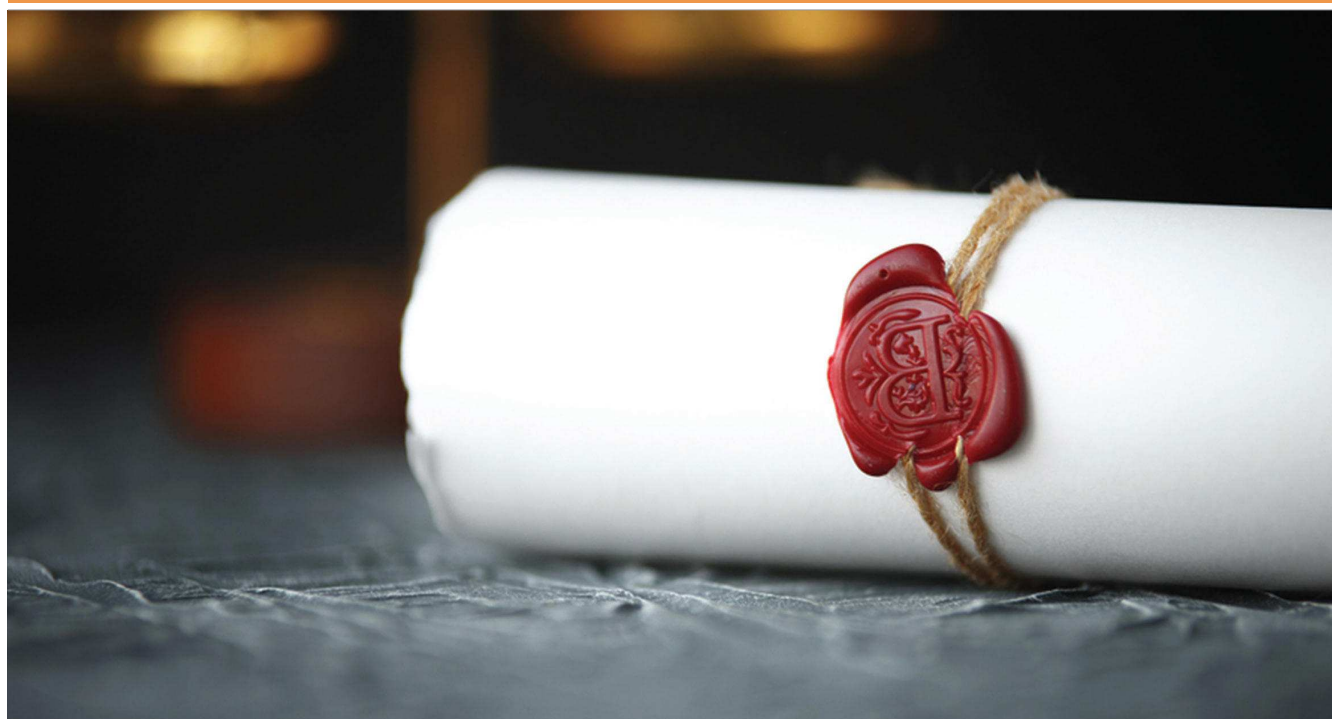




For crying out loud

Everything is gonna **BE OKAY!** Don't be so certain

BY ROBERT SUSSMAN



ONE OF THE GREATEST MISTAKES THAT A PERSON can make is having too much confidence that, despite how bad or threatening things may look at the moment, everything will be okay in the end – that his prayers will surely be answered and everything will work out just fine.

Our Sages teach¹ that it was pronounced upon Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) ten times that he would not enter the land of Israel, and, yet, this harsh decree was not actually finalised and sealed until the Great Beis Din Above informed Moshe, “It is decreed that you shall not cross over [the Jordan into the land of Israel].” It was Moshe’s surprising reaction to this news which sealed his fate

once and for all regarding his entry into the land of Israel. Moshe took this pronouncement against him lightly, relying on the following reasoning: “The nation of Israel committed grave sins several times. Whenever I asked that Hashem have mercy upon them, immediately my prayers were answered. So regarding myself, who has not sinned from the time that I was a young man, should it not be the case that, when I daven on my own behalf, that my prayers, likewise, should be immediately answered – even more so than those prayers that I davened on behalf of the nation of Israel?”

