

Torah Comments Beshalach 5772 –  
Procrastination and other Bad Habits

Our Torah reading gives us a model for fulfilling our New Year's resolutions, which we hopefully still remember, a month after January 1 and many months after Rosh Hashanah.

Take a common example – a resolution to break our bad habit of procrastination. We probably should wait until next week for this one.

Imagine that we understand the forces which push us to procrastinate. If we haven't figured those out, we probably can't change this habit, and should consider a therapist to sort out our problems. Most of us know why we procrastinate. We simply feel stuck with the habit.

Imagine that those forces are symbolized by the Egyptian army, a powerful array of soldiers, chariots, and horsemen. To free ourselves from the habit of procrastination, we need to walk away from that army and to cross our own Sea to freedom. Our New Year's resolution was the first step in

leaving Egypt. We probably started to break our habit, just as our people started to walk towards the Sea.

But then, they got scarred, as we often do. Those forces feel like they are chasing us, dragging us back to our bad habit. What can we do?

We can cry out to God, as our people did. We can even cry to a helpful person, as they did to Moses. Just before the part we read tonight, Moses cried out to God. God's answer to Moses was the one we need. God said – stop crying out to me. Start acting. Start doing what you know you should do.

If Moses started doing what he should, God will help him. For those of us who procrastinate, this means that if we start trying what we are postponing, God will help us. We get an angel to lead us, which symbolically means we get the internal strength to tackle what we are postponing. We also get a cloud, which symbolically means we have God's support, a voice inside which cheers us on, as we stop procrastinating. If we actually start doing what we should, then the angel and the cloud will move behind us, to protect

us from the Egyptian army, from those forces which want to drag us back into procrastination.

Those forces are stubborn, but we can overcome them. If we take our first steps forward, into the Sea, then all of those Godly forces inside of us and inside of those who care for us will push us forward, in effect, dividing the waters. Instead of a barrier, we will find a new path to freedom, to a life without procrastination.

We can apply this approach to any bad habit. As Rabbi Hillel taught, “if not now, when?”