

## **“He (Moshe) carried out Hashem’s justice and His ordinances with Yisrael.” (33:21)**

In *Pirkei Avos*, 5:18, *Chazal* teach us, “Whoever makes a multitude meritorious; no sin shall come through him...” Moshe *Rabbeinu* attained virtue and brought the multitude to virtue; therefore, the merit of the multitude is attributed to him, as it is stated, “He carried out Hashem’s justice and His ordinances with *Yisrael*.” We live in a complex world, in an environment that is not necessarily conducive to spiritual growth. While whether or not to sin consciously is based upon individual discretion, it is often difficult to avoid an inadvertent sin. When we act in haste without forethought, we might suffer unfortunate consequences. A thoughtless word can sometimes cut cruelly, producing severe repercussions. Indeed, even an innocuous statement can be misconstrued, so that it influences others negatively.

The *Mishnah* conveys to us its prescription for protection against sin: lead others to virtue and righteousness; be concerned with the spiritual welfare of others; and you will earn Hashem’s special concern. Circumstances will be so ordained that the *mezakeh es ho’rabim* will not lead others astray by his needless word or action. His hand will not cause others to sin. *Chazal* explain that one who leads others to merit will never be the cause of transgression, because it would cast him in a negative light to his disciples — the beneficiaries of his good work should merit *Olam Haba*, the eternal merit, and he should merit perdition. His destiny remains eternally linked with that of his beneficiaries.

The *Mishnah* cites Moshe *Rabbeinu* as an example of the *mezakeh es horabim*. He was a master at leadership, bringing his people to spiritual and moral growth through forty years of difficulty. Never did he flinch or falter. How did he do it? His portrait in *Midrashic* literature indicates one sterling quality as the primary factor in his success: he was able to bear the people patiently to the utmost limits of human endurance. They turned against him time and again out of fear, anxiety and hysteria. Their suspicions, resentments and other critiques were the outgrowth of hundreds of years of cruel servitude. Their complaints against Moshe were beyond ludicrous.

Yet, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the consummate leader, the quintessential *manhig Yisrael*, rarely retorted with impatience or anger. Moshe serves as the paradigm for all leaders. Who today is not the subject of petty, carping criticism? The frustration and irritation which a leader experiences certainly takes its toll. Yet, we are not to condemn, but rather to defend our constituents, realizing that they are human and, therefore, subject to human frailties.

While Moshe did entreat Hashem to overlook *Klal Yisrael’s* behavior, when he spoke to them, it was altogether different. He was stern and demanding, exacting and unrelenting. He taught them *middos*, character refinement; he imbued them with hope and reverence. He also taught them the *Torah*. His teachings were tempered with love, even when he upbraided them for their stubbornness and insolence and took them to task for their ingratitude. Yes, he was demanding,

but he was also thoughtful. He did not merely seek to discipline; rather, his goal was to inculcate values, inspire virtues, and imbue their lives with spiritual meaning.

This principle holds true for every principal, teacher and guide. Teaching, mentoring, instructing are all terms referring to a role in preparing the next generation. It is not easy, but then nothing of value comes without effort. It can, at times, be demeaning, frustrating, thankless to name just a few of the “negatives.” There is no endeavor, however, that provides greater and more enduring satisfaction than the knowledge that we have played a role in shaping the life of another Jew. We might not receive our “thanks” in This World, but we will receive our appreciation with the ultimate reward from Hashem. We will be repaid not only for those whom we have helped directly, but we will also receive reward for all those in generations yet to come who will learn *Torah* or become finer Jews as a result of our toil. Indeed, to teach is to achieve immortality.

We have to add one more point. Immortality is achieved when one teaches that way. Let me explain with the following story: *Horav Shlomo Heiman, z.l.*, the distinguished *Rosh HaYeshivah* of *Torah Vodaath*, was an individual of incredible depth and breadth. His *shiurim*, lectures, were brilliant masterpieces which were presented in a manner unlike many of his peers. When he taught, the *shiur* came alive; in fact, the room came alive as he would shout with almost breathless ecstasy as he explained the words of *Chazal* and their commentaries. His eyes gleamed, his hands waved to and fro, while his entire body gyrated as he expounded on *Chazal*. When the *shiur* was over, *Rav Shlomo* would collapse from the physical exertion.

One particular cold, snowy day in the early 1940's, New York was blanketed with snow. Only four *talmidim*, students, showed up for *shiur*. Undaunted, *Rav Shlomo* delivered his *shiur* as if the room were packed with hundreds of students. Sweat rolled down his face as he passionately presented the finer points of Jewish law to the four skeptical students. As he paused to catch his breath, one of the four asked, “*Rebbe*, please, why are you getting so worked up? There are only four of us!”

*Rav Shlomo* looked back at the student and said, “You think that I am only giving a *shiur* to four students? You are not the only ones. I am giving this class to hundreds and hundreds of students. I am teaching you, your students, your students’ students, and so on!”

In order to imbue generations, the lecture must be taught in such a manner. *Rav Shlomo* did not speak just to the present – he spoke to the future – to a generation yet unborn. When one works with the future in mind, his preparation takes on a whole new meaning. The *Chafetz Chaim*’s son, *Rav Leib, z.l.*, once asked his father if he really thought that the future readers of his magnum opus, the *Mishnah Berurah*, would ever have an inkling of the indescribable effort that he had expended in producing this masterpiece. Every *halachah*, every *Chazal*, every source -- *Rishon*, *Acharon*, anywhere in *Talmudic* and *Halachic* literature -- was painstakingly checked and rechecked. The *Chafetz Chaim* responded that the only reason future generations would even be able to read the *halachos* with lucidity and accuracy is that he had expended so much time in

ensuring the verity and intelligibility of the *sefer*. The *Chafetz Chaim* wrote for the future. Indeed, everything we do should be able to withstand the test of time.