

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the anonymous sponsor of this *drasha* who is sponsoring in honor of the beautiful Purim just celebrated in Shomrei! May the sponsor be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

On that note—It was **truly** an amazing and inspiring Purim season at Shomrei!

First, a big *yasher koach* to all of our talented *Baalei Kria*—Aryeh Guttenburg, Yossi Zoimen, Alan Stein, Yedidya Gradon, Ray Rosenblatt, Yosef Levenbrown, Simcha Siff, Naftoli Edinger, and Yosef Weinstein. Baruch Hashem, we had a total of eleven *krios* this Purim, plus one for small children led by Mordy Lazar! It is clear that they put so much effort—both heart and soul into it...and it made our Purim so special. There is a phrase in the Gemara responding to the question why we do not say Hallel on Purim— קריאתה זו היא הלילולא --the reading of the Megilla is the Hallel, a song of praise. The *krias hamegilla* by our talented *baalei kria* is indeed Hallel to our ears and hearts!

Second, thank you to Adina and Shuey Goldstein for directing and organizing the Purim carnival this year—it was definitely one to remember! There were close to 500 children, along with their parents, who came to enjoy some fun Purim spirit! Moon bounces, petting zoo, games, food, and more! And thank you to all the volunteers!

Third, the community wide asifa, seder limud and divrei hisorerus, which we hosted to commemorate the first yahzretzit of **Maran Hagaon, HaRav Chaim Kanievsky zt”l** was very inspiring. This event brought together Rabbonim and community members from near and far, demonstrating once again that Shomrei is the vital center of the Baltimore Jewish community.

Finally, thank you to those who have already sponsored me in my upcoming 10k run in the Jerusalem marathon next Friday. I appreciate your support and encouragement, and I will be thinking of you as I run the scenic hills of Jerusalem! It is also an honor to help support **Lemaan Achai**, an organization that gives *tzedakah* in the most *mehudar* fashion. It is not too late to join!

Although the Torah never refers to him as such, beginning with the Talmud, the most common title for Moshe in Torah literature is Moshe **Rabbeinu, our teacher**. What make him the greatest teacher of the Jewish people, earning the title “*rabbeinu*”?

Perhaps his claim to fame should be as a **prophet**, as it says ולא קם נביא עוד בישראל כמשה
Or as the Torah refers to him as עבד ה', the loyal **servant** of Hashem.

Why *rabbeinu*, our teacher? The obvious reason, was that Moshe was charged with the task of teaching the Jewish people the Torah he studied directly with God. This would also explain why it is the title found in the Talmud—in context of the transmission of the Torah. But I believe that he earned his title of *rabbeinu*, not because of his role as teacher but primarily because of the way he taught; not his classroom management or pedagogical technique, but his attitude towards his students...his belief in his students...הנוך לנער על פי דרכו...training the students within their natural proclivities and character traits—**working with them, not against them**...and seeing them all as his children... taking full responsibility for them.

במדבר פרק ג פסוק א (פרשת במדבר) וְאֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדֹת אַהֲרֹן וּמִנְשֵׁה בַיּוֹם דִּבֶּר יְקֹנֵק אֶת־מִנְשֵׁה בְּהַר סִינַי:

“*These are the children of Aharon and Moshe on the day that G-d spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai.* The Torah goes on to mention only the names of Aharon’s sons — Nadav, the firstborn, Avihu, Elazar and Isamar.

רש"י במדבר (ג: א) ואלה תולדת אהרן ומשה - ואינו מזכיר אלא בני אהרן. ונקראו תולדות משה, לפי שלמדן תורה.

In commenting on the words “These are the children of Aharon and Moshe,” **Rashi** explains that Aharon’s children are also called Moshe’s children, because he taught them Torah. It is as if they were his biological children. But I believe here, as well, it was not just that he taught them—it was how he taught them. When a child is “yours,” you never give up on them—that is the mark of a dedicated teacher.

The greatest example of this master educator’s approach is in this week’s Parsha. After the sin of the *egel*, Hashem tells Moshe that the Jewish people should be destroyed because they are a stubborn people-- עם קשה עורף. He promises Moshe that He will create a new nation to lead and to teach. Moshe refuses to desert them, stating that, despite their shortcomings, he is binding his own fate to the fate of the nation, as they are like his children.

שמות פרק לב פסוק לב (פרשת כי תשא)(לב) ועתה אם תשׁא חטאתם ואם־לאִין מְחַנֵּי נָא מִסִּפְרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ:

Now, if You will forgive their sin [well and good]; but if not, erase me from the record which You have written!

