

Moshe replied to Hashem... I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, not since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to your servant. (4:10)

Rashi notes that this was the seventh day of Moshe *Rabbeinu's* dialogue with Hashem. Moshe's reluctance to assume the leadership of *Klal Yisrael* was because he did not want to arrogate himself over his older brother, Aharon, who was a *Navi*, Prophet, and the present leader of the people. The *Yalkut Shimoni* quotes Moshe, "Until I stood here, my brother, Aharon, had been prophesizing for the last eighty years. Now I should come into his perimeter? I should be his adversary and cause him pain?" Hashem replied, "You will neither be his adversary, nor will you cause him pain. Indeed, Aharon will be overjoyed with your acceptance."

Chazal teach us that Moshe was concerned about Aharon's feelings. Indeed, if Hashem would not have assuaged his concerns, telling him that Aharon was in agreement, Moshe would not have accepted the nation's leadership – and he would have been justified! This is mind-boggling! An entire nation is enslaved. Hashem "asks" Moshe to take the reins of leadership, to play a role in the people's liberation, and Moshe politely refuses, because he does not want to hurt his older brother's feelings – and he is warranted in doing so! This teaches us the overriding significance of another Jew's feelings. *Halachah* demands that we be cognizant of our fellow's feelings. We may do nothing to impinge on another person's sensitivities. This applies even if we are in the course of executing a *mitzvah* – even one as lofty as saving the Jewish nation from bondage! Is this reasonable? Should one Jew's feelings dominate over a *mitzvah*, over saving the Jewish nation?

While there is no question that a Jew's emotions play a critical role in whatever endeavor he undertakes, it is the *halachah* that cannot be accommodated, repealed in any way. *Halachah* is the foundation of our People. It is the very discipline that maintains our commitment to Hashem. *Halachah* does not brook any compromise. To undermine *halachah* is to impugn the integrity of our relationship with Hashem.

In his commentary to the *pasuk* (in *Bircas Yaakov*, the blessings of Yaakov *Avinu*, prior to his death), *Lo yassur shevet miYehudah*, "The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah" (*Bereishis* 49:10), *Ramban* writes: "This blessing grants monarchy over the Jewish nation to the tribe of Yehudah – under all circumstances. No one is to infringe upon their leadership." He observes: "This was the reason for the punishment of the *Chashmonaim* who ruled during the Second Temple. Despite their righteousness, and the fact that without them Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish People, they were punished." The monarchy must remain in the hands of *Shevet Yehudah*.

Clearly, these *chasidei Elyon*, exalted pious ones, acted *l'shem Shomayim*, for Heaven's sake. They had no ulterior motives. Apparently, if they undertook to lead, it was because there was no one else suitable for the position. What else should they have done? Nonetheless,

they were punished. They transgressed a *halachah*. Monarchy belongs to Yehudah. They should have found another way to save the nation, rather than assuming its monarchy. Once again, we see that if the intended *mitzvah* impinges upon someone's sensitivities, if it does not consummately adhere to *halachic* standards, it is no longer a *mitzvah*. Does not the end, however, justify the means? Does not an entire nation's Torah study and *mitzvah* observance merit some leniency? The following Torah thought from the **Brisker Rav, zl**, cited by *Sichah Naeh*, as being cited by the *Tolner Rebbe, Shlita*, in *Heimah Yanchuni*, should give us deeper insight, as well as buttress the idea that a *mitzvah* must be carried out in its purest form without any taint – regardless of its nature or validity.

In the *Talmud Bava Metzia* 85b, *Chazal* relate that Eliyahu *HaNavi* would frequent the *Mesivta* of *Rebbi*. One *Rosh Chodesh*, Eliyahu arrived late. *Rebbi* asked, "What is the reason Master is late?" Eliyahu replied that he had been unusually preoccupied: "By the time I awoke Avraham [*Avinu*] (the state of death experienced by the righteous is considered as merely a slumber. Thus, if they are awakened, they must first wash their hands prior to praying. Obviously, this passage of *Talmud* is replete with esoteric meaning and implication) and washed his hands and prayed, and did the same for Yitzchak [*Avinu*] and Yaakov [*Avinu*], it was already late." *Chazal* explain that Eliyahu did not wake them all up at once, because if all three Patriarchs had prayed at once, their prayer would have had such efficacy that they would have caused *Moshiach* to come before his proper time. *Rebbi* then asked Eliyahu, "Is there anyone alive in this world whose prayer is as effective?" Eliyahu replied, "Yes, there are Rabbi Chiya and his sons." *Rebbi* decreed a fast, and he placed Rabbi Chiya and his sons before the *Amud*, Lectern. This is in following with the *halachah* that on a public fast day, three people are placed before the *Amud*. (This fast day was "arranged" by *Rebbi* as an excuse to bring Rabbi Chiya and his sons together in prayer.)

During *Chazaras Ha'Shatz*, repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrai*, when Rabbi Chiya said *Mashiv ha'ruach*, "He makes the wind blow," a wind blew. When he said, *Morid ha'geshem*, "He brings down the rain" rain descended. As he was about to say *Mechayeh ha'meisim*, "He restores life to the dead," the world suddenly shook. *Chazal* continue that Heaven prevented Rabbi Chiya from going further. *Tosfos* questions the use of Rabbi Chiya as *Shliach Tzibur*, to lead the prayer service. It has been decided that one whose articulation of certain Hebrew words is deficient should not lead the service. Therefore, people who lived in Haifa or Bais Shaan, who did not distinguish between the sounds of an *aleph* and *ayin* were not sent up to be *chazzan*. If so, why was *Rav* Chiya permitted to lead the service? Apparently, he did not distinguish between the sounds of a *hay* and a *ches*. They reply that this applies only in the event that another *chazzan* is available to lead the service. If no one else can lead, we use whomever we can get. Rabbi Chiya was unique in that no one else had the ability to achieve his exalted level of prayer. He was in a league all by himself.

