

## Why Wait

*Rabbi Yosef Koval / Parsha Shlach / June 24, 2022*

The other day I had the great privilege to attend the graduation of my 4-year-old grandson, Tzvi, who was finishing pre-school and making the transition to kindergarten. Besides for the typical satisfaction one would expect to feel from witnessing a milestone experienced by their grandchild (let alone a first grandchild), there was an added feeling of joy considering that Tzvi's teacher this past year was my older sister. In fact, she taught all my 8 children when they were in pre-school, including Tzvi's mother – my oldest child Hadassa.

So, as I watched the class of adorable 4-year-olds singing the same songs I watched my own children sing at their graduations while also being led by my dear sister, I was filled with a mixture of nostalgia and happiness.

Some of the kids are brimming with confidence and belt out the songs in a voice that does not need a microphone to project it throughout the auditorium (and bursts your eardrums when they do sing it into the mic at the top of their lungs! – looking at you Tzvi!) while others are shy and can barely whisper the song out. Some are focused on their miniature choreography and intent on making all the correct motions while others dance like they are on a 7-second delay. Some stare at the teacher so as not to miss their next steps while others are busy chatting with the kid next to them. Whatever way, all the adults in the audience typically have giant smiles plastered on their faces as they watch with complete bemusement and enjoy kids being kids.

No one really minds that some of the children can carry a tune as well as my pet guinea pig or that a few of the kids look like they are trying to eat the microphone instead of singing into it. No one is coming to these productions expecting to see a Broadway musical (and if they are they have serious issues). We come to see how the children have learned and grown throughout the year and to, as the Yiddish expression goes, “shep nachas” (enjoy some intense feelings of pride).

Tzvi was eagerly awaiting the highly anticipated day of his graduation and would practice his part time and time again at home and in school as the big day got closer. The night before the performance Hadassa told me that he could barely sleep because he was so anxious about how he would do the next day. The morning of the big day arrived, and Tzvi was up bright and early and could not eat as he battled the butterflies and bundle of nerves.

When we walked into the auditorium together with the other parents and grandparents, Tzvi offered me a nervous and weak smile. Sure enough, the graduation was chock full of

humorous and adorable performances by the 20 children and Tzvi nailed his part (cue up the “shep nachas” card here).

After his part, but before the end of the total production, there was a visible feeling of relief noticeable in Tzvi. He looked completely exhausted and drained and sort of slouched in his little chair as he was able to put his nerves behind him and enjoy his accomplishment.

What I found amusing was the nervousness this group of youngsters had over such a small thing. Obviously, while we adults considered the pre-k graduation to be small and no big deal, for a kid, it is as big of a deal as a Broadway performance. “If only I could convince Tzvi that no one cares if he messes up and not to be nervous,” I thought to myself as I watched him deal with his pre-performance anxiety. But I knew that there was no way to explain that to a young child, so I was forced to watch him deal with his nerves and then to relax when it was all said and done. After the performance we took pictures and I thanked his amazing teacher (go Sis!) and we went about our day.

Reflecting back on the events of the morning, I had some interesting observations to myself. I am by nature quite a relaxed person and don’t get particularly anxious very often. Having said that, I still deal with a fair amount of nerves even when I do things that I have done often and am good at. For example, I have been a ba’al koreh (one who reads the Torah for the congregation) in the synagogue for over 20 years. Despite my experience and proficiency in doing it, I still deal with butterflies when I get up to read the Torah publicly. Despite the fact that I have heard others read from the Torah and make mistakes and I never gave them a second thought, somehow I have this paranoia that if I make a mistake it will be calamitous. I am the same way when it comes to doing things at work. Will I do an assignment correctly? What will happen if I don’t?

The above are examples of benign activities. When it comes to larger scale things, most people suffer from some level of nerves and fears. This is certainly the case when it comes to big-ticket items like dealing with a loss of a job, an illness to themselves or a family member or loved one, finding a spouse or any other major issue in life.

What if someone watched us struggle with our fears and nerves with the same lenses we look at Tzvi and his co-graduates? “What are you nervous about? Don’t you realize it’s silly to worry about this?” we might hear someone tell us. Of course, we would indignantly protest that our situation is nothing at all like a 4 year old’s preschool production. “This is real life! This is serious!” And indeed it is.

But think for a moment. When challenges confront us in this world where do they emanate

from? The Torah teaches us that everything that happens to us, from the tiniest issue to the largest ones, are sent to us directly from G-d. Priority mail. And He sends it to us for a purpose that somehow is for our benefit. To be sure, we might not always realize how it is for our good, but we can be assured that if it came our way it is to our benefit. Not only that, but any challenge sent our way also comes along with a capability to rise above it and to succeed. There is a measure of Divine assistance provided to anyone with a challenge who wants to access it. It takes a tremendous amount of study in the subject of bitachon (trust in G-d) and years of incorporation into our psyche, but the more we can strengthen our level of bitachon and incorporate its reality into our minds the easier it is to handle all of life's struggles and get through them with lesser amounts of anxiety. So, in a sense, G-d watches us fret and worry about all sorts of things with a feeling of bemusement, wondering why indeed we are so nervous.

In this week's Torah portion we read about the spies who went to check out the land of Israel prior to the nation's entry into the land. They saw giant and powerful inhabitants and brought back tidings of doom and gloom to the point where despair and despondency set into the minds of the Jewish people who cried and protested against entering the land. This highly unfortunate event set in motion a 40-year delay in our entering Israel and even worse, reshaped history to the point where we have had to endure 2000 years of persecution, tragedy, exile and death – all because of that lack of trust in G-d.

I am not suggesting that we can reach a level where things don't bother us and we can remain completely calm no matter what we face. What I do think is attainable, however, is to work on internalizing the lesson taken from the mistake of the spies and put more of our trust in G-d. No matter the challenge we are facing, in the eyes of an All-Powerful Creator of the universe they are as significant as the preschool production is to the eyes of an adult.

I once saw a quote from a Chassidic Rebbe. "I never worry," he said. "There are two types of problems in this world, those that I can control and those that I can't. For the ones I can control, I go about doing what I can to control them so why worry? And for those I can't, it is all in the hands of Heaven and worrying about them won't help anyways, so why worry?"

If we could incorporate even some of that mindset into ourselves, our lives would be so much more enjoyable and relaxed – who would not want that?

And for any Hollywood agents out there looking for a master performer, give me a call. I have just the kid for you. Just make sure to hold the mic away from his mouth!