

## **And Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro. (3:1)**

*Chazal* teach us that Hashem tests a *tzaddik*, righteous person, in small areas, the little things, which so many of us gloss over. If the *tzaddik* passes the test, if he demonstrates an affinity to doing small things, to caring about the “little guy,” the fellow whom no one seems to consider important enough to give his time, then the *tzaddik* can be a *manhig*, leader, of *Klal Yisrael*. Two of our greatest leaders stand out in this area, and *Chazal* underscore their acts of caring about small things.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* and David *Ha'melech* were both tested by how they shepherded the sheep entrusted to their care. Moshe ran after a stray sheep in the desert. When he found it, he understood that it was tired and had run away in search of water. Moshe then picked up the sheep and carried it back on his shoulders.

David would give the youngest sheep, the ones with the weakest teeth, the first blades of grass, because that grass was softest and thus easier to chew. He gave the oldest sheep the middle part of the grass, which was more difficult to chew. He reserved the toughest part of the grass for the middle-aged group of sheep, because they were the strongest. The future king of *Yisrael* related to the sheep, caring about each individual creature.

Both Moshe and David evinced true *gadlus*, greatness. *Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl*, commented, “We often throw around the word *gadol* in reference to a Torah leader, a great spiritual individual. What really is a *gadol*? Our view is vertical in the sense that his distinction is based upon his scholarship and erudition. His profound knowledge, his familiarity with *Shas*, the entire *Talmud Bavli*, is what makes him rise above everyone.

“*Chazal* are teaching us that *gadlus* has to be horizontal as well as vertical! A *gadol* must be a *gadol* in every nook and cranny of his life – even in the small things. One who finds it difficult to interact with the “little issues” to deal with what seem insignificant, to be sensitive to the inconsequential, is ill-prepared to accept the title of *gadol*.”

*Rav Shlomo* was once in an art museum, where he beheld a man copying a beautiful painting. *Rav Shlomo* said, “Indeed, the man was doing an excellent job of copying the artwork. The flowers in the copy looked exactly like the ones in the portrait. The coloring was stunning and matched perfectly. Indeed, the young artist had performed a yeoman’s job of copying the work of art. Nonetheless, something was missing. It was the small strokes that comprised the subtleties of the painting. These small things made a huge difference.”

The *Rosh Yeshivah*’s interpretation provides a profound commentary on his own life. He had a big heart with room for **all** people, regardless of their personal idiosyncrasies. They were his “sheep,” and he cared deeply for each one of them.

Two addendums to the above: When Moshe followed the young, stray sheep into the wilderness, who was taking care of the rest of the flock? How could he leave the entire flock unattended, while he occupied himself with one single sheep? We suggest that Moshe was teaching us a lesson. A group is comprised of individuals. A flock of sheep is composed of many **single** sheep. Each single sheep within the group has great significance. The shepherd who ignores one lone sheep, in effect, ignores the entire group.

Second, I am aware of another aspect to “small things” upon which we should touch. The story is related concerning *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl*, who was well-known not only as a brilliant Torah scholar whose encyclopedic knowledge of *Shas* and *Poskim* was outstanding, but also as a warm, sensitive individual, who was an extraordinary *tzaddik* whose ethics and emotions ran very deep.

One day, he was walking through the streets of *Yerushalayim*, accompanied as usual with an entourage of students hanging on his every word. They passed a shoe store, which had a tiny pair of baby shoes displayed in the front picture window. The *Rosh Yeshivah* stared pensively at the shoes for a few moments, then turned to his students and remarked, “The *Vilna Gaon* cried on his deathbed and do you know why? He regretted leaving a world in which a few simple kopecks can purchase a pair of *Tzitzis* which can access such incredible merit. Look how easy it is to gain reward in this world! But, in the next world, we have no such opportunities. There, we collect what we have earned. This is why the *Gaon* cried. It truly is a good reason for expressing emotion.

“Well, I am not the *Gaon*,” continued *Rav Chaim*. “When I die, I will not weep on my deathbed over a pair of *Tzitzis*, but I will cry over those baby shoes in the window. To me, they symbolize a mother’s love of her children. I will cry because I will be leaving a beautiful world in which mothers love their children with all their hearts. That is why I will cry!”

*Rav Chaim* teaches us a profound insight into what many may consider inconsequential. Nothing is so diminutive as the individual who views something from Hashem as little, meager. It is all a question of perspective. There are no small things, if it comes from Hashem – only small people with small minds.