

But the midwives feared Hashem, and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them. (1:17)

Leadership has its challenges, and, unless one is strong and persistent, he will fail. Humility should be intrinsic to every leader's character. When one assumes that he is infallible, he is unaware of his tragic flaw. One who is aware of his faults, who understands his imperfections, will work on them, seeking every avenue to correct his shortcomings. Nonetheless, a position of leadership demands tremendous self-confidence. In some instances, humility comes into play, especially when the leader feels inadequate for the position. Sometimes, one is compelled to adopt a role for which he may not feel entirely suited. This may be a necessary -- even strategic -- move, considering that the other applicants/choices could potentially be less qualified. This may be a calculated decision that prioritizes a worse outcome over personal comfort or confidence. In other words, in some circumstances, a person who does not feel qualified must undertake an endeavor or assume a position simply because the other options or choices are clearly less desirable.

One of the *Chafetz Chaim's* students visited him to seek his sage advice. This young scholar had been offered a coveted position as *Rav* of a sizable community. The scholar was hesitant to accept the position for fear that he might err in a *halachic* ruling. The mere fact that this was on his mind was a clear indication of his enviable level of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven. The saintly *Chafetz Chaim* instructed him to accept the position, "I offer you support for this decision from the *me'yaldos*, Jewish midwives. When Pharaoh commanded them to murder the Jewish male infants, the Torah informs us that they did not follow orders out of fear of Heaven. We must grapple with the following question: These were fine, upstanding, religious women, who refused to follow orders out of fear of Hashem. Why did they not just quit? They could have said, 'We are not murderers. We took an oath to bring babies into the world -- not to kill them.'"

The *Chafetz Chaim* explained that it was specifically due to their extraordinary *yiraas Shomayim* that they did not relinquish their positions. They felt they could control the situation. Who knows who Pharaoh would find to replace them. Their alternates might be women who would easily capitulate to Pharaoh's request and murder the babies.

The *Chafetz Chaim* continued, "Therefore, it is specifically due to your *yiraas Shomayim* that I encourage you to accept the *rabbanus*. You will see to it that the community adheres to the highest standards of *halachah*. Who knows whom they would otherwise hire?"

Leadership requires firmness and a resolute nature. This enables the leader to provide direction, make tough, and, at times, unpopular decisions, thus inspiring others to follow his lead. People neither gravitate towards nor follow weak leaders. A leader must be consistent in sticking to his principles and goals in order to maintain a clear direction for those who follow.

Chazal teach that when Bisyah, Pharaoh's daughter, saw the infant Moshe in the water, she

stretched out her arm to reach him. Actually, this was impossible since she was too far away for her arm to reach him. Miraculously, her arm became elongated, and she reached the basket containing Moshe. *Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, Lubliner Rav*, once convened a number of members of his lay leadership to discuss a matter of *pikuach nefesh*, a life and death situation. It was a difficult and demanding endeavor. The *baalei batim*, lay people, were negative of their ability to succeed, "It is beyond our ability to emerge triumphant." The *Rav* replied, "Look at what occurred with Pharaoh's daughter. She stretched forth her arm and succeeded in reaching Moshe. I have always wondered," asked the *Rav*, "what possessed Bisyah to take such action. She was clearly too far from the basket. It was impossible (hypothetically) for her to prevail. Why did she even try?" We see from here that, when there is a critical issue that requires one to act – he does – and asks questions later. He does not hem and haw, 'Can I do it?' He acts and relies on Hashem to achieve success!" [If he is sincere, Heaven will respond positively.]

Last, a leader must be humble. What greater example than our quintessential leader, Moshe *Rabbeinu*, concerning whom the Torah asserts was the humblest man on earth? A leader who embodies humility recognizes his own limitations, vulnerabilities and flaws. He deeply understands that, while he may be superior to his followers, it is not necessarily a result of his distinction, but rather, due to the inadequacies of others. A leader who is humble can more easily connect with those whom he has been charged to lead. He is able to empathize with the foibles and struggles of his followers, because he acknowledges his own personal failings. This engenders a sense of relatability and authenticity, fostering a stronger bond between the leader and his followers. A leader's worthiness to guide is the outgrowth of his willingness to serve, understand and support his congregants. He understands that everyone has his own unique path on which to grow, and he is present to nurture each individual congregant's ascension to success.

When Hashem charged Moshe with the mission of going to Egypt and demanding that Pharaoh release the Jews from slavery, he countered, *Mi anochi*, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh?" (Ibid 3:11). He continued, *V'chi otzi es Bnei Yisrael mi'Mitzrayim?* "And that I should take out *Bnei Yisrael* from Egypt?" *Rashi* explains that Moshe presented two issues: A) Of what significance am I that I should speak with kings? B) Even if, in fact, I am significant enough, why are *Bnei Yisrael* worthy that a miracle be performed for them?

The *Chasam Sofer* was the *gadol hador*, not only in Hungary, but throughout the Jewish world. Not only was he brilliant and erudite, a *posek*, *halachic* arbiter without peer, but he was also a leader who understood the Jewish world and its detractors – both from within and from without. When he became old, his eyesight began to fail. Nonetheless, *halachic* correspondence reached him from all parts of the globe. His son, *Horav Shimon Sofer (K'sav Sofer)*, would read the letters to him and respond appropriately. One day, *Rav Shimon* was reading the introduction to the letter in which the writer added a number of titles and plaudits to the *Chasam Sofer's* name, which is common (out of deference and respect), especially upon addressing the pre-eminent leader of the generation. When the *Chasam Sofer* heard this, he gave a huge *krechitz*, groan. *Rav Shimon* questioned his father's response to the accolades, "Do you doubt that you are the *gadol hador*?" The *Chasam*

Sofer's reply sets the standard for the humility required of a Torah leader, "How sad it is that someone like me could be the *gadol hador*." (It is an indication of the generation's shortcomings. Otherwise, they would have been worthy of someone "greater.")

Rav Shimon added, "Now I understand Moshe's response to Hashem, *Mi anochi?* 'Who am I?' to speak to kings. It must be because the generation that I am leading is not where it should be. If so, why do they deserve a miracle?" In other words, "If I can lead them, then something must be deficient in their relationship with Hashem. If so, are they really worthy of being redeemed?"

The greatest leaders did not view themselves as anything more than agents of Hashem. Their humility was their greatest attribute.