

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 194

**Shemot** | Behaving with Kindness and Generosity

# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

פרשת שמות | אנגלית

# ...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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Publisher and Distributer of the Teachings of  
Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l

 500 Frank W Burr Blvd Suite 47  
Teaneck, NJ 07666

 [en@h-l.org.il](mailto:en@h-l.org.il)


 [www.hameir-laarets.org.il/en](http://www.hameir-laarets.org.il/en)

 HaKatzir 666, Netivot, Israel

 (954) 800-6526

 HameirLaaretsEN

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## **Parshat Shemot**

### **The Daunting Responsibilities of Torah Leadership**

Daniel knocked lightly on the front door of his parents' home and entered. As expected, his father was sitting by the window studying the Talmud.

"It's always been the same posture and the same melody for decades now," Daniel thought admiringly.

Daniel approached his father, kissed his hand, and said, "Father, thank G-d, in a good and auspicious time, I have been appointed as the rabbi of a town in northern Israel!"

His elderly father looked at him with his kind and wise eyes and asked, "Daniel, please tell me, how do you expect me to react to this news?"

Daniel looked at him, surprised. "How to react? Rejoice with me and bless me. Wish me

congratulations!"

His father looked at him silently.

He then said, "My dear son Daniel, I am not sure that it is most appropriate to wish you congratulations for this amazing accomplishment."

"Father, I don't understand; why not?"

"See," the father began to explain, "to wish a 'mazel tov' and congratulations, one must clearly rejoice and feel tangible happiness, but upon hearing these good tidings, quite a different feeling altogether overcomes me.

"I will explain my words:

Every person experiences various transitions throughout their life, for example exiting singlehood and entering married

## Parshat Shemot - In the Footsteps of G-d's Wisdom

life, or from being called by their first name to being called 'Father' by one's children.

Each such transition creates a new challenge and requires that the person discover new inner strengths.

Under normal circumstances, there's not much at stake with these transitions, and even if there is some risk, it's not on a constant basis.

However, there's one type of transition in life that is fraught with great risk, and carries immense responsibilities. This transition involves constant 'danger' at every moment and every second - I'm referring to the transition from private life to public leadership.

"I hope you now understand," the father concluded, "why I'm

not sure it is right to wish you 'congratulations' - you've become a public leader, it would be much more fitting to wish you 'the best of luck and much success!'"

Daniel persisted, "Father, I haven't entered real public leadership; I have not been elected as a mayor or a Knesset member. I've merely been appointed as a town rabbi."

His father surveyed him again and said, "I think you may not have understood my intention. You don't seem to grasp the many 'dangers' inherent in the life of a town rabbi.

As such, we have no choice; we must study together and understand the weighty role of a rabbi better."

## In the Footsteps of G-d's Wisdom

In 'Hayom Yom' of the Lubavitcher Rebbe of saintly memory (23<sup>rd</sup> of Adar II), the following is written:

"The Rebbe Rashab of Lubavitch said to a certain rabbi,

who was a pious and scholarly individual:

'A rabbi must remember at all times and every moment that he is constantly on the threshold between those who bring merit to

the masses and, G-d forbid, those who drive the masses to sin; on the threshold between the greatest heights and the deepest depths. All matters must, therefore, touch the innermost point of their soul since it is largely up to them."<sup>1</sup>

"Do you understand," the father turned to Daniel, "the fateful mission of a rabbi hangs by a hair's breadth. If he merits, he elevates with him all who follow him, but if, G-d forbid, otherwise - he brings the public down with him to the depths.

"Moreover, a rabbi," the father continued, "is called a 'Talmid Chacham,' meaning a student of

the wisdom of the Torah, and this requires him to behave as does the Supreme Wisdom of G-d, as revealed by the kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero:<sup>2</sup>

"Behold, the power of the Supreme Wisdom spreads over all existing beings, even though it is hidden and exceedingly lofty. About it, it is said: "How manifold are Your works, L-rd; In wisdom, You have made them all" (Psalms 104:24).

