

Parshas Shemos 5772

A TALE OF TWO LEADERS

This week's *parshah* sees the emergence of two quite distinct communal heads: Pharaoh arises to lead his people in the brutal subjugation of B'nei Yisrael, and – *l'havdil* – Moshe Rabbeinu is Divinely appointed as the redeemer of the oppressed nation. The contradistinction between these two leaders could not be more pronounced. Aside from the glaring differences of Pharaoh's abject wickedness compared to Moshe's unsurpassed spiritual stature, we find a most telling contrast in the area of leadership and the level of concern exhibited for their respective followers.

TRUE COLORS

Of note is Pharaoh's reaction to the plagues. For example, during the plague of locusts, the land was completely devastated, stripped of basically all forms of crops and vegetation. With the entire country brought to its knees, Pharaoh summoned Moshe and begged him to end the plague. Yet how did he word his plea? "Entreat Hashem, your G-d, that He should remove... this death from **me**" (*Shemos 10:17*). At this critical moment in the midst of a national crisis, Pharaoh revealed himself to be concerned primarily with his own skin (*cf. Ta'am V'da'as, Shemos 8:24*).

In stark contrast is Moshe Rabbeinu's attitude towards his people when they were faced with impending doom. In response to the heinous communal sin of the Golden Calf, B'nei Yisrael were threatened with extermination. Hashem informed Moshe that He was ready to wipe out the Jewish people and to form a new and great nation from Moshe himself (*ibid. 32:10*). A self-centered megalomaniac such

as Pharaoh may have jumped at such an opportunity. Not so with Moshe. Not only did he decline, and not only did he beseech Hashem to forgive B'nei Yisrael, but he even asked for his own demise should his request remain unfulfilled (*ibid. v. 32, based on the meforshim [commentaries]*).

In fact, this has been the hallmark of the great men of Yisrael. Following Moshe's lead, they concern themselves with the welfare of their fellow Yidden – even to the detriment of their own personal interests. One such illustration takes place in the context of the *Ibbur hashanah*, the *halachic* process by which the calendar is adjusted through the inclusion of an additional lunar month.

CRASHING THE IBBUR

The Mishnah in Sanhedrin (1:2) records the number of participants necessary for the adjudication of this event:

עבור השנה, בשלישה, דברי רבי מאיר. רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר, בשלישה מתחילין, ובחמשה נושאין ונותנין, וגומרין בשבעה.

"*Ibbur hashanah* is presided over by three judges; this is the opinion of R' Meir. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: The process begins with three judges, after which a total of five judges debate the matter and the process is concluded through seven judges."

The Gemara (*Sanhedrin 10b-11a*) adds that these judges must be pre-designated as *Ibbur* participants from the preceding night. It relates an incident in which Rabban Gamliel summoned such a court, but in the morning discovered eight waiting judges instead of the requisite seven. "There is one amongst you here who is unauthorized. Whoever it is, should exit forthwith," he declared.

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Immediately, Shmuel Hakattan stood up and confessed to being the uninvited guest. The Gemara clarifies that, in fact, the offender was actually someone else; it was Shmuel Hakattan, however, who claimed responsibility, in order to spare the actual perpetrator from embarrassment.

Such behavior is the sign of a true leader, one who is actually invested in the welfare of the people. Pharaoh, in a tough situation, focused on his own welfare; Torah leaders, on the other hand, would readily suffer degradation in order to help their fellow man.

AIRING THE DIRTY LAUNDRY

The Ponovezher Rav serves as a more recent example of this lofty trait. One such illustration of his selfless desire to aid those in need – even at the cost of self-denigration – occurred when he dealt with a troubled marriage.


A married scholar once shared his troubles with the Ponovezher Rav. He complained that his wife could simply not keep house, and his home was in total disarray. The Rav encouraged the distraught husband to be more patient. Perhaps your wife simply needs more time to get things together, he espoused.

But when the scholar returned some time later, he had obviously reached the breaking point. “Rebbe, I can’t go on like this. The house is a total disaster. Please, prepare a *get* (bill of divorce)!” he exclaimed.

The Ponovezher Rav decided on the way to handle this crisis. “Alright,” he told the scholar. “Come to my house this evening, where we will produce the *get*.”

Upon arriving at his home, the Rav went straight to his Rebbetzin. “I have an unusual request to make of you,” he told her. “But I ask that you fulfill it no matter how bizarre and unappealing it may seem.” With his wife’s acquiescence, the Rav issued his instructions. “Please go to the kitchen. Take out all of the dirty dishes, and scatter them all over the place: the counters, the table, the floor, wherever. Then attack the laundry, and make sure it is strewn all over the house.”

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That evening, the irate husband appeared at the Rav’s house, fully expecting to walk out with a bill of divorce with which to present to his wife. He knocked on the door, but when it opened, he received quite a shock. His eyes beheld a most remarkable sight. There sat the Rav, poised to begin to compose the document; but he was surrounded by the most unbelievable mess he had witnessed in his life. Clothes, dishes, clutter punctuated every corner of the Rav’s abode.

The Rav looked up when he saw his supplicant. “Yes, are we ready to begin?” the Rav asked innocently.

The scholar replied with some hesitation. “Um... um... actually... maybe it’s not such a great idea after all,” he remarked.

“As you wish,” the Rav replied. And, as they say... they lived happily ever after.