

## Keeping the “Big Picture” in Mind<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

**Value: Keeping the “big picture” in mind.** Life is full of details. Precise attention to life’s details is necessary for accomplishing anything. Yet, attention to details and the routine developed to accomplish these details might lead to losing sight of the “big picture”—your goals and the purpose of your life’s work. Periodically evaluating whether your routine and details are leading to your goals is a practice that can help ensure the achievement of your goals.

**Background:** Moshe’s first attempt at saving Bne Yisrael from their oppressive slavery ended in a result worse than failure—Bne Yisrael’s situation became worse. After a heated confrontation with the furious people of Israel, Moshe complained to God, asking why He had harmed the people by sending him. God answered that Moshe will see what He will do to Pharaoh. Our parasha begins with a continuation of this speech. God explained that there would be a new revelation of His nature. God then gave Moshe a new message to convey to Israel.

### **Text: Shemot 6:2-9 (NJPS)**

God spoke to Moses and said to him. “I am Hashem. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name Hashem. I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am Hashem. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And you shall know that I, Hashem, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession. I am Hashem.

But when Moshe told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moshe, from shortness of breath and hard labor.

**Analysis:** Hashem’s prophecy to Israel contains the most concise statement of Israel’s goals for the next stage of its existence. Yet, Israel ignored Hashem’s words. The people were too busy with their hard work. Even though Moshe’s words promised deliverance from their work, Israel chose to disregard the goal, and keep working.

Occasionally, we are so caught up in what we are doing that we forget to evaluate the big picture of our goals. We focus on routine triumphs over realizing our goals. Concern with details replaces striving for our destiny. When we suspect this is happening we must take a step back and evaluate whether what we are so busy with is really fulfilling all of our ambitions.

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<sup>1</sup> From Rabbi Ralph Tawil’s Shabbat Table Talks for Parashat Va’era, available online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org).

**Discussion:** After reading the section to your Shabbat table, ask: Why do you think that Israel kept on working? Didn't Moshe just tell them that Hashem was about to save them from working for the Egyptians? (Your family might answer that Israel did not believe Moshe would succeed. The verse tells us the answer; they were too impatient and too busy working.)

Does it make sense to be too busy working as someone else's slave when you soon will be redeemed?

What do you think is more important to `Am Yisrael, to continue building cities for Pharaoh or to get the Torah and go to Israel? (Obviously the latter choice.) Why?

Sometimes we get so busy with the things that we are doing that we forget why we are doing them and what we should be doing. We can become so busy in getting somewhere and forget why we were going in the first place.

**Some examples:**

**In school:** Sometimes we are so busy getting grades and doing homework that we forget that school is about thinking, being creative, learning, and loving to learn. Some people are so concerned with making the grade that they even forget the very important social aspects of school.

**In family:** Concern with the details of making a living and accomplishing the many things that must be accomplished in running the family, that we forget to make time for working on the relationships—the crux of what family is all about.

**In business:** We can get so used to producing our item that we do not stop to ask whether the item should be produced at all.

**In community:** What are we trying to achieve as a community? What are our goals, are we coming close to achieving them? Do we need goals at all or should we just keep on going, just trying to survive? What does “survive” mean—physical, spiritual, cultural survival?

**In Israel:** We are so caught up with dealing with our survival that we forget to ask what it is that we are meant to accomplish as a people. Is the purpose of having a state just to have a state?

**Danger signs:** Here are some examples of when to suspect that we are ignoring something that we should be doing because of concern with other, less important things:

- When you say about too many things, “I would like to do it, but I do not have the time.”
- When the details of what you are doing are all in order, but you are still not succeeding.

**What to do:**

Ask your family what can be done to rectify this situation.

- Articulate clear goals

Take time off to evaluate whether what you are doing leads to your goals.