But there is a subtle example of Moshe’s dedication to the Jewish people. Hashem mentions to Moshe **three times** that the character trait that led the Jewish people to worship the *egel* was stubbornness—an inability to get past their previous mode of worship—idolatry—and an inability to change and adapt to the new reality, now dictated by their faith in Hashem.

שמות פרק לב

(ט) ויאמר ה' אל משה ראיתי את העם הזה והנה עם קשה ערף הוא:

Hashem further said to Moshe, “I see that this is a **stiffnecked people**.

(י) ועתה הניחה לי ויחר אפי בהם ואכלם ואעשה אותך לגוי גדול:

שמות פרק לג

(ב) ושלחתי לפניך מלאך וגרשתי את הכנעני האמרי והחתי והפרזי החוי והיבוסי:

(ג) אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש כי לא אעלה בקרבך כי עם קשה ערף אתה פן אכלך בדרך:

a land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go in your midst, since you are a **stiffnecked people**, lest I destroy you on the way.”

(ה) ויאמר ה' אל משה אמר אל בני ישראל אתם עם קשה ערף רגע אחד אעלה בקרבך וכליתך ועתה הורד עדיך מעליך ואדעה מה אעשה לך:

Hashem said to Moshe, “Say to the Israelite people, ‘**You are a stiffnecked people**. If I were to go in your midst for one moment, I would destroy you. Now, then, leave off your finery, and I will consider what to do to you’”.

We would think that Moshe would either accept Hashem’s offer to make a new nation, or he would defend the people by mentioning their wonderful characteristics—their *emunah* in following God into the wilderness, or their *zechus avos*.

Yet, in an interesting twist, Moshe Rabbeinu, while defending the Jewish people, does not dispute Hashem’s assessment that they are stubborn. Not only does he agree that they are stubborn. But, paradoxically, he tells Hashem that is why they should be forgiven.

שמות פרק לד שמות פרק לד (ט) ויאמר אם נא מצאתי חן בעיניך אדני ילך נא אדני בקרבנו כי עם קשה ערף הוא וסלחת לעוננו ולחטאתנו ונחלתנו:

He [Moshe] said “If I have gained Your favor, O my lord, pray, let my lord go in our midst, **because this is a stiffnecked people**. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own!”

Jewish stubbornness is God’s argument to destroy them. How is Moshe now using it as a defense?

The great **Ksav Sofer** ask this question, stating that this should hurt their case, not help them!

יֵלֶךְ נֹא ה' זְקָרְנוּ כִּי עִם קֶסֶם עֹרֵף הוּא. לֵ"ל מִה זֶה נִחְיֵי עִם כִּי עִם קֶסֶם
 עֹרֵף הוּא הֵא זֶה מְעֹרֵר סֵדִין יוֹחֵר, וְלַעֲיֵל אֲמַר ד' לְמַעַם רִאִי חַת הַעַם וְסִנֵּה
 קֶסֶם עֹרֵף הוּא וְעִי' רִמְזָן, וְכֵ"ל לִיִּטֵּז כ"ז כְּסִלּוֹמֵר כִּי ה' אֲמַר לְמַעַם וְסִנֵּה רִאִי חַת

I would like to share a comment of **Rav Yitzchak Nissenbaum**, a great *talmid chacham* and Religious Zionist leader from the last century. I believe his life story sheds some light on his comment about our question. Rabbi Nissenbaum studied at the great Volozhin Yeshiva. In 1916, Rabbi Nissenbaum attended the first convention of the Zionist Federation in Poland and was a member of its central committee. He encouraged the *chalutzim* (pioneers) to move to Israel, and he founded an organization that offered them financial aid. He was willing to work with the secular Zionists to help realize the dream of a Jewish state—focusing on their strengths and fiery passion for a common cause. Unfortunately, the life of this great religious Zionist leader was cut short. He was murdered in the Warsaw ghetto, holding onto his convictions and commitment to the Jewish people.

Rav Nissenbaum explained Moshe's defense as follows: *"They are indeed an obstinate people. When they have everything to thank You for, they complain. Mere weeks after hearing Your voice they make a golden calf. But just as now they are stiff-necked in their disobedience, so one day they will be equally stiff-necked in their loyalty. ... Obstinate in their disbelief during much of the biblical era, they became obstinate in their belief ever afterward. ... At times, Jews found it hard to bow down to G-d – but they were certainly never willing to bow down to anything less."*

ר' חיים פלטיאל שמות (לד:ט) ד"א הזכיר זכותם כי עם קשה עורף לפשוט צוארם על יהוד השם.