Similarly, a person should make an effort to have his wisdom present everywhere, teaching and benefiting people each according to their capacity. Whatever he can

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*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

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1. Once, the rabbi of a certain town met the Chafetz Chaim, and they began to talk.

The Chafetz Chaim asked him, "Is Shabbat observed in your community?"

The rabbi replied, "What can I do? The youth of today are rebellious..."

He asked the rabbi further, "What about the state of the observance of the kosher dietary laws?"

The rabbi answered, "What can I do? They don't listen to me."

The Chafetz Chaim inquired, "And how about the observance of family purity?"

The rabbi responded, "What can I do? There are many difficulties in this area."

The Chafetz Chaim fixed his gaze on him and said, "What can you do, you ask? - You should have fainted from overwhelming sorrow from the sorry state of the religious affairs in your community."

2. 'Tomer Devorah', Chapter 3.

impart from his wisdom, he should impart, and no circumstance should distract him from doing so.

In fact, G-d's Wisdom has two aspects, and so too should a person have these two aspects:

The first aspect is internal, to increase in wisdom and perfect it in solitude with his Creator.

The second is to impart to others from that very wisdom that the Holy One, blessed be He, has bestowed upon him. And just as G-d's Wisdom bestows to each Sefirah according to its measure and need, so should one bestow further to each person according to the measure of his intellect and as is suitable for their need, taking heed not to give more than the recipient's capacity, lest it lead to a harmful outcome, just as the Supreme Sefirah of Wisdom does not exceed the limited measure of the recipient.

Furthermore, the way of the Supreme Wisdom is to oversee all existence because it is the initial and exalted thought that contemplates all created beings, and about it, it is said: "For My

thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8), and "He devises plans so that none be entirely banished" (2 Samuel 14:14), and "For I know the thoughts that I think about you, says the L-rd, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

In the same manner, a person must strive to be with eyes open to guide G-d's people for their benefit, with thoughts aiming to bring near those who are distant and to think positively of them, just as the divine intellect thinks of the benefit of all existence, so should he contemplate the benefit of his fellows, counsel them with good advice toward G-d as well as His people, both individually and collectively. Those who deviate from proper conduct should be guided back to the straight and proper path, using his intellect and understanding to lead them to good and upright behavior, just as the Supreme Thought that guides G-d's actions.

Moreover, Wisdom gives life to all, as it is written: "Wisdom gives life to those who possess it" (Ecclesiastes 7:12), and so should

one be, a life guide to all, bringing them both life of this world as well as the afterlife, as well as providing them with sustenance, being a source of life to all.

Wisdom is additionally the source of all beings, as it is written: "In wisdom, You have made them all," and by this power, they live and exist. Similarly, one should be like a father to all of G-d's creatures, especially to the Jewish people, whose holy souls emanated from this supernal Wisdom.

He should constantly seek mercy and blessing for the world, just as the Supreme Merciful Father has compassion for His creatures. He should always pray in the distress of those in trouble as if they were his own children and as if he had created them; this is the will of G-d - that he bears all of G-d's people.

He will attend to the hidden, seek those lost, heal the brokenhearted, support the needy, have mercy and bear their burden with a pleasant countenance, like the Supreme Merciful Father who endures and tolerates all.

He must not grow weary, ignore, or despise them but rather guide each one according to their need. These are the attributes of the wisdom of a merciful father toward his children.

Additionally, his compassion should extend to all creatures; he should not despise or destroy them. The Supreme Wisdom extends to all creatures - inanimate, vegetative, animal, and human- and for this reason, we are cautioned against wasting food.

Just as the Supreme Wisdom does not despise any creature and everything is made from it, as it is written: "In wisdom, You have made them all," so should a person's mercy be upon all of G-d's works.

For this reason, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi was punished because he did not have compassion on the calf that sought refuge with him and he instead said to it, "Go to be slaughtered, for this is the purpose for which you were created" (Bava Metzia 85a).

