

All in the Right Time

It seems that there has been a vaccine all along. So what took so long? What does Torah have to say about such a late rollout?

A Late Roll-Out

Mazal Tov!

This week, G-d willing, the FDA will approve the COVID-19 vaccine. In several countries, thousands of people have already been vaccinated.

We are now some ten months into the crisis here in America. But as it turns out, Moderna had a vaccine ready on January 13, eleven months ago, according to an article in the New York Magazine.

The scientists at Moderna successfully produced a vaccine within one weekend of work. They were able to pull it off so quickly because COVID comes from the same family as SARS, for which they had produced a vaccine in 2003. When they realized how closely the two viruses were related, they literally pulled the vaccine off the shelf and made a few changes to update it to the new virus.

The vaccine was ready a week before the first case of COVID was confirmed in the United States!

A month later, as the first American patient died from the

disease, the vaccine had already been manufactured and sent to the NIH for stage one of testing on humans. Throughout this entire difficult period, when over a quarter million people died in the United States and many more throughout the world, the vaccine was already in existence.

Moreover: A classic vaccine injects a small amount of the actual disease into your body and your body develops the ability to fight it. For this reason, scientists have always been very careful before rolling out a new vaccine. They make endless tests on animals and then on human beings. A defective vaccine can be devastating, like the botched polio vaccine which killed twelve children and paralyzed many more.

But the coronavirus vaccine is different. Instead of inserting the actual illness into the body, Moderna created a vaccine with a new genetic technology called mRNA which gives a person immunity to the virus without actually exposing him to it. So, the scientists knew from the outset that there was nothing dangerous in the vaccine. The tests were necessary to prove that the vaccine was effective, but not that it was safe.

If so, the question must be asked, why did they wait so long? Why is the vaccine only being released now?

Torah's Late Rollout

As Jews, we believe in Torah and in Divine Providence. No doubt, the timeless teachings of the Torah can shed light on this bizarre situation, where a vaccine could have been ready for distribution in April yet is only being released now, after we've lost a quarter of a million lives.

The Rebbe once addressed a famous question posed to the Chassidic movement. If Chassidism is so integral to Judaism, its detractors asked, why did it appear only three hundred years ago?

In the Rebbe's words, "If the revelation of the Baal Shem Tov was so important, why didn't it occur years earlier?"

"But G-d does everything in its proper time," the Rebbe answered. "The Giving of the Torah too, was only twenty-six generations after creation." (Toras Menachem vol. 29 pg. 142).

The Rebbe cites a statement of King Solomon in Kohelet (Ecclesiastes), "*Hakol asah yafe b'ito*, G-d does everything at the right time." Everything in the world has its special moment.

We all agree that the Ten Commandments and the Torah in its entirety are the most important revelations in the history of humankind. They teach us how to live a spiritual and meaningful life and how to establish a just society. Even other religions draw on the Torah.

But if Torah is so important, why didn't G-d give the Torah to Adam after He created the world? Why did he wait more than twenty-four hundred years to give the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai?

The answer is that humankind was not ready to receive the Torah. As the Midrash puts it, God said about Adam, "I gave him six commandments and he couldn't manage to fulfill them. Should I give him 613?" (Bireishis Rabba 24:4). Adam wasn't ready for the Torah. It would take twenty-six generations for

humanity to mature enough to receive it.

Joseph's Right Moment

We find a similar idea in this week's Parsha. At the end of the Torah portion, we read the story of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker who are thrown into prison with Joseph.

One morning, they woke up depressed. They had each dreamt a dream but couldn't pinpoint its meaning. Joseph came to the rescue. He interpreted the dreams satisfactorily and predicted that the cupbearer would be reinstated to his former position.

And then he made a request.

"When things go well for you," he told the cupbearer, "just remember that I was with you. Be kind to me and mention my name to Pharaoh. Get me out of this prison."

It is quite a touching plea. How disappointing it is to read just a few lines later at the Parsha's conclusion that "the cupbearer did not remember Joseph. He forgot all about him."

However, when you begin to read the next Parsha, you realize that it was all for good. Two years later, Pharaoh woke up one morning from a dream that gave him no rest. He was terribly disturbed by what he had seen and needed an interpreter urgently. Suddenly, the cupbearer remembered Joseph, and the rest is history.

Clearly, everything was for the best. Had the cupbearer made good on his promise and mentioned him to Pharaoh, he may have been brushed off immediately. "Say thank you for your

freedom and get to work,” Pharaoh may have told him. “Why are you bothering me about the friends you made in prison. Mind your own business...”

But when Pharaoh woke up terribly agitated by his dream, a perfect opportunity arose to speak about Joseph and his phenomenal ability to interpret dreams.

Everything took place at the right moment.

Chanukah A Year Later

Chanukah has a similar story.

Purim and Chanukah differ in the fact that the holiday of Purim was established immediately. As soon as the fighting died down, the Jews put away their swords and began to party. Chanukah, on the other hand, was only established a year later, on the first anniversary of the miracle.

Why was it so? the Rebbe once asked. Why didn't they celebrate the miracle of Chanukah immediately?

The Rebbe explained that the answer lies in the fundamental difference between the holidays. On Purim, the Jewish people were saved from annihilation. Nobody needed to be convinced that an amazing miracle had taken place. Haman had conspired to kill every Jewish man, women and child, and the tables had been completely turned around. It is no surprise that they held an immediate celebration.

But Chanukah was more complicated.

The war wasn't about Jewish survival. The Syrian-Greeks didn't seek to kill Jews; they wanted to assimilate them. They forbade the observance of circumcision, Shabbos and so on; they tried to force Jews to sacrifice a pig on the Altar. The war on Chanukah was a war for religious freedom.

But not everyone was on board with the fight against the Greeks. Some people considered the Maccabees to be zealots and fanatics. The Jewish intelligentsia were Hellenists; they welcomed the Greeks with open arms —and they were some forty percent of the Jewish population. That year, when the war was over, not everyone felt a reason to celebrate. Only a year later, when the realization of the miracle finally began to sink in, was there a broad enough consensus to establish a holiday.

Again, everything happened in the right time.

In the Right Time

Today, even ten months into the virus, forty percent of the population say that they don't want to be vaccinated. Seven months ago, when the pandemic was still new to us, ninety percent of the population would have refused. Without the necessary cooperation, a ready vaccine would not have been able to stem the tide of the pandemic.

This is also true in our own lives. Often, a couple will be acquainted with each other for ten years before they decide that they are suitable for each other and get married. Afterwards, they can't stop asking themselves why it took so long to come to this realization, while they lost precious years to raise a family.

The answer is: everything in its right time. It is entirely possible that if someone would have proposed that very idea, they would have rejected it outright. But now that they matured, they have come to the point where they can make the right decision.

There is only one thing that the Rebbe often said is long overdue: That is the time for the coming of Moshiach. May it be very soon.