

FEELING HUMAN BEINGS

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM said to Moshe, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the land; it shall become lice throughout the land of Egypt.'" (Shemos 8:12)

Say to Aaron: This plague was not initiated by Moshe for the soil did not deserve to be stricken by Moshe because it protected him when he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Therefore it was stricken by Aaron. (Rashi)

What great deference is shown to the soil of Egypt!? Even while Egypt is being disassembled plague after plague Moshe is disqualified from striking the dust because it had saved him. What's going on here? Does the dust of Egypt really care whether Moshe or Aaron hits it? What would be so terrible if Moshe would be the one?

I recently heard the following remarkable story: Rabbi Yisaschar Frand was approached after a lecture he gave somewhere in Connecticut, by a somewhat elderly gentleman with a slight European accent wishing to register a serious complaint. Politely but firmly the man insisted that he had a problem with something that Rabbi Frand had written in one of his books on Parshas "Lech Lecha" on the verse where Avraham is promised by HASHEM that He will bless those who bless Avraham. Rabbi Frand asked to be reminded what he had written. With almost perfect recall the man reminded the Rabbi.

There was a story told there with great attention to historical detail, about a Jewish family during the 2nd World War that in desperation, anticipating the brutal invasion of the Nazis, had to give up their precious son to a gentile family. They understood there was a good chance they may never return, and therefore they made an appeal to the host family that if by any chance they did not come back they should contact family in Silver Spring, Maryland. They were provided with all the necessary information before the parents disappeared.

After the dust of war had begun to settle it became clear that the parents were not coming back to pick up their child and it was a safe assumption that they had perished. The host family then took the child to the local priest and requested that he baptize the boy. The priest asked them why they were baptizing a now older child. It is usually done earlier. The parents gleefully related that it was a Jewish child that they were left to care for and how the parents had entrusted them to send him to

relatives America if they failed to return. The priest listened to all they had to say and he then refused to baptize the Jewish child. He insisted that if the parents wanted him to be sent to his relatives that is what they are morally obligated to do, and that is what they did. As it turns out that Polish priest was later appointed to become Pope and so he stood on the world stage for many decades, Pope John Paul. Rabbi Frand was highlighting that perhaps the enormous honor that redounded to that priest was for doing the right thing and refusing to baptize a Jewish child and insisting he be reunited with his family's family.

Rabbi Frand asked the man what was wrong with the story or the message of the story. At this the man became very emotional and he told Rabbi Frand, "I am that boy! How could you cast my adopted parents in such a negative light?! They saved my life! They are like my real family! I send them money! I visit them every year! How could you write about them that way?!"

Rabbi E.E. Dessler ztl. explains that of course the dust of Egypt is inanimate and void of feelings. Striking it would only have had a negative effect on the character of Moshe. For him to do so would diminish his sensitivity in the realm of gratitude. Now we can estimate "how much more so" with **feeling human beings**. DvarTorah, Copyright 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).