Consequently, suffering came upon him, which emanated from the

## Parshat Shemot - In the Footsteps of G-d's Wisdom

side of divine judgment, which mercy shields against. Later, however, when he had compassion on a weasel and said, "And His mercies are over all of His creations," he was saved from judgment because he drew down the light of Wisdom upon himself, and the sufferings thereupon departed.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, one should not despise anything; they are all made with G-d's Wisdom. He should not uproot vegetation unless necessary, nor kill an animal unless necessary. When he does, he should choose the most humane death with a properly checked knife, showing as much mercy as possible.<sup>4</sup>

### *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

**3.** As mentioned in the holy Talmud (ibid.):

Once, a calf was brought before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi to be slaughtered. The calf went and placed its head under Rabbi Yehuda's garment, crying as if pleading for its life not to be slaughtered. Rabbi Yehuda did not pay attention and said to the calf, "Go to slaughter, for this is why you were created."

Seeing that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi did not show mercy to the calf, Heaven decided to bring upon him severe and bitter sufferings for thirteen years. One day, when Rabbi Yehuda's maidservant was cleaning his house, she saw small mice and was about to throw them out. Rabbi Yehuda said to her, "Leave them, for it is said, 'His mercies are upon all His works' (Psalms 145:9)." Immediately, seeing that he showed mercy to the mice, it was decided in Heaven to have mercy on him and remove his sufferings.

**4.** Rabbi Moshe Grylak recounted the following story (Ma'ayan Ha'emunah', Part I, page 506):

"At a seminar for returnees to Judaism held in Toronto, a senior doctor participated with great enthusiasm. He sought to eagerly take in the knowledge imparted, and he delved deeply, clarified, and was convinced on the authenticity of Judaism - all that is, except for one issue: kosher slaughter. As a member of an animal welfare organization, he couldn't understand why Jewish law opposes stunning the animal with an electric shock to prevent pain before ritual slaughter.

Even though he understood that such stunning might damage the brain and render the animal non-kosher, he wasn't satisfied.

"If so," he argued, "then slaughter should be altogether forbidden."

Since he expressed these views emphatically throughout the seminar, Rabbi Grylak knew what to expect in his next lecture. It came down to a dialogue between him and the doctor, with the audience listening by as observers.

Rabbi Grylak began: "The Torah commands that the slaughtering knife be



**Parshat Shemot - In the Footsteps of G-d's Wisdom**

completely smooth, without the slightest notch - not even the smallest nick. This demonstrates that the Torah seeks to prevent suffering of the animals, does it not?"

"Yes," the doctor admitted."

Rabbi Grylak continued, "The Torah moreover, invalidates slaughter if there's any delay or interruption during the process, again indicating a desire to prevent the animal's suffering."

"Yes," the doctor agreed again, although he had many further doubts.

Rabbi Grylak added, "The Torah instructs that when slaughtering, the trachea, esophagus, and the neck arteries must be swiftly cut in one motion. This causes the blood pressure in the brain to instantly drop to zero, and the animal loses consciousness without feeling any pain at all. Isn't this further evidence of Torah's great lengths to prevent suffering?"

That's precisely the issue I disagree with," the doctor contested. "While the trachea, esophagus, and neck artery are cut, the vertebral artery, which runs along the spine, continues to supply blood to the brain. Therefore, the blood pressure in fact, does not drop due to the slaughter, and the animal remains conscious and feels the pain and suffers."

Rabbi Grylak leaned forward, and said, "What would you say if I agree with you

that you're correct as far as non-kosher animals go: horses, donkeys, pigs, and camels, but for animals that are kosher - such as cows, goats, and sheep - the vertebral artery doesn't connect directly to the Circle of Willis that supplies blood to the brain. Instead, it bends and connects to the neck artery, and specifically prevents suffering during slaughter. When the neck artery is cut, the vertebral artery's blood also drains out, causing the animal to lose consciousness immediately without feeling any pain."

