

BE A MAN, BE A LEADER

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What exactly did G-d see in Moses?

The Refusal of Moses

People always complain that there is a lack of leadership in this day and age. Is there someone that you can think of that is truly a leader?

What are the criteria for a true leader?

Let's see what G-d looks for in a leader. In this week's parsha G-d finds a leader for his people. Moses. However, Moses seems to be uninterested in the job. We all know the story:

G-d reveals himself to Moses in the Burning Bush and requests that he go to Pharaoh and tell him to let the Jewish people out of Egypt. This is a tremendous opportunity! The Jews had been suffering for decades under the harsh rule of the Egyptians. Now, the prayers of the Jewish people have been heard and G-d is beginning the process of their redemption. He calls on no one else but Moses yet Moses declines the offer. They bartered and bargained for seven days straight!

Moses said, "Of what importance am I that I should go speak to Pharaoh?"

G-d responds, "It's not due to your importance that you will be heard. It's My greatness that will bring you success."

But Moses tries again. "When I come to the Jewish people and tell them that G-d has answered their prayers they will ask me, 'Where was he until now?' What will I tell them?"

G-d replies, "Tell them: *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, I was with them in their pain. When they suffered I suffered right along with them."

Still Moses tries again. "They won't believe me. They'll say I'm making it up."

So G-d gives Moses the three signs with which to prove that he is truly a

messenger from G-d.

Moses still does not give in. He says, "But I am not a man of words, I stutter."

G-d answers, "Who gave you your mouth in the first place? Me. So when you need it to do My bidding it will work fine."

Finally Moses cuts to the chase. "Send somebody else," he says. "Send whoever you want just let me be!"

But G-d doesn't take no for an answer.

Now, why in fact did Moses refuse to go on such an important mission for G-d, to redeem the Jewish people - whom he loved very much? Why was he hesitating? After the Jews had suffered such a long and bitter slavery he should have jumped at the opportunity and had the Jews out by sundown if he could! Why did he simply refuse to do that for his people?

Rashi puts it simply. "Moses did all of this because he did not want to take away from his brother Aaron's honor for Aaron was older than he and he was the nation's prophet." Moses adamantly wanted that G-d choose Aaron as the leader and not him.

It is only when G-d insists that Aaron would be proud of Moses and not jealous or hurt by his rise to glory that Moses agreed to go to Egypt to free the Jews.

Why Was He Chosen

This raises another question:

Why did G-d choose Moses over Aaron for the leading position? First of all, Aaron was the older of the two. Secondly and most importantly, Moses hadn't been in Egypt for over forty years (some even say it was more like sixty years) and, having grown up in Pharaoh's own palace he had never in his life tasted the hardships of their slavery. Aaron on the other hand, had stayed in Egypt throughout the entire slavery. It was his voice that offered encouragement and hope to the downtrodden Jewish people. He had been their leader and prophet in Egypt. In fact, he was now prophesizing that G-d had heard their prayers and that their suffering was almost over! And the people trusted him and loved him for that! They loved him for all of

it!

But now, G-d wants Moses, Johnny-come-lately, who hasn't seen his brothers in years, and the people are supposed to trust this total stranger?

Moses protested to G-d and said, "Even before I could stand on my own Aaron was the prophet of the people in Egypt. Now you want me to encroach upon my brother's territory?!"

Now these are all valid points. Aaron did seem to be the better suited of the two for the job. So why did G-d choose Moses over Aaron?

Perhaps the answer lies in the only story the Torah tells us about Moses' life in Egypt. The story goes like this:

There Was No Man

Moses has grown up and finally leaves the safety of the king's palace alone. He decides to go see the Jewish slaves, his brothers, probably for the first time in his life. He arrives at the construction site and sees that the Jews are being treated very harshly. As he is watching, an Egyptian guard begins to beat a Jewish man mercilessly. Moses looks around and sees that there isn't a man around. He rises up and smites the Egyptian guard, killing him. He quickly buries the body and flees from the scene of the "crime".

Pharaoh finds out that Moses the Jew, the adopted son of his princess, has killed an Egyptian. Pharaoh decrees that Moses must be killed. Moses has no choice but to leave Egypt.

The Midrash makes a very interesting point:

If Moses had checked and made sure that nobody was around when he killed the Egyptian how did Pharaoh find out about it?

In light of this the Midrash explains: Moses looked around and saw that there were in fact people all around there but there was "no Man"— none of them were "man enough" to do anything to put an end to the beating this poor Jew was getting! Out of sheer love for his Jewish brother he knowingly forfeited his own safety and attacked the guard.

Imagine if something like that would happen in, say, Germany for example. If a Jew would have attacked a German soldier he would have been shot on the spot!

Egypt was exactly the same. Jews were a subhuman class to be treated however the good Egyptian citizens pleased.

Knowing all of that Moses still attacked that Egyptian. Without a moment's hesitation he "threw away" his own life for the sake of one Jewish man — he hadn't even solved anything, he just stopped one beating...

But Moses didn't even take those things into consideration. To him one Jew's momentary comfort was worth his whole life.

And that is what G-d was looking for in the leader of his people. It's not enough to speak well or smile nicely to everyone. A leader must be willing to give his life for even a single member of his flock. This is Moses. This is a Leader.

What's the lesson for each of us?

Hillel the Great is quoted in *Pirkei Avos* as saying, "In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." Hillel is basically saying that we should be like Moses. If you come to a city and you look around and see that there is no one doing anything for the furtherance of Yiddishkeit, Hillel says: Don't wait for others to do it! Follow Moses' example, and take the initiative, be a leader, be Moses.