

# SHARING THE PAIN OF OTHERS

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

After telling the story of Moshe's birth, the Torah skips over the details of his upbringing in the palace of Pharaoh, and jumps to a time during Moshe's transition to adulthood, when he first came into contact with his Jewish brethren (2:11-13):

And it was in those times when Moshe grew up; he went out to his brothers, and observed their burden.

Moshe had grown up in great comfort as a member of Pharaoh's household. Still, as soon as he came of age - and found out he was a Jew - he abandoned his position of comfort and stature, and chose to cast his lot with his brethren. (Ramban)

One might think that Moshe's 'observation' of his brethren's suffering was circumstantial; he happened to leave the palace, and happened to notice their situation. Rashi dispels this approach:

"And he observed their burden," Moshe concentrated with his eyes and his heart to suffer together with them.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:27) expands on this:

Seeing their anguish, Moshe too would cry, saying, "My brothers - I can't bear to see you like this. Would that I would die for you." And he would bend down, and help everyone with their loads.

Chazal, our Sages in the Mishnah (Avos 6), would later describe the process of sharing other people's pain (and their joy) as, "Carrying the burden together with one's friend," a clear allusion to Moshe.

This period - with the exception of Moshe's marriage (which incidentally also came about as a result of his desire to help others) - is all we hear about his life until the age of eighty, when Hashem instructs him, from a bush, to redeem the Jews from Egypt. Clearly this incident, which describes how Moshe nurtured his deep attachment to his people, is a seminal moment in Moshe's path to becoming a leader.

Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, the Ponevizher Rav zt"l, was in his youth one of the brilliant young

students of the famous Yeshiva of Telz. At some point, he decided to transfer from Telz to the fabled yeshiva of Novardok. On his way, he passed through the town of Radin, where the renowned tzaddik the Chafetz Chaim lived, and decided to visit the elderly sage.

He entered the Chafetz Chaim's home during the early evening, and the rebbitzen told him to take a seat, saying the Rav would be with him shortly. Suddenly, there was a great cry and screaming. R' Yosef Shlomo bolted from his seat to see what had happened. "Don't be alarmed," the rebbitzen said. "Someone just came to tell my husband that his wife is going through a difficult childbirth. He is praying for her." On the spot, the Ponevizher Rav made up his mind to remain in Radin and study under the Chafetz Chaim.

Suffering together with one's friends, emotionally and physically, is obviously a noble trait. But why is it the defining characteristic which led to Moshe guiding the Jews out of slavery and giving them the Torah? And why is it one of the 48 critical character traits without which one cannot properly study Torah?

In its essence, the Torah is not a collection of laws and stories. It is the light of the Infinite One, constricted through prism after prism. While anyone can read the Torah and study its words at a very basic level, tapping the infinite light requires that man, somehow, shed his corporeal existence.

This sounds very lofty. One would think it would require living a life of abstinence atop high mountains, separated from anything physical. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We are commanded, to the extent we can express it, to "cleave" to Hashem ("u-Vo tidbak"). This is accomplished, Chazal explain, by cleaving to His ways: He is kind, so you be kind. He is compassionate, so you be compassionate.

Likewise, Meshech Chochma explains, Hashem is described as "suffering together with man." Moshe understood that emulating Hashem must include bearing the pain of his fellow Jew, emotionally and physically. It was this, more than all his other positive traits, that made Moshe worthy of leading Hashem's nation and giving them the Torah.

Tomer Devorah notes that we're called She'eris Nachlaso, the last remainder of Hashem's inheritance. The term She'eris also means "relative" - meaning that Hashem treats us like family. Am Kerovo - each Jew is Hashem's close relative.

This is why the Torah refers to Moshe going out to "his brothers." The expression is often thought of as a colloquialism, but it is not. If one were to hear about a terrible calamity that happened to someone he does not know, he might still be terribly upset. Who was not horrified when imagining the plight of the cadets trapped on the fiery bus in the Carmel a few weeks ago? But now imagine you knew someone on the bus - perhaps a business associate, or a close friend. And what if - G-d forbid - your brother, or your son, or father had been on the bus? Might your reaction have been different?

Moshe teaches us the true meaning of "bearing the load together with our friends." He saw their burden - not like a person looking at a display in a museum. Not a groan or a perfunctory "tsk tsk." Moshe cried with his brothers. He bent down and bore their load with them, literally. It is this, and no less, that the Torah expects of us. Have a good Shabbos. Text Copyright © 2010 by [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **[Torah.org](#)**