The *Brisker Rav* has difficulty with *Tosfos'* question. This was a one-time opportunity, unprecedented in history, to bring about the advent of the Final Redemption. Is this a time to concern ourselves if the *chazzan* properly pronounces the *hay*? This teaches us, explains the

Brisker Rav, that if the action we are about to take does not absolutely one-hundred percent conform with *halachah*, it is not done – even if this means delaying the Final Redemption for thousands of years! *Halachah* may neither be pushed aside, nor belittled. It is our lifeline, our strongest sense of discipline, and our connection with the Divine.

In today's highly-technological society, concern for the feelings of our fellow is not at a premium. We move at a faster pace and have less time for face-to-face, person-to-person relationships. We say "good morning" to thirty people at one time via text, and we neither offer a smile, nor care to receive one in return. There was a time when people did concern themselves with the feelings of others. While this may sound cynical, it is not meant to be. It is, regrettably, the truth. I had the good fortune to read the following two inspirational stories in Rabbi Yisrael Besser's *Warmed by the Fire*. While the stories took place involving *gedolei Yisrael*, I think it was their attitude and concern for others that elevated their *gadol* status even more.

It was *Purim* evening in the *Yeshivah Gedolah* of Montreal. In anticipation of the many times that Haman's name would be publicly read from the *Megillah*, the *bachurim*, students, hid a tape recorder that made numerous strange noises in the ceiling. Each time the name of Haman was read, they would activate it, to the hilarious laughter of all the students. The *Rosh Yeshivah*, **Horav Mordechai Weinberg, zl**, was visibly upset. He halted the *Megillah* reading, concerned lest he miss hearing the reading of a word, and sought out the source of the strange noises.

The *Rosh Yeshivah's* agitation continued, even after the *Megillah* reading had concluded. Later, someone asked him why he had been so anxious; after all, it had only been a joke. The *Rosh Yeshivah's* response teaches us volumes about his concern for a fellow Jew: "To you, perhaps it was a joke – a joke that would delay the reading of the *Megillah*. To *Reb Mordche* (an elderly *misparallel*, worshipper, in the *yeshivah*, who was also a Holocaust survivor), who does not allow himself to sit down in a *bais ha'medrash* and who has been fasting all day because it is *Taanis Esther*, Fast of Esther, it is not so funny. To him, your five minutes of laughter may not be so funny. To him, five minutes may be critical. And you wonder why I am upset!"

The second episode occurred concerning **Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl**, during one of his brilliant *shiurim*, lectures. *Rav Shach's shiur* was an experience to behold, as hundreds of students would sit there spellbound, while they observed the unfolding of the extraordinary *gaon's* thought process. His depth was without peer, the fruits of diligence, perseverance and sheer brilliance. One day, as the *Rosh Yeshivah* was giving the *shiur*, he paused in mid-sentence, as if trying to recall something. The room was still – not a sound was uttered – nobody moved. *Rav Shach* was thinking. He said, "I know that *Rav Akiva Eiger* discussed this issue someplace, but, for some reason, I cannot seem to pinpoint it. Is there anyone here who knows where *Rav Akiva Eiger* discusses this subject?"

Immediately, everyone began to speak. The most distinguished students all searched their minds, looking for the elusive commentary of *Rav Akiva Eiger* – which the *Rosh Yeshivah* did not know!

There was no resolution. Suddenly, from the back row, a *talmid*, student, walked up to the lectern carrying in his hand a *Teshuvah* Rav Akiva Eiger, and, with great confidence, presented it to Rav Shach. Voila! The *Rosh Yeshivah*'s eyes flashed with delight. "Reuven," albeit a good student, was not the most distinguished – but the smile that Rav Shach gave him was priceless. It elevated his esteem before the entire student body of Ponevez. "Reuven" returned to his seat in the back of the *bais ha'medrash* a changed person.

One student in the *bais ha'medrash*, Akiva, Reuven's *chavrusa*, study partner, had a deeper insight into what had just taken place. Apparently, Reuven had been seriously involved in a *shidduch*, matrimonial match, with a fine, young woman, and it had recently broken off. He had thought that he was getting engaged. She let him know otherwise. Reuven was devastated, sitting in his room for a few days following the breakup. Word reached the *Rosh Yeshivah*, whose concern for his students was legend. The *Rosh Yeshiva* carried the nation's ills on his shoulders, but it did not distract him from his self-imposed responsibility to his *talmidim*.

Rav Shach summoned Akiva to his office and asked him about Reuven's "progress" in getting over his mishap. Akiva explained that, while he was going to *seder*, his heart was not in it. He remained depressed, his self-esteem having taken a major hit. Rav Shach thought for a moment and said, *Mir dürfen em freilich machen*, "We must gladden him."

The very next day, as Rav Shach was preparing to enter his office prior to the *shiur*, he once again summoned Akiva and asked him what they were learning that day. Akiva mentioned that they had come across an interesting commentary by Rav Akiva Eiger. Rav Shach stopped him, "Hold it right there. Perfect."

For days after Reuven pointed out the Rav Akiva Eiger to Rav Shach, students would pass him by with looks of admiration and perhaps a bit of envy. After all, how often does one have the opportunity to show the *Rosh Yeshivah* a commentary that had "slipped" his mind? We now have an idea regarding the extent of caring for another fellow's feelings.