

FROM BEGINNING TO END

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Va'era

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 357, Birchas Hamotzi. Good Shabbos!

Moshe and Aaron Remained Moshe and Aaron From Beginning To End

There is a strange set of verses near the beginning of our parsha. After G-d charged Moshe and Aaron with taking the Children of Israel out of Egypt, the pasuk launches into their genealogy. The pasuk says, "This was Aaron and Moshe to whom Hashem said, 'Take the Children of Israel out of Egypt, according to their legions'. They were the ones who spoke to Pharoah, King of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, this was the Moshe and Aaron." [Shemos 6:26-27] This last pasuk is seemingly a total repetition of the preceding pasuk.

Rashi notes this apparent redundancy, and says that it teaches that Moshe and Aaron retained their righteousness and their perfection throughout their mission.

Rav Gifter, zt"l, explains this Rashi. When the pasuk first introduces Aaron and Moshe "who received the command to take the Jews out of Egypt" the reason why they were doing what they did was simply because G-d told them to do it. This is how we all start out when we embark on a task. Why do we do it? We do it because we were told to do it. When someone first assumes a position of responsibility -- whether as a result of being elected to a post, or appointed to a job or whatever -- he takes his charge seriously and does what he was elected or appointed to do.

But then what happens? After beginning to work and getting involved, we are no longer doing it because we were told to or because we were asked. We are doing it because our egos have become involved. Now it has become a question of whether WE will succeed or fail. Our reputation

is on the line.

The pasuk is informing us that the greatness of Moshe and Aaron was that from the time they got the initial command to take the Jews out of Egypt -- which they did solely for altruistic purposes (because G-d said so) -- until they completed the entire process, they remained totally committed -- at a completely altruistic level (because G-d said so). At the end of the day, when it was all said and done, the Torah reiterates "This is the same Moshe and Aaron" as at the very outset. They were not acting because of egos or because their reputations were on the line. They were acting -- until the very end -- simply because they were carrying out G-d's will. It was not 'them', it was G-d's command that was operative. They remained in their righteousness from beginning to end.

So many times, our trouble is that despite the fact that we embark on extremely noble endeavors, we become too involved with our egos. Eventually, "our success and glory" drives us, rather than the nobility of the cause or endeavor. When we are working for G-d, success should not be the factor. Effort is all that counts. Did we do the job honestly? Did we give it our best shot? That is what counts.

When the ego becomes involved and drives us to 'succeed' at any cost, that is when we lose perspective. That is when our character traits (midos) are put on the line. That is when things sometimes go awry.

The Scrolls They Read On Shabbos Gave Them Hope

There is an interesting Medrash Tanchuma that comments on Pharoah's reaction to the plagues. The pasuk [Shemos 5:9] says that Pharoah's reaction to the plagues was to turn the screws tighter against the slaves: "Increase the workload upon these people and make sure they do it and do not allow them to occupy themselves with false words." The Medrash elaborates on the "false words" that concerned Pharoah: "They had scrolls (megillos) in their possession that they used to enjoy reading each and every Shabbos. In the scrolls was recorded a promise that G-d would redeem them and take them out. Pharoah wanted to increase their workload so they would no longer have time to read these scrolls of 'propaganda and fantasy'.

We need to understand: Why did the spare time activities of the slaves bother Pharoah? Why did he care that they were reading these scrolls, as long as they completed their work? What was his obsession with these megillos?

Perhaps these scrolls represented more than merely something to help pass the time on Shabbos. Pharoah was not merely interested in having people work for him. He was interested in breaking the spirit of the people. The way to break the spirit of a nation is by taking away from them that which every human being and every nation needs -- hope. The scrolls that they would read every Shabbos promised that G-d would redeem them. These scrolls kept them going. No matter how bad it became and how terrible it was, they knew that it would come to an end. Ultimately, G-d would take them out.

The Jews did not understand the reason for their dire circumstances. They were righteous. The Egyptians were wicked. They asked the question: Why do the righteous suffer? But somehow, despite the questions, they had the strength to continue. Why? Because they read in the megillos that G-d would redeem them and they had hope.

Taking hope away from a people breaks a people. No matter how desperate a person becomes, as long as there is hope, he is not broken. This is what Pharoah wanted to destroy.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Va'eyra are provided below:

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