

Overcoming Resistance

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

The protracted negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh that were aimed at forcing him to release the Jews, raises a lot of questions. Why couldn't God have achieved His ends in one fell swoop, in one go? Why did He give Moses certain signs and wonders to perform that Pharaoh's magicians could copy? Why did Pharaoh keep on changing his mind each time he seemed like capitulating? And there is another set of questions that relate to the problem of the Jewish slaves not being very resilient and often wanting to give up.

Some argue that the process was meant to weaken and chip away at Pharaoh's resolve. Some say it was to persuade the people of the land that they should get rid of the slaves. And there are some who say it was a process that was necessary to convince the demoralized slaves themselves that they could actually overcome the powers they had been subjected to.

I prefer the mystical idea that our relationship with God is one of "Ratsui Veshuv" coming close and then stepping back. Sometimes we feel close and then new feel alienated, sometimes joy, sometimes pain as both sides come close but then withdraw. All relationships go through these processes. It is only by slow steps and progress, by repeating and reassuring, one step forward, another back and then forward again that we get closer to the ones we love on earth and God beyond. Things that are worthwhile require a lot of effort and when things go wrong we really should keep on trying rather than giving up.