



ארגון רבני צהר



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
המערך לשירותים רוחניים בתפוצות

BSD

Parashat Shemot

Fidelity, Humility and Caring

-Rabbi Dr. Ronen Lubitz-

If Moshe were to arrive on the scene today and run for election as leader of the country, he would most likely be subject to an outpouring of criticism, be rejected by the public and be shot down by the media. Moshe returned to Egypt as an illegal with an unknown past coming from the desert. Moshe arrived with no diplomatic experience, no one to vouch for his skills and no record of public activity on his resume.

Despite these apparent shortcomings, Moshe proved himself to be up to the task and more, and his outstanding leadership became obvious even to people outside the world of Torah. Machiavelli, one of the fathers of modern statesmanship, in his book *The Prince* (1515), describes Moshe as one of the greatest of leaders. Freud, one of the fathers of modern psychology, in his book *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), views Moshe as a great man who affected those around him through his personality and the ideas for which he fought and who served as a supreme fatherly figure for his nation.

The secret of Moshe's selection as leader of the Jewish people is concealed in one word at the beginning of the parasha, the word *na'ar* (lad). The Torah describes the initial encounter between Pharaoh's daughter and Moshe as follows: "She opened [it] and she saw him the child, and behold, he was a weeping lad." Why did the Torah call a three-month old baby a "lad"? A midrash cited in the Torah Shleimah (M.M. Kasher) explains that this word is an acronym of the three qualities ascribed by the Torah to Moshe, qualities which are also the most important in a leader: *ne'eman* (faithful), *anav* (humble) and *ro'eh* (shepherd). Faithful – "he is faithful throughout my house." Humble – "now this man Moshe was exceedingly humble." Shepherd – "and Moshe was pasturing the flocks of Yitro."

Moshe's fidelity is apparent in our parasha, when Pharaoh rejected Moshe out of hand and he took responsibility and opened a difficult dialogue with Hashem in advocacy for his people. Moshe would continue to demonstrate complete fidelity toward the values and objectives to which he had dedicated himself, a fidelity that reached its apex in Moshe's complete self-effacement following the sin of the Golden Calf, when he requested that Hashem "redact me from your book" unless Hashem granted his wish and forgave the actions of the Jewish people. Moshe's humility is first on display in our parasha when he argued that he was not worthy of the position Hashem had selected for him and when he recognized his weaknesses, such as his rhetorical difficulties and speech impediments. Later Moshe's humility is again apparent in his reactions to the rebellion led by Korach, the prophetic experiences of Eldad and Meidad and to the challenge of his sister Miriam. As a shepherd, he is judged by the performance of his professional responsibilities as presented in our parasha (see *Shemot Rabbah* 2) and later when he demonstrated compassion and concern for his people and did his utmost to provide for them even when they approached him with complaints and criticism.

I suggest that these three qualities can be identified in Moshe's reactions in the context of the first three events described by the Torah immediately upon Moshe's exit from Pharaoh's palace. In the first event, when Moshe killed the Egyptian who had been beating a Jewish slave, Moshe demonstrates fidelity toward his people and his own value system in his willingness to protect the weak and to rescue the victim from the oppressor while putting his own safety at risk. In the second event, when Moshe attempted to make peace between two Jewish slaves, it is his humility that is on display when he was attacked by one of the belligerent parties, who responded to Moshe with the



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retort: "Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian?" Any other person would have responded to such a claim with harsh words, but Moshe remained calm and silent. In the third event, Moshe acted in his role as shepherd by watering the sheep belonging to Yitro's daughters after rescuing them from the other Midianite shepherds.

These events demonstrate a steady rise in Moshe's abilities: in the first Moshe used physical force, in the second he used the power of speech and in the third he assisted through his very presence and his siding with the young women who were in distress, even without the need to enter into an argument with the shepherds. Thus, Moshe harnessed his NA'AR qualities with sensitivity, a developed sense of right and wrong and empathy for the downtrodden, and he was able to apply his principles in his actions, which were characterized by bravery, dedication and persistence.

The qualities demonstrated by Moshe must be found in every leader: fidelity – a leader must remain faithful to his principles and platform and not dole out empty promises; humility – a leader must know to be cautious and not self-elevated, must consult others and not be arrogant; shepherd – a leader must demonstrate dedication and caring for the people on whose behalf he is charged with serving.

The persona and nature of the great leader, Moshe, should serve as an inspiration to every person and as a role model for every leader. May Hashem provide that the NA'AR qualities, fidelity, humility and caring, characterize every potential leader in today's world and that the words of the prophet Yesha'yahu, "and a small lad (*na'ar*) shall lead them," come to pass in our time.

Rabbi Dr. Ronen Lubitz is the rabbi of the Nir Etzion community, a teacher at the Sha'anani College of Education and the president of the Ne'emanei Torah ve'Avoda organization