"That can't be." the doctor exclaimed, shocked. "Why would the artery bend and connect differently in kosher animals?"

"Why so?" Rabbi Grylak immediately replied, "Because it is written about G-d: 'His mercies are upon all of His works' (Psalms 145:9), compassion is G-d's domain even more so than it is the field of animal welfare activists."

The doctor stood up, agitated. "Listen, Rabbi; I'm going to investigate this, and if you so happen to have been right, I'll be attending your next seminar wearing a big kippah."

A big applause erupted, cutting through the emotional exchange that had occurred.

Rabbi Grylak shared: "A few months later, I was once again called to deliver a seminar in Toronto.

It was wonderful to meet with the doctor - now wearing a big kippah and filled with fervent faith in Judaism and in G-d."

**Parshat Shemot - Divinely Ordained Mission**

As a general rule, having compassion upon all beings and not harming them is derived from the attribute of Wisdom. The exception is only when elevating them from one level to another - from vegetative to animal, from animal to human - when it is then permitted to uproot the vegetative and slaughter the animal, causing a slight loss in order to gain benefit."

Daniel's father concluded, "If every Torah scholar has the responsibility to act in this exalted manner, following the example of the divine wisdom, how much more so does a rabbi of a town, appointed over thousands of people - have the much greater responsibility to guard and lead the members of his community."

**Divinely Ordained Mission**

A grimace of shock passed over Daniel's face. "Father, after everything that you shared with me, I'm considering calling off the position and giving it up."

His father was startled. "Heaven forbid. It would be a foolish and absurd idea to give up a rabbinical position!"

Daniel looked at his father with bewildered eyes and said, "Father, you've completely confused me. So is it worthwhile to become a rabbi or not?"

A slight smile briefly passed over the father's lips, and then he said, "Well, honestly, it depends; let me explain.

"As is known, in six days, G-d created the world. In just six days, He created all of the creatures that exist. Although we may not know how many of each species were created, one thing is clear - at the time of creation, there were at least two of each species, male and female.

At midday on the sixth day of creation, Man stood on his feet and began to observe his surroundings. To his surprise, he discovered that all creatures have a mate; every creature has another of its kind; he alone was solitary. He despondent wondered: Why?

**Parshat Shemot - Be a Disciple of Aaron !**

In truth, our sages, many generations later, wondered the very same question and asked: Why did the Holy One, blessed be He, create man alone without a mate ?

They answered (Sanhedrin 37a): 'Man was created alone, to teach that whoever destroys a single life from the Jewish people, it is as if he destroyed an entire world, and whoever saves a single life amongst the Jewish people, it is as if he saved an entire world.'

Indeed, G-d could have started the creation of humanity with many individuals, yet He preferred to create Adam alone to establish the principle that every person is entirely unique in the universe, to teach that every person has a unique personality and is not merely a duplication of another, and this uniqueness makes him a complete world, one that is irreplaceable.

The uniqueness of each individual is precisely suited to the role and mission they need to fulfill - one that only they can accomplish.

As Hillel the Elder said (Pirkei Avot 1:14): 'If I am not for myself, who will be for me.' 'Upon myself lies the duty to carry out my unique mission because if I don't do my role - who will do it for me ? The role of a person cannot ever be fulfilled by another.'

Daniel's father concluded, "Therefore, I said that it depends - it depends on the kind of mission that G-d has assigned you. Since from Heaven, you have been led to this position, apparently, this is your divinely ordained mission, and therefore it's worthwhile and proper for you to be a rabbi, although it entails tremendous responsibility."

"So, will you wish me congratulations ?" Daniel asked.

"Of course ! I must, however, add a blessing for success in your holy work. May you merit to be of benefit and elevate together with you all the members of your town and all who follow you."

**Be a Disciple of Aaron !**

"Father," Daniel turned to his experienced and wise father for

advice, "where will I find the strength and inspiration to

**Parshat Shemot - A Loving and Compassionate Heart**

supervise, care, educate, and guide others?"

