

MOSHE DEMONSTRATES THE PRIORITIES OF A LEADER OF ISRAEL

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Pinchas

Moshe Demonstrates The Priorities Of A Leader Of Israel

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 776, Yayin Mevushal - Does It Exist? Good Shabbos!

It says in this week's Parsha: "Hashem said to Moshe, 'Go up to this mountain of Avarim and see the land that I have given to the Children of Israel. You shall see it and you shall be brought in to your people, you too, as Aaron your brother was brought in; because you rebelled against My word in the Wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the assembly, to sanctify Me at the water before their eyes. They are the waters of the strife of Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin.'" [Bamidbar 27:12-14].

Moshe Rabbeinu must now come to grips with a reality that was extremely painful to him. HaShem told Moshe that he will never going to enter Eretz Yisrael. This message was already delivered to Moshe in Parshas Chukas, but it is only now that the reality and the finality of the message came crushing down upon him.

Upon hearing this news, Moshe's reaction is to ask the Almighty to appoint a worthy successor to lead the people. "May Hashem, G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and who shall bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd." [Bamidbar 27: 16-17].

Rashi comments on this dialog: "This demonstrates the praise of the righteous. When their time comes to leave the world, they abandon their own needs and occupy themselves with the needs of the community." Rather than go with his first instinct to pray to the Almighty to rescind the decree and let him go into Eretz Yisrael (as Moshe indeed ultimately does as we read in the beginning of Parshas V'Eschanan), Moshe forgoes that urge and his first reaction is to pray for a worthy successor.

This is the classic behavior of a true leader of Israel. Dovid HaMelech articulates this behavior in the Book of Tehillim in a very interesting and enigmatic pasuk [verse]: "K'Ayal ta'a'rog al afikei mayim, ken

nafshi ta'arog eilecha Elokim" [Tehillim 42:2]. The simple translation of this pasuk is "Like the ayal (a type of deer, antelope, gazelle, or hind) screams out on the waters, so too my soul cries out to You, Almighty". The Yalkut Shimoni points out a grammatical anomaly regarding this pasuk: The ayal is the male of the species (ayeles would be the feminine form) and yet the verb used in the pasuk is third person feminine (ta'arog) rather than third person masculine (ya'arog). So the Medrash asked, what is the subject of this pasuk -- the male or the female of the species?

The Medrash elaborates: When this Ayeles is about to give birth, she crouches (as it were) on the birthing stool and cries out from the excruciating labor pains to the Holy One Blessed Be He. And He answers her. The Medrash continues: What is the meaning of the term "Afikei mayim" [the underground currents of water] and what does crying out from labor pains have to do with "Afikei mayim"? The Medrash explains that the Ayeles is the most good-natured animal of the animal kingdom (haChasidah she'bechayos). When the other animals are terribly thirsty, they gather around the Ayeles and she digs with her antlers into the ground to find underground water for them. Even when she is in labor and suffering excruciating pain, she still accommodates the needs of the other animals and cries out to the Almighty in prayer to provide a source of underground currents for them. The Almighty listens to her prayers, opens the underground springs and the waters rise to greet her, thereby providing water for all the animals in answer of the gazelle's prayers.

Thus according to the Medrash, we have two independent incidents relating to the same Ayeles. The pasuk begins with the story of the Ayeles suffering from the labor pains and crying out to Hashem. The end of the pasuk speaks of this very Ayeles who cries out to Hashem to supply the needs of the other animals for water. This seems like a strange Medrash. What is it telling us?

I once heard a fantastic explanation from Rav Yaakov Galinsky, the Maggid of Jerusalem. He comments that normally when people are in pain, they are preoccupied with their own problems. When people have 'tzores', the only thing they can think about is themselves and their troubles. The type of individual, who, when gripped with personal pain, can nevertheless raise himself up above his provincial problems and think about another person's pain, is a rare individual indeed.

The Medrash comments that this Ayeles is suffering the terrible pain of labor. She has her own problems and then, while she is suffering, the other animals approach her and say "Do something for us". They ask her to pray for them that HaShem grant them water. Her reaction should be "I have enough of my own problems. Do you not see I am in labor? Leave me alone! I can't help you!" However, the Medrash tells us this is not her response. She leaves her own problems and prays for the other animals.

This, says the Medrash, is why the masculine form (Ayal rather than Ayeles) is used "k'Ayal ta'arog". At that very moment, she makes herself like a male -- oblivious to the pains of labor. She puts aside her own tzores and prays for the rest of the animals that they should have what to drink. This is what Dovid HaMelech concludes: "So too may my soul ta'arog towards you, O' G-d."

Dovid HaMelech had a miserable life, a life of pain and tzores. He had problems with Shaul HaMelech. He had enemies. He had wars to fight. He had rebellions and embarrassments within his own family. Dovid HaMelech personally experienced every conceivable trial and tribulation a person can experience. Yet, "thus shall my soul yearn for You, O' G-d." He put aside his personal issues and served as the King of Klal Yisrael. He took interest in the needs and pains of everyone else and acted as if he had no personal tragedies whatsoever.

This is in the same mold as Moshe Rabbeinu, who when he hears the words "You are not going to go to Eretz Yisrael", instead of pleading right then and there for the decree to be rescinded, first and foremost his concern was for the people -- that they might be given a worthy successor and leader. This capacity, to put aside personal needs in favor of the needs of the community at large, is the mark of the true Jewish leader. That was the mark of Moshe Rabbeinu. That was the mark of Dovid HaMelech. One only achieves that by working on oneself constantly to raise oneself above one's petty concerns.

The type of leader Moshe Rabbeinu requested for the Jewish people was one who "would go out before them and go in before them; one who would take them out and one who would bring them in." As the commentaries point out, Moshe sought a man who could deal with all types of individuals "A man who has 'ruach' within him". This means a person who has the capacity to deal with different personalities and different types of individuals. This is what is required of a Jewish leader.

HaShem told Moshe to take Yehoshua and to give him part of his "spirit". Moshe placed his hands upon the head of Yehoshua and Yehoshua was thereby gifted with the spirit of Moshe and was able to be the leader.

Rav Simcha Zissel asks, if Moshe was anyhow going to place his hands upon the head of the individual and give him part of his "ruach", then what need was there for him to request a man with "ruach" in the first place? It would seem that anyone off the street would serve the purpose. They would be gifted with this attribute of "ruach" from G-d and then be ready to lead!

Rav Simcha Zissel answers that a gift from G-d can give one wisdom and knowledge. It can make a person be cunning, a great organizer, and a superb military strategist. It can do all these things. However, there is one thing that a gift from G-d cannot give anyone. That is "midos tovos" -- good character traits. This is something that a person has to achieve on his own. Therefore, even though, eventually, the ruach would come about from a Divine transfer from the spirit of Moshe to the spirit of the recipient, before that could take place the recipient had to be a man who had "ruach" within him on his own! It had to be a person of sterling quality who would be able to deal with the people. The leader of Israel must be that very special category of individual who can arise above his own personal package of worries and focus on the needs of the tzibur, the needs of the community.

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