

UNDER THE CARPET

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 129, Giving English Names. Good Shabbos!

External Endangerment Doesn't Justify Sweeping Problems Under The Rug

The verse tells us, "And in those days Moshe grew up, and he went out to his brethren and saw their suffering, and he saw an Egyptian man hitting a Hebrew man from his brethren." [Shemos 2:11] Moshe saw that no one was looking and he killed the Egyptian. Then we find "And he went out on the second day and saw two Jews arguing with each other. And he said to the wicked one, 'why are you hitting your brother?'" [Shemos 2:13].

The Medrash comments, "this righteous person went out twice and G-d recorded these two 'goings out' one after the other." The Medrash is obviously telling us that these two "goings out" of Moshe Rabbeinu were significant. But what is the significance?

The Shemen HaTov explains the Medrash. On the first day, Moshe went out and saw the terrible danger that the Jews faced externally. They were in mortal danger, surrounded by hostile non-Jews. They were being oppressed. He saw a hostile neighbor attacking a Jew; he rose to the occasion and protected his brethren. On the second day he saw two Jews arguing with one another - and he chastises them for their behavior (gives them mussar).

One could have said that this is not the time to make waves and cause internal problems. "We have enough problems with the Egyptians, we can't worry about correcting our own misbehavior." One could have swept the internal problems under the carpet in the face of all the external persecution.

The Medrash points out that this was not the way that Moshe Rabbeinu acted. The fact that we are endangered externally should not stop Jewish leaders from saying that which must be said regarding correcting internal faults. The leader -- whoever he may be -- must always be ready to point out our foibles and our own shortcomings. The "need" to "provide a united front" and the argument "let's not start our own bickering" should not be used as an excuse to cover up serious internal problems.

When Moshe saw two Jews who needed Mussar, he did not fail to complain and make a tumult and tell them "this is not the way that Jews act".

He Who Neither Slumbers Nor Sleeps Chooses Leaders Who Count Sheep

The Medrash says that Moshe was superior to Noach. Noach was first called "a righteous man" [Bereishis 6:9] and later was called "a man of the earth" [9:20]; Moshe was first called "an Egyptian man" [Shemos 2:19] and later was called "a Man of G-d" [Devorim 33:1]. What was the difference between Moshe and Noach?

Noach, personally, was a righteous man, but he failed to have any influence on his generation. This is a terrible indictment for a leader. If a person can remain a Tzadik -- which is an admirable quality -- while his entire generation is wiped out, something is amiss. He had so much potential, he could have had such a great effect, and yet his whole generation was wiped out.

Moshe Rabbenu shows us the opposite approach. He began as "an Egyptian man". However, not only was he able to elevate himself, he elevated an entire nation. He was and is the leader par excellence.

What was the power of Moshe that made him have such a strong impact on his people?

There is a Medrash that tells us "G-d does not elevate a person to greatness until he first tests him with a minor matter." The Medrash goes on to tell us that prior to elevating Moshe (and other Jewish leaders) to roles of greatness G-d tested them with a small thing -- how did they care for sheep.

Why do sheep mark a leader?

In order to be a leader of the Jewish people, it is obvious that a person has to have greatness. But that said, this is not what **makes** the leader. What **makes** the leader is his ability to relate to the common man, the ability to see the mundane needs of the people.

It goes without saying that G-d needs a leader for His people who has Fear of Heaven and is a Talmid Chochom, but the acid test He gives them is with the sheep. The mark of the true leader is to relate to the small problems of man.

Here was a person on the level of an Angel -- he did not eat bread or drink water [Shemos 34:28] -- but what did he have to deal with? When people came to him to adjudicate their disputes, they did not ask for sophisticated theological proofs of G-d's existence. They told him "I have problems with my wife, my children, my business..." This is what the leader gets. If he can't relate to these types of problems, he can't be an effective leader.

The Talmud states [Sanhedrin 8a] that a Judge has to suffer with the congregation like a nursemaid carries a baby [Bamidbar 11:12]. This is a very apt analogy.

What type of problems does a mother get from her children? "The cereal is not hot enough; The cereal is not cold enough; My nose is running; I skinned my knee; He hurt me; She kicked me..." These are the problems that a mother gets.

Whatever problems Moshe Rabbeinu heard, it is clear that on his level, they were no more significant, no less petty, than a runny nose. Did it make a difference to Moshe Rabbeinu that this person's cow wasn't giving any milk? But that is what a leader has to be. He has to have that concern, that love, that ability to feel that when Reuvain's cow isn't giving milk -- that is a problem. When Shimeon's business isn't going well -- that is a problem.

Those problems are what make a leader. That is what Moshe Rabbeinu was. Not only was he the Master of all prophets, the Teacher of all Israel - but he was a trusted shepherd. He ran to pick up the little sheep. He had compassion for the smallest of problems. In the final analysis, that is the criteria for a Jewish leader.

Personalities & Sources:

Shemen HaTov -- Rabbi Dov Weinberger -- contemporary author, Rav in Brooklyn, NY

Glossary

Talmid Chochom -- Scholarly Disciple (Torah scholar)

Tzadik -- Righteous person

mussar -- constructive ethical criticism

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion #129. The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Giving English Names. The other halachic portions for Parsha Shemos from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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