His father opened the Mishnah in Tractate Avot, pointed to a passage, and said, "This Mishnah is the solution to your question.

"The Mishnah states (Pirkei Avot 1:12): 'Hillel says: Be of the disciples of Aaron - love peace and pursue peace, love all creatures and bring them close to the Torah.'

This Mishnah points to the correct approach and way to acquire the strength needed for proper leadership.

The figure of Aaron is that of a leader from whom we are

supposed to learn, and therefore, our sages begin the Mishnah with the imperative term - 'Be' (הוי) - like Aaron.<sup>5</sup>

This Mishnah is a flowing fountain of wisdom and endless insight, and it contains all the foundational elements needed for proper leadership. It's quite impossible to detail everything that is contained in these words, so we'll focus on the two main points here, which are the basis and at the heart of leadership:

A. The basis and prerequisite of leadership - Love for a fellow Jew.

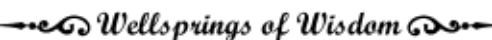
B. The heart of leadership - Bringing them closer to the Torah."

## A Loving and Compassionate Heart

"Let's begin with the love for a fellow Jew required from a leader:

In the year 2365 to Creation, a son was born to Amram, and

he was named Aaron. At the age of three, he received his first prophecy, and he continued to prophesize in Egypt throughout the



5. "'Be'- is a term that indicates a command, suggesting that this is not merely a narrative about a pious conduct, as is the case with several subjects discussed in this tractate, but it is rather a directive and instruction that one must be among the disciples of Aaron.

This term can additionally be interpreted to include that one is granted from above both permission and capability to succeed at this task" (Commentary of the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Pirkei Avot, Chapters 1-5, page 64).

**Parshat Shemot - A Loving and Compassionate Heart**

next eighty years of their bondage there.

As the verses state: "And a man of G-d came to Eli and said to him: 'Thus says the L-rd: Did I not indeed reveal Myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt, enslaved to Pharaoh's house? I chose him from all the tribes of Israel to be My priest, to ascend My altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before Me; and I gave to your father's house all the fire offerings of the Jewish people'" (Samuel I 2:27-28).

In the above verses, G-d tells Eli the priest:

'Know that during the dark Egyptian exile, a time of immense concealment, when all spiritual lights were dimmed, the hearts diminished, there I discovered Aaron the priest, and his loving and compassionate heart shone before Me.

Thanks to his immense devotion to peace, he brought My Divine Presence into the land of Egypt, and I, therefore, in turn, revealed Myself to him in Egypt and placed My prophecy in his mouth. I chose

him to serve Me, together with his descendants, for all posterity.'

The following eighty years of prophecy passed swiftly, and in distant Midian, G-d revealed Himself to Moses and informed him:

'Moses, the time has come to end the terrible suffering of the children of the Jewish people in Egypt. The deathly blows and insufferable tortures are about to be over; the murders and the wicked cruelty will end. The Jewish people will no longer suffer humiliation and the yoke of slavery; the time of redemption has come.

Go on My mission to Pharaoh and bring out My people, the children of Israel, from Egypt.'

Moses hears G-d's words and refuses to comply - Moses, the great lover of the Jewish people, refused to go and redeem the Jewish people.

For hundreds of hours, G-d tries to persuade him, yet Moses remains steadfast in his refusal. Finally, Moses reveals what was weighing upon his heart and the reason for his refusal:

**Parshat Shemot - A Loving and Compassionate Heart**

'Please, my L-rd, send by the hand of whomever You will send' (Exodus 4:13).

"Until now, You have been sending my brother Aaron prophecies to convey to the children of Israel. If you now send me on this mission, it will cause my brother Aaron distress."

Thus, the children of Israel would remain in exile, beaten and wounded, in pain and suffering, but Moses was unwilling to cause pain and distress to even one of his fellow Jews.

