

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Gedalyah *ben Ya'akov a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Don't Be So *Frum*

PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN 5778

A famous anecdote involving R' Moshe Feinstein contains much food for thought. As one of the foremost Torah sages in America, R' Moshe was kept busy on a constant basis, answering queries and otherwise shouldering the affairs of Klal Yisrael. This left him little private time to engage in his most beloved pursuit – the study of Torah. To accommodate this need, then, he would awaken at 3:00 in the morning each day. This was the only time he could find to learn without interruption, so he greatly cherished this aspect of his schedule.

One day, upon assessing his health, R' Moshe's doctor ordered him to discontinue this practice; no longer would he be able to rise at such an early hour. R' Moshe's immediate reaction, if somewhat amusing to us, is also quite telling. He exclaimed in consternation: "Now I'll forever remain an *am-ha'aretz* (ignoramus)!"

There is actually a great lesson in this reaction, one which, as we shall see, is echoed in the *parshah*.

Enough

The *parshah* begins with Moshe Rabbeinu recounting his efforts at beseeching Hashem. The Heavenly decree had been issued barring Moshe's entry into Eretz Yisrael; as such, he implored Hashem to rescind the mandate. But his request was denied, as the *passuk* states: וַיֹּאמֶר ד' אֵלַי רַב־לֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּסָף דָּבַר אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדַבַּר הַזֶּה – "And Hashem said to me: 'It is enough for you! Do not continue speaking to Me anymore concerning this matter'" (*Devarim 3:26*).

Now, Chazal reveal that there was an element of *middah k'negged middah* – measure for measure – contained in this denial. In turning down his request, Hashem employed the phrase "*rav lach* – it is enough for you." As it turns out, this is the very same phrase Moshe himself used on a different occasion – during the encounter with Korach. At the time, Moshe was confronted by Korach and his rebellious band, who objected to the authority exercised by Moshe and his brother, Aharon. Greatly dismayed by the developments, Moshe addressed the assemblage by stating: וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי רַב־לֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּסָף דָּבַר אֵלַי עוֹד בְּדַבַּר הַזֶּה – "It is enough for you, O sons of Levi!" (*Bamidbar 16:7*). And so, the Midrash draws the parallel: "Hashem said to Moshe: 'You struck with a stick; and with the very object with which you struck, you yourself shall be stricken. You said: *It is enough for you (O sons of Levi)*; and so you must hear (yourself being told): *It is enough for you*'" (*Bamidbar Rabbah 18:18*).

At first glance, the intent of the *medrash* is somewhat difficult to grasp. True, the phraseology is the same; but what exactly was wrong with Moshe speaking as he did? After all, the perpetrators in the Korach episode were clearly in the wrong, as evidenced by the dramatic and tragic end the rebels faced: most were swallowed up into the ground, while the 250 censor-bearers were burned alive. They had contested the authority of Moshe and sought to wrest control of the priesthood; wasn't Moshe correct in chastising them and pointing out that, as members of the tribe of Levi, they had already acquired favored status in the Divine service? It would seem that exclaiming "*rav lachem*" was in fact an accurate and appropriate comment! Why, then, did he need to be "stricken" with a punishment of corresponding nature?

Always on the Rise

R' Yeruchem Olshin explains that the matter can only be clarified in light of a proper understanding of the episode of Korach's company. In his commentary on the *parshah*, the Shelah Hakaddosh draws a distinction between the different elements involved in the dispute. There were some participants, such as Dasan and Aviram, who had truly nefarious motives and were interested only in fomenting dissent. But there was another group – the 250 men – whose intentions were more pristine. They took action in an improper manner, and for that they were punished. But they were not just driven by a base desire for glory; in their hearts, they truly wished to come closer to Hashem and serve Him in an elevated manner. Thus, the Torah refers to them as “*chata'im b'nafshosam* – sinners with their souls” (*Bamidbar 17:3*), for their sin actually had a certain uplifted and spiritual quality to it.

In any event, it was for this reason that Moshe was faulted, to some extent, for saying what he said. By stating “It is enough for you,” he was effectively delivering a message that would stifle their desire for spiritual growth. This desire, in and of itself, is actually a positive and laudable element. Instead, he should have instructed them how to better express and channel their innate yearning for closeness with Hashem, while encouraging their pristine sentiments. Thus, it truly was “measure for measure” when Moshe himself was told: “*Rav lach.*” He longed to enter Eretz Yisrael for the same reason: the immense spiritual opportunities it afforded. But as he had once stifled such longings in others, he, too, was told: “Enough.”

The lesson that emerges is that a Yid should indeed be constantly looking to grow ever more. In fact, this is the hallmark of the righteous figures of Yisrael; no matter what level they reached, they constantly yearned to become greater still.

And as we have seen, R' Moshe Feinstein exemplified this trait. Thus, when deprived of his early morning learning session, he was greatly disturbed. He still wished to become an even greater *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) than he already was – no matter that he was one of the most accomplished sages of our lifetimes.

According to Rabbeinu Yonah, this idea is expressed in the well-known Mishnah (*Avos 2:5*):
במקום שאין אנשים השתדל להיות איש.

“In a place where there are no men – strive to be a man.”

This statement is conventionally taken to mean that one should not be discouraged by the spiritual paucity of his surroundings. On the contrary; even if no one around you conducts himself appropriately, you yourself should strive to be the lone loyal servant, if need be. But the Rabbeinu Yonah interprets this mishnah as reflecting the notion stated above. The mishnah may even be speaking of a very ideal situation, in which the surroundings are pristine; in fact, it is addressing the most righteous figure of the generation. In a place where there are no individuals whose stature equals your own – you should still strive to become an even greater *ish*.

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