Jewish Tribune – Shemos

**The Mark of a Leader**

What makes a great leader? His erudition? His organisational skills? His charisma?

As ever, we don’t have to look beyond this week’s parsha. Let me share with you some insights I once heard from Rav Pinchos Roberts shlita.

Moshe Rabbeinu was selected as leader because he was **נושא עול בחבירו**; he really felt the pain of Klal Yisroel.

In one of the most pivotal moments in history, Moshe Rabbeinu notices the bush burning but not being consumed. Many would shrug and move on, but Moshe stops and notices.

**וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אָסֻרָה נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הַמַּרְאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מַדּוּעַ לֹא יִבְעַר הַסְּנֶה**

And Moshe said, "Let me turn now and see this great spectacle

why does the thorn bush not burn up?"

Rabbi Roberts explained that Moshe was referring to Klal Yisroel. They are experiencing much tzoros and pain but will not be consumed. He turned to see, not the burning bush, but the tzoros of Klal Yisroel and it was this display of empathy that was the making of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rav Shneur Kotler, was the great Rosh Yeshiva of Beis Medrash Gevoha in Lakewood

and a worthy successor to his illustrious father Rav Aharon Kotler. In fact, many noted that when Rav Shneur was niftar at the young age of 64 in 1982, he had served as Rosh Yeshiva for nineteen years, seven months, and one day, exactly the same amount of time as did his father. This extraordinary coincidence was noted throughout the Torah world and seen as a sign that he had been a worthy son and successor who carried on his father's mission.

Rav Shneur managed to escape Europe in 1940 and went to what was then Palestine. He was already engaged to Rischel, the daughter of Rav Malkiel Friedman but she found refuge in Shanghai with the Mir yeshiva. They only got married after the war.

Throughout the war years Rav Shneur learned in Eitz Chaim Yeshiva led by his illustrious grandfather Rav Isser Zalman Metzer. When the time came to return to America for his wedding, Rav Shneur took leave of his grandfather. Instead of escorting him all the way to the street, Rav Isser Zalman Metzer stopped after a few stairs and gave his grandson his warm heartfelt brochos there, not leaving the building.

Someone noticed and questioned the great Rosh Yeshiva. Rav Isser Zalman Metzer explained that he felt for so many survivors who were not zoche to have grandchildren and see them get married. Therefore, in empathy with them, he stopped short, curtailing the experience. He couldn’t enjoy the moment to the full in the knowledge that so many others did not enjoy the same.

The brocha of Hatov v’Hameitiv in benching is curious. This fourth blessing of benching was instituted by the Sages in Yavneh after the second Churban. Hundreds of thousands of Jews of Beitar were slain during Bar Kochba's ill-fated rebellion against the Romans and were then denied burial. After years of praying and fasting by Rabbi Gamliel and his court in Yavneh, permission for burial was finally granted. This brocha is in appreciation of this event.

But why insert it in benching?

Rabbi Roberts explained that for the years that the bodies were waiting to be buried, people could not enjoy their meals. Throughout this long period, their minds were elsewhere. How can I enjoy my meal when this is the situation outside? Once they were buried (with the added miracle that the bodies did not decompose), they could now enjoy their food once more. We specifically recognise this in benching and continue to do so until this day.

The stories are many, Rav Chaim Brisker moving out of his home to sleep on a bench in the Beis Hamedrash to empathise with the hundreds of Jews in Brisk who were left homeless when a fire ravaged the city. These acts are not lip service, it comes from a deep feeling of empathy with the pain that Klal Yisroel feels and it is this empathy which makes great leaders.

**Rabbi Golker is the Menahel of Hasmonean High School. To listen to his shiurim, go to TorahAnytime.com or JewishPodcasts.Org**