

THE NATION EMPOWERS ITS LEADERS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vaera

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Good Shabbos!

The Nation Empowers Its Leaders

Moshe complained to G-d that as a result of their oppression, the Jewish people did not pay attention to him. Moshe further argued that even if the Jews would not listen to him, certainly Pharaoh would not listen to him, particularly since he (Moshe) was 'uncircumcised of lips' [Shemos 6:12].

However, the logic of Moshe's argument -- that Pharaoh would not listen to him -- is flawed. The "kal v'chomer" ("all the more so") does not follow, and may be refuted as follows: As Moshe himself stated, the reason that the Jews did not listen was because they were too weary -- from shortness of breath and from arduous labor. Pharaoh, on the other hand, did not have those distractions. So where is the proof that Pharaoh would not be prepared to listen?

The Sefas Emes (1847-1905) has an interesting approach to this question. The Sefas Emes explains that a Jewish leader is only as strong as the people who back him are. If the people do not want to be led, if a leader can not even sway the people to his side, then he in fact loses his power of speech. This explains why Moshe added the fact that "I am uncircumcised of lips" (aral sefasayim). The reason why I am 'tongue-tied' is because my power of speech is only by virtue of the fact that I represent the people. If the people do not listen to me and do not rally around me as their leader, then I am in fact 'tongue-tied'. A leader is no greater than the people he leads are and if he does not lead them, he can not begin to represent them to others.

A Person Must Carefully 'Budget' His Utterances

There is an interesting Medrash that verifies something I once heard as a child. The Medrash HaGadol on the pasuk [verse] "When Pharaoh will speak to you saying..." [Shemos 7:9] makes reference to a pasuk in Amos [4:13]: "For behold, He forms mountains and creates winds; He recounts to a person what is his conversation (mah seicho)..." The Medrash states that in this pasuk, Amos is referring to the fact that when G-d creates an individual, he decrees upon him how many conversations he will have in his life and how many words he will speak. The neshama is basically provided with an allotment of words before it comes down into this world. Once a person reaches his ration of words, his time is up.

The Imrei Shammai explains that a person's life span can thus be calibrated by the number of words it was decreed that he would speak in his lifetime. Therefore, someone who minimizes his idle conversation is in effect prolonging his life. Since no one wants to be 'stingy' with his words when he is teaching Torah or speaking in matters of learning, where is there a place to 'cut down'? Obviously, the place to economize is in regards to idle speech (devarim betailim).

No good ever comes out of too much talking. This is axiomatic. The more one speaks, the more trouble he gets himself into. Now we have an incentive. If we viewed words the way we view dollars and realized that we have a limited number to 'spend', we would be a lot more judicious with the words that we use.

Stop Hitting Those Stupid Frogs Already!

The pasuk says "And Aharon stretched his arm over the water of Egypt and the frog ascended and it covered the land of Egypt" [Shemos 8:2]. Rashi comments on the fact that the word frog is written in the singular (Tsefardeah). We know that the plague involved thousands if not millions of frogs, so why does the pasuk seem to indicate that only one frog initially ascended from the Egyptian waters?

Rashi explains in the name of the Medrash that in fact only one frog came out initially, but the Egyptians would beat it with swords and each time they would hit it, the frog would subdivide. As they kept hitting the frogs, they kept multiplying geometrically until there were hundreds of thousands and millions of frogs.

What lesson is this Medrash teaching us? The Steipler Gaon (1899-1985) explained as follows: Let us analyze the situation. The first time the Egyptians hit the frog, they certainly did not expect it to split into two. But then they hit it again, and again, and again. Each time they hit it, it divided again. So 'wake up and smell the coffee' already! Stop hitting the stupid frogs! Why did they keep hitting them? They saw that each time they hit a frog, they were only making matters worse. Why didn't they stop?

The Steipler explained that the Egyptians grew angrier and angrier each time they hit the frogs. Once a person becomes angry, he loses all sense of reason and rationality. Of course, the logical

thing to do would have been to stop hitting the frogs, but when a person is very angry and frustrated, he loses control of his faculties. At that point, forget about logic. Logic is the language of the reasonable. An angry man is not reasonable.

Unfortunately, we can all relate to this concept. We can all relate to getting angry and to losing control. We know what a terrible state that is to be in. If we lose control, we say silly things. We do not hear that which people say to us in response. We are out of control.

That is true regarding a person who becomes angry occasionally. However, what if a person is always getting angry? That person is in very serious shape, because he is then always out of control. If he is always out of control, he is living a horrible life. The Talmud says "a person who constantly gets angry, all forms of Hell rule over him" [Nedarim 22a]. The simple reading of this Gemara is that an angry person will be judged harshly in the next world and all forms of Gehinnom will rule over him.

Rav Yeruchum Levovitz (1874-1936) adds that the simple meaning is not the complete meaning of the Gemara. The Gemara is not only speaking about the price the person will have to pay in the next world. The Gemara is also saying that the person who constantly becomes angry lives a living Hell in THIS world! That is what it is like to always be angry and out of control.

This explains why even though the most rational thing in the world would have been to stop hitting those stupid frogs, an angry person brings a living Hell upon himself by irrationally continuing to hit the frogs and further aggravating the matter.

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