

Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro...he guided the sheep into the wilderness. (3:1)

The proof that Moshe had the ability to become *Klal Yisrael's* leader was his ability to shepherd his father-in-law's sheep. *Chazal* relate the remarkable compassion he exhibited towards the tired and thirsty sheep. Hashem said to him, "You have such empathy towards the sheep belonging to human beings. By your life, you will shepherd My sheep, *Yisrael*." While this *Midrash* is well-known, it is important to take a moment and note the stories recounted by the *Torah* that demonstrate Moshe *Rabbeinu's* sense of compassion. Indeed, as *Horav Yitzchak Goldwasser, Shlita*, points out, there is a specific sequence to the *Torah's* narrative. He indicates that Moshe's character developed commensurate with his acts of compassion. The more lowly the subject of his compassion, the more spiritually uplifted Moshe became.

The first story in the *Torah* tells of Moshe's encounter with an Egyptian beating a Jew. The act of violence that the Egyptian was about to commit would have destroyed not only a physical life, but it would also have cut short the Jewish *neshamah's*, soul, stay in this world. The Egyptian was depriving a *neshamah* of preparation to enter *Olam Habah*. By shortening its lifespan, he was decreasing its opportunity for a greater portion of *Olam Habah*. Moshe displayed a noble compassion for the plight of the *Yiddishe neshamah*.

The *Torah* records the following incident to demonstrate Moshe's sympathy for the physical body. He encountered two Jews who were quarrelling. Their quarrel had escalated into a physical confrontation. Moshe quickly intervened, putting an end to the fracas.

In the third occurrence, Moshe saved Yisro's daughters from the hands of the Midyanite shepherds. His sensitivity towards all people, regardless of race, established his level of compassion on yet a higher plane. It was evident that Moshe did not have selective sensitivity. He was moved to action whenever he perceived that someone was suffering.

In the last case, the *Torah* shows that Moshe's empathy was truly unique. He cared for every creation. He treated animals that were thirsty or tired with tenderness. We derive from here that one must progress step by step through the levels of compassion. Some individuals demonstrate incredible concern for the plight of animals, while ignoring the difficulty experienced by humans. The Nazis were devoted to their dogs, but had no qualms about sending Jewish children to their deaths in the most cruel and heinous manner. Character refinement must be developed progressively, stage by stage, in each individual.