

This week, as we begin the Torah portions of the second book- Sefer Shemot- we are introduced to the main character of the rest of the Torah- Moshe Rabbeinu. We are told very little about his youth, other than that he was hidden from the Egyptians and found by the daughter of Pharaoh.

We then encounter Moshe as a young man who begins to grapple with some moral issues. Moshe saves a fellow Jew who was being beaten by man. Perhaps he felt a kinship to the Jew, or perhaps he was simply developing a sense of right and just. Something in the scene did not sit right with Moshe and he took drastic measures to see that this particular Egyptian man would no longer beat defenseless people. Moshe strikes the Egyptian and buries him in the sand. Later, when he sees two Hebrews fighting with each other, he once again intervenes. Although in this situation he does not kill anyone, we see a theme of moral consciousness developing in Moshe.

Realizing that he was in trouble and that he could be put to death for killing the Egyptian, Moshe runs to Midian where he comes upon a group of young girls who are having trouble at a well. They are being harassed by a group of local shepherds. Again, Moshe intervenes and helps these young women to feed their sheep. Moshe marries the eldest of these girls- Tsipporah, and lives with her family in Midian for quite a while.

The man I just described seems like someone who would perfectly fit the bill to be the savior of the Jewish people. He is the champion of the underdog and he has the moral conviction to accomplish a great deal. It is therefore no surprise when G-D appears to Moshe to present him with his task- to go back to Egypt and save the Jewish people. What is surprising, however, is Moshe's reluctance. We would have expected Moshe to jump at the chance to help an oppressed people. Instead, he consistently questions G-D's choice in picking him and insists that there is probably a better candidate for the job. What happened to our vigilante of justice?

The commentaries point out that Moshe was not unwilling to do the job; rather he was not entirely convinced that he could adequately perform the task as G-D's representative. Because of his extreme humility, he could not see himself as the savior of an entire people. But ultimately, we know that Moshe does accept the mantle of leadership and successfully represents GD to both the Jewish People and Pharaoh.

When G-D first appears to Moshe at the burning bush, the verse tells us that Moshe turned to see what was going on, and that G-D took notice of Moshe taking notice. Moshe at this moment decided that he was going to be a leader. He veered from his normal path and acted based on what he saw. This is the same quality that allowed him to take note when a Hebrew slave was being beaten, or when innocent young girls were being harassed. When Moshe saw something strange or out of line happening, he couldn't continue on his path. He needed to check it out. When he expressed to G-D that he didn't know if he was the right person for the job, he may have been asking for a confidence boost, or some assurance. But I don't believe he was considering turning down the job. Moshe realized at the burning bush that he had a role to play in the events that were beginning to unfold.

When we see something which doesn't sit right with us, we have a duty to check it out. We can choose to pass by and hope someone else will come along, but we shouldn't. As with Moshe, we can insist that there is a better person for the job, someone else who could accomplish the goal. We can always come up with excuses. But if it is my opportunity to make a difference, my turn to influence the course of events and I don't, then I have not realized my potential. If Moshe had decided to walk away from the burning bush, he would never have been Moshe Rabbeinu. He may have lived a very nice quiet life, but he certainly would not have lived up to his full potential. We should all learn from Moshe's example and actively pursue opportunities to help when they come to us. Even if someone else could do it better if the opportunity comes to ME, then I should take advantage.

Shabbat Shalom,

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