

Where did Moshe Learn Compassion?

Rabbi Maury Grebenau

When Moshe goes out to see the slavery of his brethren with his own eyes it is really an amazing scene. There is an strong leadership quality here as Moshe decides to go and see the pain of others in order to connect to them. He is drawn to the people he will lead and gets involved in their suffering. Rashi (Shemos 2:11) define the quality for us in a powerful way.

וירא בסבלתם - נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם:

And he saw what they had to bear – He (Moshe) focused his eyes and heart to be in pain regarding them (the Jewish people)

Moshe is incredibly mindful here. He is deliberate with what he chooses to focus upon and he then takes it to heart. In the context of a lost object we are told not to look away and ignore the object. Here Moshe deliberately goes out and witnesses the difficulties. He does not look away, he mindfully embraces the scene. But it does not end with the eyes; Moshe takes it to heart. He connects emotionally with the scene. Rashi is defining beautifully the quality known as *noseh b'ol chaveiro*, being able to bear a friend's loan with them.

I recently saw an idea from Rav Yeshaya Horowitz, the Shlah haKadosh¹, which might explain where Moshe learned this amazing quality. The Shlah explains the origin of the names of Levi's sons. The names are unusual and aside from Gershon not really found elsewhere in TaNaCh. The Shlah explains that Levi knew that his children would not be enslaved the way the other shevatim were and he was concerned that they would not remain tied to the Jewish people. For this reason he named them in ways that were tied to the slavery. Gershom, from the word *ger*, that they were strangers in Egypt. Kehat, as in the phrase *hakhek et shinav* meaning to put the teeth on edge. Merari from the root *mar*, bitter.

It seems that Levi was quite successful. Here his grandson is probably farthest from the slavery of any other Jew in Egypt. Yet, Moshe makes a point to go out and make sure to experience the slavery in a real way. It works so well that Moshe is drawn into the experience of the Jews to the point where he leaves his association with Paroh and the Egyptians behind and comes to the rescue of the Jewish man. The quality of *noseh b'ol chaveiro* is a powerful one which live Levi we must find a way to bequeath to our children.

¹ Parshat Vaeirah (Derech Chaim s"v eleh)