

## VAERA 5779

The beginning of Sepher Shemot recounts both the terrible enslavement the Jewish people endured in Egypt as well as serving as Moshe Rabbeinu's introduction to the B'Nai Yisrael. The enslavement was so intense that when Moshe announced their impending redemption to the Bnai Yisrael, the Pasuk states "They were unable to listen to him out of shortness of spirit and hard work." [Shemot 6:9]. Why should the B'Nai Yisrael have listened to Moshe? When Moshe appeared before Pharaoh at the start of his mission of redemption, he was aged 80. What did Moshe do during the first 80 years of his life that would qualify him for becoming the chosen person to lead the Jewish people?

Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv Broida (the 'Alter' from Kelm 1824-1898) says that only one quality about Moshe Rabbeinu marked him out for the leadership. This quality is being "nos'ei b'ol im chaveiro" – the capacity that Moshe had to feel the pain of his fellow kin.

Rav Simcha Zissel proves this from the following in last week's Parsha, Shemot :

- "...and he went out to his brethren and he saw their suffering..." [Shmot 2:11]. Moshe was a prince who was almost like a grandson of Pharaoh. He could have remained in the lap of luxury in Pharaoh's palace and done nothing. However, Chazal say, commenting on the above quoted Pasuk, "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them. He said 'I wish I could be in your place.'"
- Moshe saw the Egyptian beating up the Jew. Moshe saved the Jew by killing the Egyptian.
- The next day, when it was not Egyptian against Jew but Jew against Jew, Moshe again intercedes. It costs him his position in the palace of Pharaoh and he has to run away from Egypt to save his life.
- Then when Moshe went to Midyan, he sees that the daughters of Midyan are being harassed and he intercedes to save them.

Moshe felt his fellow man's suffering. This is the primary quality that Moshe possessed, which qualified him for the leadership.

Rav Yonosan Eibeshutz (1690-1764), in his Sefer Tiferes Yonosan, uses this idea to explain why Pharaoh exempted the entire Tribe of Levi from Egyptian slavery. He says that Pharaoh through his astrologers saw that the eventual saviour of the Jewish people would be a descendant of the Tribe of Levi. Therefore Pharaoh thought that a person who was never enslaved could not be the leader of a rebellion. Pharaoh was therefore willing to give up the potential work output of the Tribe of Levi as a means of stifling the ability of any Levite to aspire to become the saviour of his people

The Shalo"n HaKadosh (Rabbi Isaiah Halevi Horowitz 1558-1628) points out an anomaly in the Torah's pasukim [Shmot 6:14-19]:

When the Torah introduces the genealogy of Moshe Rabbeinu, it begins with the Tribe of Reuven and lists the sons of Reuven. It then lists the sons of Shimon. There is similar syntax in both cases: "The sons of Reuven..." "And the sons of Shimon..." We would then expect a parallel listing of Moshe Rabbeinu's tribe, beginning with the words "And the sons of Levi..." Instead, the Torah says, "And these ARE THE NAMES OF THE SONS OF LEVI..."

The Shalo"n says that when Levi prophetically realized that his sons and grandsons were not going to be victims of the enslavement in Egypt. He did not want them to forget about their cousins who were slaves. Therefore, he named each of his sons with a name somehow connoting the enslavement in Egypt:

- Kehas (meaning dark) means the fact that "they blackened their teeth with the suffering of the enslavement."
- Merari (coming from the word Mar) means that they made their lives bitter.
- Gershon (coming from the word Ger) means being temporary sojourners in this land of our exile.

Levi anticipated what was coming and he took pains to imbue in his children the sense of kinship and empathy with other members of the family. Levi wanted to ensure that his descendants would not be able to sleep well at night – even if they were not enslaved – as long as another member of the family was in pain.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that Moshe Rabbeinu's statement at the end of last week's Parsha "My Lord, why have You harmed this people, why have you sent me?" [Shmot 5:22] was a worse sin than what he did at Mei Meriva (when he hit the rock). The Medrash, in fact, states that at this very moment, the Attribute of Justice wanted to smite Moshe. However, G-d responded, "Leave him alone, he speaks this way only out of a sense of honour for the B'Nai Yisrael."

Rav Matisyahu Solomon -now of Lakewood formerly of Gateshead explains the Medrash: "Why did the Almighty say 'Leave him alone?'" It was because it was as if it was Klal Yisrael talking." Moshe Rabbeinu was so fused with the needs and suffering of the Jewish people, it was as if the Jewish people were talking through the voice of Moshe. The words of "Why have You harmed this people?" is what the people felt. Moshe Rabbeinu, articulated the words the people were feeling. For such speech, the Almighty said, one cannot be held accountable. The people could not be held accountable for such speech because "a person is not held accountable for what he says in his moment of anguish."

Therefore Moshe qualified for Jewish leadership because he had the preeminent quality required of a Jewish leader – the ability to empathise with the suffering of the Jewish people.

Based on "The Resume of Moshe Rabbeinu" by Rabbi Yissocher Frand 2015