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This Above All  
By Rabbi Joshua (truthfully known as The Hoffer) Hoffman

This week's parsha introduces us to Moshe - beginning with the circumstances relating to his birth, continuing through his childhood in Pharaoh's court and reaching a crescendo with his choice as the man who would lead the children of Israel out of their exile in Egypt. From this parsha until the culmination of the Torah in parshas Vezos Haberacha, Moshe remains the central character and the focus of attention. He is - above all - the man who delivers the Torah to the nation and teaches them its precepts and ideals. This aspect of Moshe's mission is hinted to in the account of his appointment as the nation's leader. In accordance with Rashi's interpretation of the exchange, Moshe asked God why the nation deserved to be liberated from Egypt. God responded, "When you take the nation out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain" (Shemos, 3, 13). Thus, the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt was predicated upon their eventual acceptance of the Torah, which Moshe would teach them. Central to Moshe's leadership position, then, was his role as the one who would teach Torah to the nation. It would, therefore, be instructive to look for those character traits of Moshe that made him worthy of this aspect of his leadership role in particular.

A well-known midrash relates that when Moshe was acting as a shepherd, one of the sheep got separated from the flock. Moshe chased after it and found it at a pond, drinking water. He felt sorry for the thirsty animal, let it drink it's fill, and then picked it up and carried it back to the rest of the flock. This caring attitude towards his flock, the midrash says, was the characteristic that made him worthy, in God's eyes, of leading the Jewish nation out of Egypt. Although the midrash relates this incident to Moshe's choice as leader in general, I believe it can relate specifically to his being chosen as Torah-teacher, as well. The rabbis tell us that the Torah begins with an act of kindness, when God makes clothing for Adam and Eve, and ends with an act of kindness, when He buries Moshe. We thus see, they conclude, that the Torah consists entirely of kindness. The man who was to teach the Torah to the Jewish nation, then, had to be someone whose personal life reflected the character trait of kindness, and Moshe proved himself to be such a person.

Moshe's caring attitude can be seen already in his early youth, when he was still in Pharaoh's house. The Torah relates that, after Moshe grew up, he went out to his brothers and he saw their burdens. He then saw an Egyptian beating one of his brethren, and killed the Egyptian in order to save the slave's life. (Shemos 2:11-12). Rashi explains that he focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them. Rabbi Henoch Leibovits, in his work Chidushei Lev, on this parsha, cites the Maharal who explains that Rashi said this because otherwise, the verse seems superfluous. Moshe must have seen these burdens many times before. What, then, was unique about is seeing these burdens on this occasion that led him to action? The answer, as provided by Rashi, is that he now looked deeper into the situation, and began to care about his brothers' plight. Rashi's comments teach us, observes Rabbi Leibovits, that a person can see suffering occur before his eyes but never realize it, unless he looks at it in a caring way and seeks to understand the real situation. The ability to bestow kindness on others often requires the use of penetrating eyes, just as a

proper view of Torah requires the use of a penetrating mind, seeing beneath the surface. Moshe's ability to look at events and the plight of others, in this way, made him worthy of being the one who would teach Torah, which is grounded in kindness, to his people.

Moshe's efforts to save the life of the slave being beaten by the Egyptian present us with another characteristic of his that qualified him to teach Torah. Rabbi Eliyohu Meir Bloch points out, in his commentary Peninei Da'as, that Moshe, as an important member of the royal house, was in a position to lobby politically for the rights of the slaves. By killing the Egyptian taskmaster and having to flee for his life, he effectively killed his chance to have any political clout. This is something he must have realized would happen before he acted. Still, his innate sense of justice would not allow him to stand idly by and watch as this act of cruelty took place. While standing by may have allowed him to preserve a position that would allow him to improve the condition of his brothers considerably, he would have lost his own self had he done so. Moshe felt he had to be true to himself, to his sense of justice, and, if we may add to Rabbi Bloch's comments, to his sense of kindness and caring. Therefore, he immediately did all he could to alleviate the suffering of the persecuted slave. Moshe's sense of being true to himself, to his inner essence, ultimately made him the one who was to teach the Torah, which is characterized as truth. In the words of the well known saying, "Moshe is true and his Torah is true," reflecting the nature of the divine author of the Torah, whose seal, as the rabbis tell us, is truth.

Note-Please address all correspondence to the author (Rabbi Hoffman) to JoshHoff @ AOL.com.

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