

SIMPLY QUALIFIED

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

As the book of Exodus begins, it is important to ponder what catapulted Moshe (Moses) from the position of valiant citizen to national leader. The story of Moshe's youth in Egypt is hardly expounded upon in the Torah. Yes, it tells the story of his birth and his escape in the Nile River. The Torah even mentions his great vigilance in smiting an Egyptian who struck a Hebrew. But in relating those stories, it does not leave us feeling that those acts, merited Divine ordination. It tells the tale of Moshe stopping a fight between two Hebrew fellows, and how he was forced to flee from Egypt to the wilderness of Midian because of his strong stand in chastising those Jews who quarreled. All those stories show perseverance, courage, and fortitude. Yet not one of those incidents is juxtaposed with the Divine revelation that catapults Moshe into the great spiritual and prophetic leader whom we know.

Even after the event in which he saves Yisro's (Jethro) seven daughters from evil shepherds G-d is silent, there is no pronouncement of Moses' glory or appointment of a Divine role. Hashem declares Moshe's greatness in the context of a very simple serene story.

"Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law, he guided them into the wilderness, and he arrived at the mountain of G-d toward Horeb. An angel of G-d appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amidst the bush, and he saw that the bush was burning, and the bush was not consumed. Moshe looked and analyzed the sight and he questioned, "why is the bush not being burned?" (Exodus 3:1-3). It is only in that serene setting that G-d called out "Moshe, Moshe," to which Moshe replied "Here I am." The end of that story is the beginning of the Jewish nation.

Why is the act of shepherding sheep the setting for such majestic and Divine revelation? What amazing incident occurred during the shepherding? Why didn't G-d appear to Moses after his courageous act of smiting the Egyptian or after he reproached two Hebrews who were fighting? Wouldn't that setting be the ripe moment for induction into the halls of prophecy and leadership?

James Humes, a speechwriter for President Reagan, tells the story about a young recruit who was drafted into the army. During the interview, the sergeant asked him the following question, "Did you have six years of grade school education?"

"Sure thing, Sir", snapped the recruit. "I also graduated with honors from high school. I went to Yale where I received my college degree and then I did my graduate work at Colombia University, and," he added, "I received my doctorate in political science at Harvard."

The sergeant turned toward to the stenographer, smiled, and said, "Put a check in the space marked literate."

The Midrash tells us that during Moshe's tenure as a shepherd, one of the sheep ran away. He chased the sheep, he brought it back to the rest of the flock, and he carried it home. G-d looked upon him and said, "A man who cares for his sheep, will care for his people." That act catapulted Moshe to the position we know.

Acts that are bold and courageous may personify leadership, character, and commitment. People think that they that only those gallant and daring acts that will catapult them into greatness and glory. The Torah tells us that it is not so.

The Torah links Moshe's selection to Divine leadership with the simple task of shepherding. The qualifications that G-d wants are not necessarily what humans perceive. We often look for honors, accolades, achievements, and accomplishments that are almost superhuman. Hashem, on the other hand, cherishes simple shepherding. He loves care and concern for simple Jews. We may come to Him with risumis of brilliance, of courage, of valor, but He does not need that. He wants consistency, love, compassion, and, perhaps most of all, humble simplicity.

Moshe had those qualities too. It was those qualities of compassion, not the forceful qualities of attacking the Egyptian taskmaster, nor fending off evil shepherds, nor chastising combative Hebrews, that were chosen to cast Moshe into the light of leadership. We may be bold and courageous, but without compassion for the little things, without the humility to find lost sheep, we may be simply overqualified.

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Good Shabbos!***

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