Jewish Tribune – Behaaloscha

**Loneliness, Leadership & Captain Tom**

After a lengthy stay in the Sinai desert, Klal Yisroel are about to begin the second part of their journey. As Rabbi Sacks writes in Covenant & Conversation (family edition p156), “they are no longer travelling *from* but travelling *to*.” They are no longer escaping from Egypt; they are journeying towards the Promised Land.

The people are counted. They are gathered, tribe by tribe, around the Mishkan in marching order. Preparations are made to purify the camp, silver trumpets are made and used to gather together the people and to give them the signal to move on. Finally, the journey begins.

And then the trouble starts. People start complaining.

They crave food. “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Mitzrayim at no cost!” (Bamidbar 11,4-5)

Those who complained forgot they had been slaves, oppressed, their make children killed and they had cried out to Hashem to be freed. As Rabbi Sacks says: “They ate the bread of affliction and tasted bitterness, not meat and fish. As for the remark that they ate the food at no cost, it did cost them something: their liberty.”

This complaint was a tipping point for Moshe Rabbeinu. He pours his heart out to Hashem:

לָמָה הֲרֵעֹתָ לְעַבְדֶּךָ

Why have You brought this trouble on Your servant?

לָמָּה לֹא מָצָתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ

Why have I not found favour in Your eyes?

לֹא אוּכַל אָנֹכִי לְבַדִּי לָשֵׂאת אֶת כָּל הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי כָבֵד מִמֶּנִּי

I cannot carry all these people myself; the burden is too heavy for me.

הָרְגֵנִי נָא הָרֹג

Please go ahead and kill me

Strong words. This was one of the lowest points of Moshe Rabbeinu’s life.

And then HKBH steps in. He tells Moshe to appoint seventy elders who would share the burden of leadership. As Rabbi Sacks surmises, Moshe Rabbeinu had become the ‘lonely man of faith’.

Leadership is lonely. But we must also remember that it was this loneliness that allowed Moshe to develop a deeper relationship with Hashem. And there is always a light at the end of the tunnel. Sometimes it takes patience, sometimes it takes tefilla, sometimes it takes emunah, and often it takes all three, but transformation and salvation does come.

Sometimes, in times of crisis, a sense of helplessness sets in. This feeling ran deep for so many during the Covid-19 pandemic, as millions of people around the globe were forced to isolate in their own homes.

Thomas Moore, a ninety-nine-year-old former British Army officer (popularly known as Captain Tom) was desperate to do something to help, despite being forced into quarantine in his home. So, he decided to raise much needed funds for the NHS and its heroic medical teams who were risking their lives every day to look after others.

On April 6 2020, Captain Tom held firmly onto his walking frame and began the challenge of walking one hundred laps of his garden, hoping to raise £1,000 by his hundredth birthday twenty-four days later.

Word spread. The story was shared. Captain Tom could never had imagined how his story would capture the hearts of the British people. In just twenty-four days, he had raised over £32 million from 1.5 million individual donations!

In honour of this tremendous achievement, and the inspiring model of goodness that he became for the British people and beyond, his hundredth birthday was celebrated by the RAF and British Army with flypasts over his home, and he received more than 150,000 birthday cards from the public. The Queen even honoured him with a knighthood.

Moshe Rabbeinu’s despair in this week’s parsha is answered. There *are* solutions to loneliness and hopelessness. But we must do our bit. Sometimes it takes some movement on our part, to become more active, reach out to others, start giving, and of course turn to the Ribbono shel Olam.

Often in times of despair, the solutions are quite straightforward and, if we dig deep enough, they are often close at hand.

Captain Tom became Sir Tom and he proved that everyone can do their part to bring good and hope to the world, even from the own back yard.

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