

Facing adversity

The Jews are caught between the sea in front and the pursuing Egyptians in back. What to do? The Torah says:

Exodus 14:13-14. Thus Moses said to the people: "Don't be afraid; stand by and see the salvation of God, which He will show you today. You have seen the Egyptians today, but you will not see them again, ever. God will fight for you, and you will be silent."

Exodus 14:15. And God said to Moses: "Why do you cry out to Me? Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward".

Midrash (Mechilta): The Jews split into four factions:

- One faction said: "Let us cast ourselves into the sea."
- Another said, "Let us return to Egypt."
- A third said, "Let us wage war against the Egyptians."
- A fourth said, "Let us cry out to God."

When Moses spoke, he addressed the four in succession:

- To those who said, "Let us cast ourselves into the sea," Moses said: "Don't be afraid; stand by and see the salvation of God."
- To those who said, "Let us return to Egypt," he said: "You have seen the Egyptians today, but you will not see them again, ever."
- To those who said, "Let us wage war against them," he said: "God will fight for you."
- And to those who said, "Let us cry out to God," he said: "And you will be silent."

These are the four reactions most people adopt when facing trouble:

- The ostrich philosophy -- Retreat into isolationism; or commit suicide ("Let us cast ourselves into the sea")
- Follow the flow -- if you can't lick'em, join'em ("Let us return to Egypt")
- Fight vigorously ("Let us wage war against them")
- Pray ("Let us cry out to God")

DISCUSSION: What do you think is the proper attitude?

Rabbi Schneerson (The Lubavitcher Rebbe) says that God rejected all four approaches when He said simply: "Let them go forward" .

'While each approach has its time and place, none of them is a complete vision to guide our lives and define our relationship with the world. We must simply go forward, take another step towards our goals. Not escape reality, not submit to it, not wage war on it, not pray for it to change, but "go forward". Do another mitzvah, ignite another soul, take one more step towards your goal.'