Note the two experiences: We have the *Bnei Efrayim*, bullish and confident that their time had come when in fact it had not; and we have the nation who later, when their time had truly come, were vulnerable to paralyzing doubts based on previous failures. Danger apparently lurks in both overconfidence and overcaution. And while their biblical dilemmas involved meeting a prophesized divine timeframe of 400 years, in our time we do not have the benefit of such a prophecy. The decisions we make today as a nation and the steps that we choose to take surely require *siyata d'shmaya*, divine guidance and support, but that guidance is not explicit but hidden within our logical consideration of the issues. As that is the case, how are we to get it right? What can we learn from these two experiences that will help us as a nation know when to push forward aggressively and when to stand back?



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It appears that the combined lesson of the two is that we must step forward with humble determination, acknowledging the need for caution in a world where the promise of redemption has continued to remain elusive, yet determined to move forward without being intimidated by past failures. Whether combating antisemitism or moving Israel towards a safer future, we cannot afford to hesitate to assert and pursue what we need, traveling with both prayer and resolve even towards the oncoming sea, but we must do so with the lessons that history has imbued in us, knowing that just as for the *Bnei Efrayim*, unbridled confidence is not in and of itself our ticket to redemption. ■

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