When Hashem saw that Moshe had taken this harsh decree so lightly and

that Moshe was not davening, Hashem immediately swore on His great name that the decree would be fulfilled and that Moshe would not enter the land of Israel. Our Sages teach that it was at this point, seeing that the decree had been sealed, that Moshe resolved to fast, donned sackcloth and ashes, and began storming the heavens with his prayers, davening 515 times (hinted to by the word *va’eschanan* (pleaded), which has a *gematria* of this number). But no matter how powerful Moshe’s prayers were, cutting through everything that stood in front of them like a sword, it was too late; Hashem ordered all the gates of heaven locked in order to prevent

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“A PERSON MUST NEVER RELY ON HIS OWN REASONING AND CLAIMS – NO MATTER HOW STRONG THAT REASONING OR THOSE CLAIMS MIGHT BE OR EVEN HOW GOOD HIS LOGIC MIGHT BE – THAT, DESPITE APPEARANCES TO THE CONTRARY, EVERYTHING WILL TURN OUT FINE.”

Moshe's incredibly powerful prayers from getting through, lest he succeed in annulling the decree that had been sealed against him.

According to this, we see that were it not for his initial reaction, his overconfidence, Moshe would have been able to have the decree that he not be allowed to enter the land of Israel nullified through his davening. Only because he took the matter lightly and was certain that he would, in the end, be able to have the harsh decree torn up, thereby gaining entry to the land of Israel, did it become the case that his davening could no longer help him anymore.

Our Sages learn from this an important and valuable lesson: a person must never rely on his own reasoning and claims – no matter how strong that reasoning or those claims might be or even how good his logic might be – that, despite appearances to the contrary, everything will turn out fine, or, alternatively, on the belief that Hashem will relent in the end, sparing him from a terrible fate. It's forbidden to think like this. Instead, a person must daven with all of his might and beseech Hashem to help him, recognising that there is nowhere else to turn and no one else who can help him.

This can also help us understand why our Sages say about Noach (Noah) that he did not enter the ark until the flood waters forced him to because he was “lacking in faith” – which is a rather shocking statement in light of the fact that Noach spent 120 years of his life building the ark which Hashem had commanded him to build! But, now we can understand the reason behind Noach's actions, as well as our Sages criticism of him. Despite what Hashem had explicitly told him, Noach

thought that, in the end, Hashem would certainly relent from destroying the world and that things would work out so that the flood would not need to take place. This was an error in Noach's outlook and approach, as he failed to daven for his generation that they should be saved from Hashem's decree, resulting in him being considered responsible for the flood and it being called after his name, “the waters of Noach”.

We can also find examples of just the opposite approach as well; where people did as they were supposed to, taking the dangers facing them very seriously and doing everything in their power to save themselves and the Jewish people.

Even though Yaakov Avinu trusted in Hashem, he didn't rely on Him when he faced off against his wicked twin brother Eisav at their fateful meeting. Despite all of Hashem's promises to him and to his forefathers regarding the future of their descendants, Yaakov genuinely feared that perhaps his merits had been diminished by all of the kindnesses that Hashem had done for him or that he had been tainted by sin, making it possible for Eisav to defeat him. So, rather than assume that everything would be okay in the end, Yaakov prepared in three ways: he sent gifts to Eisav in the hopes of appeasing his brother and assuaging his anger; he davened to Hashem to save

him; and he prepared to do battle.

We see this also by Mordechai HaYehudi regarding the events of Purim. After the wicked Haman's plan to destroy the Jews was ratified by Achashveirosh and the evil decree that had been passed, formally legalising the extermination of the Jews, became known to Mordechai, Mordechai took the matter very seriously, putting forth tremendous effort davening. Surely the Jewish people trusted that they would not be destroyed and that, in the end, Haman's evil decree would have to be nullified in some way so that they would be saved from it? In fact, Hashem has repeatedly assured us, time and time again, through his many Prophets that the Jewish people cannot be destroyed, that we will always exist.² So why did Mordechai feel the need to occupy himself with donning sack cloth and ashes, crying out in prayer, and fasting, as if, in truth, there hovered over the Jewish people a real danger to their existence from this terrible decree to exterminate them?

The answer here is, again, as we have explained: whenever there is trouble, it's not the time to rely on different conjectures and rationalisations that it's not possible that such a thing could come to fruition and that, in the end, everything is certain to work out because we were promised that it would. Instead, we must take such things very seriously and always daven vigorously and determinedly to Hashem. Only by crying out to Hashem sincerely and wholeheartedly will we merit to have such harsh decrees nullified. **II**

*Based primarily on Tiferes Shimshon
Al HaTorah Devarim (Parshas Vayeilech)*

¹Devarim Rabbah 11:10

²See Rambam – Iggeres Teiman

“WERE IT NOT FOR HIS INITIAL REACTION, HIS OVERCONFIDENCE, MOSHE WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HAVE THE DECREE THAT HE NOT BE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE LAND OF ISRAEL NULLIFIED THROUGH HIS DAVENING.”