



Bo: Courageous Independence

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

The wheels of redemption were turning. God tells Moshe to prepare the Jewish people for imminent freedom.

Please, speak into the ears of the people, and let them ask, each man from his friend and each woman from her friend, silver vessels and golden vessels." (Exodus 11:2)

Why did they have to ask? Why not orchestrate that the Egyptians would give their former slaves the gold and silver? There was so much miraculous activity; why not save the Jews the hassle of going door to door asking for riches?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson 1902-1994) explains that Hashem didn't want the people showered with gifts; He wanted them to receive their fair share. The money and possessions they received from the Egyptians was to represent back wages, compensation earned during the 210 years of servitude. Hashem was trying to instill within us two profound lessons.

Lesson #1 – Don't wait for handouts. The most important thing in life is to be self-sufficient. Those who depend on the generosity of others are beholden to others. But those who find the ability to be independent can chart their own course. We must recognize that none of us are fully independent. Our ancestors in the desert depended on Hashem for their daily bread and every aspect of survival. Truth be told, we must depend on Hashem for every aspect of our lives, but we must create a level of independence and self-sufficiency when it comes to the other. It is always beautiful to receive a gift, but don't rely on it. And it isn't only material gifts. It is true with emotional "gifts" as well. My happiness cannot be dependent on someone else. My sense of purpose and fulfillment cannot be tethered to the other. Otherwise, I am waiting to receive these emotional gifts to from someone else, which may or may not come. Hashem tells us, do not wait for the Egyptians to give you gifts; go and get that which you have earned.

Lesson #2 – If you don't ask you don't get. Too often, we expect people to know what we want or need without ever communicating the wish or desire to the other. It can be uncomfortable to ask or to advocate for your own interests. But if you don't do it – no one else will. We become so frustrated when people don't come through for us in ways that we feel they should have. Sometimes, it is just because we never really asked. I just relied on the other to intuit or somehow discern what my need may be. Most people have a lot going on at all times and don't necessarily know what you need or when and why you need it. I need to summon up the courage to articulate and advocate for myself. Hashem ordered our ancestors to knock on the doors of their former oppressors and ask for that which was owed to them. It was probably uncomfortable and awkward but was a necessary step in their personal and national development.

Just like a father or mother who wants the very best for their child, the Ribbono Shel Olam wants our success, happiness, and fulfillment. The instructions He gives us are for our benefit and allow us to become the best version of ourselves.