In the words of the Midrash:<sup>6</sup>

"Moses said: 'Before I received prophecy, my brother Aaron was prophesying to them in Egypt for eighty years. Now, I shall enter my brother's domain and cause him to be distressed?' And for this reason, he did not want to go."

G-d then revealed to Moses, Aaron's high spiritual level, and

said: 'Moreover, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart' (Exodus 4:14).

Our sages explain that Moses was told, 'Do you think that he will be distressed? Not so; he will rather rejoice. As it is said: "And when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart."

Rabbi Shimon, son of Rabbi Yosi, said: The heart that rejoiced in his brother's greatness was destined to wear the holy garments of the Urim and Tumim, as it is said: "They shall be upon Aaron's heart" (Exodus 28:30).<sup>7</sup>

The immense love Aaron felt for his brother Moses caused Aaron to have a 'good eye' and to look favorably upon his brother's greatness and celebrate it.<sup>8</sup>

"Daniel," the father continued, "let us expand yet further on the topic."

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

6. Shemot Rabbah, 3:16.

7. The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah, 3:17).

8. Even from his youth, Aaron loved and cherished his brother Moses, as the

Midrash states: "'And behold, a youth was crying' (Exodus 2:6) - this refers to Aaron, teaching that Aaron stood and wept when Moses his brother was placed upon the Nile" (Yalkut Shimoni, Shemot, 166).

## Having a Good Eye

In a sermon of Rabbi Reuven Karlenstein, he explained the concept of having a "good eye":<sup>9</sup>

“A 'good eye' means having a generosity of spirit. It is to be happy in one's heart for his friend's achievement and to express this sentiment joyfully upon seeing his friend's success.

As Rashi<sup>10</sup> interprets: 'A good eye' - one has no jealousy of his friend, and his friend's honor is as dear to him as his own.

When one is told that his friend received a prominent position or stature, they may find it hard to accept. But in truth, does it come on your account or diminish you in any way? Why not be happy for a friend and have a good eye? Why not instead thank G-d and be joyful and generous of heart toward another?

Rashi, in his insightful commentary, reveals that being generous and good hearted with regard to another's success in business and acquiring wealth, is insufficient.

It is when the other receives honor that one's generosity of heart and 'good eye' is truly tested, as Rashi states: 'A good eye' - is when his friend's honor is as dear to him as his own.

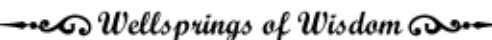
It was specifically in this most difficult challenge that Aaron excelled, he bore no hard feelings and truly rejoiced in his heart at his brother's success and lofty stature and the divine mission that he was tasked with.

“Let us now turn to discuss another one of Aaron's virtues.”

## Loving and Seeking Peace

Aaron the priest embodied the attribute of love - both 'Love of

the Creator and His Torah', as well as 'love of all creatures.'



9. 'LeHagid', Bamidbar, p. 224.

10. Pirkei Avot 5:19.

**Parshat Shemot - Loving and Seeking Peace**

The love Aaron had for people was an immense authentic love, and it led and propelled him to promote peace among them.

The Zohar (Emor 88a) testifies about Aaron: "Throughout all of the days of Aaron's life, he solely endeavored to increase peace and harmony in the world."

Similarly, in 'Tanna Devei Eliyahu,' it is written:<sup>11</sup>

"Four virtues uphold and maintain the world: charity, justice, truth, and peace.

Through peace - how so? Just as the Holy One, blessed be His great name forever, makes peace among his billions of myriads of ministering angels who stand before Him constantly and sanctify His name - so too should a person make peace between one individual and his fellow, between man and his wife.

Aaron the priest indeed did so - he made peace between the Jewish people and their Father in

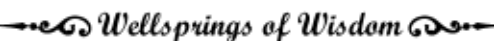
Heaven, between the Jewish people and the sages, between one Torah sage and another, between one Israelite and his fellow, and between a man and his wife."