Rav Chaim Paltiel, a 13th century Tosafist and Talmid of Mahara"m MiRottenberg in Germany, explains that Moshe was telling the Jews and Hashem—yes, the Jewish people made a mistake; yes, they are stubborn—but I have confidence that they can use this מידה, constructively. They can also direct that very character trait that led them to the *egel*...if only You give them a chance, they will prove to be equally stubborn about their *emunah* in Hashem.

This is actually first expressed in an enigmatic Medrash

שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשה מב סימן ט אתה סבור שהיא לגנאי ואינו אלא לשבחן או יהודי או צלוב.

Throughout the ages, Jews were willing to die *al kiddush Hashem*...

This is Moshe's message to Hashem—the Jews' trademark stubbornness can be used for the positive—to cling to Hashem, to their values, to their heritage.

We can imagine this statement being written during the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, or the Warsaw ghetto...or in the difficult times that preceded it. When viewed from that perspective, it becomes even more poignant and relevant. The image of the thousands of Jews who remained true to their faith through most difficult of times brings this comment to life.

We just read the megillah about Mordechai who was called ומרדכי היהודי, איש יהודי, a Yehudi. The *targum sheni* explains that he was called איש יהודי because he he feared only sin...nothing else. He was נקרא יהודי...of singular mind...only caring about the will of Hashem.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky writes:

שזו מהותו של היהודי כהרבהם אבינו הראושנין אברם העברי כל העולם כלו מעבר אחד והוא מעבר אחד...

Like Avraham Avinu, he was not afraid to stand up for truth, even if it meant standing alone...a true קשה עורף in his belief and conviction.

And back to Moshe Rabbeinu, only a dedicated teacher—who sees each student like his own child—has the patience and faith to see the possibility of good in *midos* which not everyone would see as complimentary...which can get in their own way, and make them difficult to teach and love...and help his students develop their potential.

Moshe was also conveying a most profound lesson for all teachers and for all parents--that character traits are not meant to be crushed or stifled—they need to be directed and channeled.

This is a lesson that **Shlomo Hamelech** would write about centuries later—

משלי פרק כב:ח:יג: לנער על־פי דרכו גם כִּי־יִקְוֶה לֹא־יִסוּר מִמֶּנּוּ:

Educate a child according to his or her own way...

Don't try to change people—don't spend your time wishing you or your students or children had different qualities. Take the qualities you have been given and develop them—both those that seem to be strengths and those that are perceived as weaknesses...but work with what you have.

The **Vilna Gaon** in his commentary on that pasuk in Mishlei (22:8) writes that a person's natural inclinations—whatever they are-- can be used for good. He cites the **Gemara in Shabbos 156a** that states that one was born under the astrological sign of Mars has a natural proclivity towards blood. Rav Ashi comments in that statement--it is up to that person to decide if he will become a murderous bandit, or if he will use that natural drive to become a shochet, a mohel, or a surgeon.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קנו עמוד א האי מאן דבמאדים יהי גבר אשיד דמא. אמר רב אשי: אי אומנא, אי גנבא, אי טבחא, אי מוהלא.

A good leader doesn't dream about having easier people to lead...He appreciates the qualities and potential in front of him. He directs everyone to maximize their own individual potential...

Rav Kook writes that all character traits are themselves neither bad nor good, they are neutral. A person is born with certain neutral personality traits and he can decide how he wants to utilize them.

Moshe Rabbeinu's story teaches that we should understand ourselves, our strengths, talents, and abilities and try to work with what we have. We can try to refine to direct our inclinations...but we should not try to be something we are not. We should not wish that we had different abilities, nor wish that we were living in a different time or place.

Erich Fromm writes (in his philosophical work *The Art of Loving*) "*Education is identical with helping the child realize his potentialities. The opposite of education is manipulation, which is based on the absence of faith in the growth of potentialities and the assertion that a child will be right only if the adults put into him what is desirable and suppress what seems to be undesirable.*"

This is the most important quality of a teacher and, I believe, it was this philosophy that earned Moshe the title of **Rabbeinu**. Beyond molding intellect, a teacher's job is to develop character. And a great teacher understands that character is not meant to be broken—it is meant to be developed and channeled towards positive expression and manifestation. Moshe Rabbeinu teaches all of us how to look at ourselves--to love ourselves; to believe in ourselves; to be comfortable with who we are—and to develop our own character and not try to be someone else. May we learn this timeless lesson, in terms of our own character, and how we view our lives—to elevate our character and **all** our experiences—to channel our character traits and all our experiences towards *avodas Hashem*...and may we soon merit the day when God's glory will illuminate the world—and we all will see the good in everyone...amen.