

“Moshe said, “It is not proper to do so ...behold if we were to slaughter the deity of Egypt in their sight, will they not stone us?” (8:22)

Pharaoh told Moshe to offer their sacrifices in Egypt. Why should they leave for the wilderness? Moshe responded that this was untenable. The Egyptians worshipped sheep, the very animal that the Jews sacrificed to Hashem. How could the Jews slaughter the Egyptian god in front of their eyes and not expect a violent reaction? This is enigmatic. If Pharaoh had issued a decree permitting the Jews to slaughter sheep in Egypt, then no one would dare to harm them. The king's edict was law. Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap z.l., explains that Moshe did not want to cause the Egyptians to be disconcerted to the point that they would want to stone them. He was sensitive to their feelings.

This teaches us an important lesson regarding middos, character traits. Even if the mitzvah one is about to perform is great and noble, it should not be done in a manner that will cause pain to others – even if this is self-imposed or foolish. Of course, if the mitzvah demands that it be carried out in a specific manner, then the mitzvah overrides everything. The Torah only wants us to be sensitive to another person's feelings, regardless of who he is.