

WHEN YOU ARE RAISED AS A PRINCE, YOU ACT LIKE A PRINCE

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 # 444 - The Deaf Mute In Halacha. Good Shabbos!

When You Are Raised As A Prince, You Act Like A Prince

Pharaoh's daughter rescued baby Moshe from the Nile River. She brought him home to the palace and raised him as an adopted son. On a superficial level, it is a great story. Pharaoh wants to get rid of all the Jewish baby boys, in order to preclude the possibility of a savior being born to them. He orders all Jewish baby boys thrown into the Nile. In the irony of ironies, Pharaoh's own daughter saves the future savior of Israel from the Nile and brings him into Pharaoh's own palace to raise and nurture him.

Of course, there is more to the sequence of events than just the fact that it "makes a great story." There is a fascinating Ibn Ezra that explains the motivation of hashgacha [Divine Providence] in causing events to turn out this way. The Ibn Ezra speculates that the reason the hashgacha brought Moshe to the palace was to create a future leader of Israel who would be raised in an atmosphere of royalty and power, rather than in an environment of slavery and submission.

In the great controversy of nature versus nurture, the Ibn Ezra lends weight to the point of view that gives great import to nurture in determining what a person eventually becomes. If Moshe Rabbeinu had been raised as a slave, thinking like a slave and acting submissively like a slave, it would have been much more difficult for him to become the leader of two million people.

The Ibn Ezra cites the fact that Moshe killed the Egyptian for an act of injustice that the latter perpetrated. A slave, who is always downtrodden and spat upon, would not have the forcefulness and the gumption to protest injustice and to personally punish the perpetrator. There is no way we could imagine someone with a slave's mentality doing such a thing. On the other hand, someone brought up in the house of the king, believing he is a prince, automatically possesses a certain aura and confidence that allows him to intervene in situations that people with less self-esteem would certainly avoid.

The Ibn Ezra similarly notes Moshe's intervention on behalf of Yisro's daughters during the incident with the Shepherds at the well of Midyan. Moshe was a stranger who had just arrived in town. Who asked him to intervene? Who asked him to get involved? The answer is that someone who grew up in a house of authority and leadership has the courage and the assertiveness to take charge and administer justice wherever justice needs to be administered. These leadership abilities were much more easily nurtured in the palace of the king than in a house of slaves.

The Mir Masgiach, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, comments on this Ibn Ezra that we learn from here the power of nurture. Two genetically identical twins will grow up to be very different individuals if they are exposed to different educations and different atmospheres in their formative years. This underlies the power of chinuch [education], the power of environment, and the power of a nurturing home.

We look around today and unfortunately see the many ills that plague our society. What is happening to society? Why is this happening? Part of the answer is that there is no real home life for a large number of children growing up in our society. It is not the least bit surprising and it does not require a great social scientist to see the cause and effect relationship between how one is raised and how one turns out.

The reverse is true as well. When one takes an individual and showers him with love and with confidence, giving him a sense of self and a sense of presence, chances are high that the individual will grow up to demonstrate far greater leadership capabilities than an equally talented individual who was not given the benefit of such an enlightened upbringing.

The ironic sequence of events at the beginning of Sefer Shemos provided the leadership training necessary for the savior who would eventually take Israel out of Egypt.

And Yet, One Need Not Be a Prince to Rise to Greatness

The marriage of Amram and Yocheved is described with the enigmatic words "And a man from the House of Levi went and he married the daughter of Levi" [Shemos 2:1]. It would seem appropriate as the Torah introduces this very important milestone in the Biblical narrative -- the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu -- that the Torah would at least mention the names of Moshe's parents. Shouldn't we be told explicitly of Moshe's proud "yichus" [ancestry]?

Rav Bergman comments in the Shaarei Orah that this is precisely the point. A person does not need yichus to become Moshe Rabbeinu. Anyone is capable of reaching spiritual heights based on his own merits and his own capabilities. A person does not need to have a distinguished father to lead a distinguished life. It is true that Moshe's father happened to be the Gadol HaDor [greatest man of his generation], but the Torah de-emphasizes that point. Moshe's parents are left anonymous to stress that lineage is not what made Moshe who he was.

The idea is that every child and every human being is capable of reaching great heights despite a humble lineage. The Rambam writes this in Hilchos Teshuvah [5:2]: "Any individual can grow up to be as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu."

In this week's parsha, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky comments that the Ramo's rules in Shulchan Aruch that it is preferable, if a mother is incapable of nursing her baby, to have another Jewish woman nurse the child. A non-Jewish woman may only serve in this capacity if there is no alternative. The reason for this is because the non-Jewish nurse eats foods that are not kosher, and the milk then is a byproduct of such foods. This law is derived from the fact that Moshe refused to nurse from the non-Jewish women in Pharaoh's palace. The reason, our Sages tell us, that he refused to nurse from foreign women is that "the mouth that would eventually directly speak to the Almighty should not begin life by sucking non-Kosher matter."

The Ramo's rules in Shulchan Aruch, based on this incident in Chumash and the reasoning of "the mouth that is destined to speak with the Divine Presence," that if at all possible a Jewish baby should not be given to a non-Jewish wet nurse. We might ask when the last time was that a Jewish baby was born who grew up to engage in personal conversation with the Divine Presence. It is certainly not an everyday occurrence. It has not happened since the days of the Malachi, the last of the prophets.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky says that we learn from here that every Jewish child has to be looked at as a child that may potentially speak with the Divine Presence. Great lineage is not necessary to achieve great potential. "An anonymous man from the Tribe of Levi went and married an anonymous daughter of Levi." As the Rambam writes, anyone is capable of reaching such a level.

Some might think that the two thoughts presented herein are contradictory. Upon reflection, one should realize that this is not necessarily the case. "These and these are the words of the Living G-d." [Eruvin 13b]

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