The Midrash shares a small glimpse of Aaron's efforts at making peace:<sup>12</sup>

In Aaron's time, there were countless couples among the Jewish people who wanted to separate. As soon as Aaron heard about such a couple, he would hurry to them and say, "I absolutely and vehemently disagree with this step you are both about to make. If you respect me, please make sincere efforts to make peace between yourselves."

Out of respect and affection for Aaron, they would strive to make peace, and later, when they had a son, they named him 'Aaron,' acknowledging that this child was born thanks to Aaron's efforts at bringing them back together.

The Midrash continues that on the day of Aaron's passing,



11. Chapters 15 and 31.

12. 'Masechet Kallah Rabbati', Chapter 3.



**Parshat Shemot - Loving All Beings**

accompanying his bier were 80,000 young men named 'Aaron' - born as the result of marital harmony that he fostered.<sup>13</sup>

The Zohar quoted above, continues that, "Because Aaron endeavored all his life to increase peace in the world, G-d chose

him to be His conduit of kindness and abundant blessings to the world."

We now shall discuss the second element and foundation of leadership the Mishnah learns from Aaron: 'bringing them close to the Torah.'

**Loving All Beings**

"Until now," the father continued, "we've discussed the foundation of leadership, which is love for others. Now we'll move on to discuss the very heart of Torah leadership: to 'bring them close to the Torah,' which is very much a rabbi's mission.

The primary role of a rabbi of a Jewish community is to 'rescue' individuals from under the sway of negative forces and to bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence.

Upon every rabbi lies the responsibility to clear the path for all those who are dependent on him and to remove all of the spiritual obstacles that may stand in their way.

A rabbi must pave the way for Jewish life in accordance with the will of the Creator: Torah study, observing the commandments, refining character traits, fostering peace in the home, and educating the children.

*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

13. To grasp the extent of Aaron's dedication to fostering marital harmony, the above Midrash suggests that he resolved an average of five cases each day. This calculation is based on the assumption that the 80,000 instances

of marital reconciliation took place during the 40 years in the wilderness, which amounts to 14,600 days. Dividing 80,000 by 14,600 yields an average of approximately five cases per day.

**Parshat Shemot - The Prerequisite - Stability**

Rabbi Asher Weiss once recounted:<sup>14</sup>

"Three great sages once met: Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, Rabbi Itzele of Ponovezh (author of 'Zichron Yitzchak'), and Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (author of 'Aruch HaShulchan'). They discussed among themselves the primary role and responsibility of a rabbi and leader toward his congregation.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein said: The main role of the rabbi is to issue halachic rulings and to teach the congregation the proper way to act and the required deeds they must perform.

Rabbi Itzele disagreed and declared: The central role of a rabbi is to disseminate Torah to his flock and teach the people the depth and profundity of the Talmud until they, too, become Torah scholars.

Rabbi Chaim of Brisk had an opinion of his own: The role of a rabbi is to be a merciful father and a loving mother to all of his community members, with an attentive ear and a heart wide open to the cry of the poor and the plea of the needy. He must support the orphan and the widow and care for all of the city's needs."

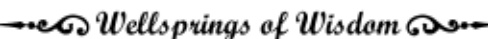
Rabbi Weiss concluded, "In truth, there's no disagreement among them. All of these duties are different facets that are incumbent upon every Torah leader and rabbi. Their discussion was merely about which point most clearly defined the 'primary' role of a rabbi."

However, as a prerequisite for a rabbi to fulfill his mission properly, he must have a mind that is clear and pure, as we shall explain further on, and before we continue, let us preface.

**The Prerequisite - Stability**

King David describes the differences between the soul of

the righteous and the wicked as follows:



14. 'HaShulchan HaAruch LaRav' (page 16).

Parshat Shemot - The Prerequisite - Stability

"And he [the righteous] shall be like a tree planted by streams of water. Not so the wicked; rather, they are like chaff that the wind drives away" (Psalms 1:3-4).

The righteous is likened here to "a tree planted by streams of water" - whose roots cannot be moved from their place despite all of the winds in the world.

In contrast, the wicked are compared to "chaff that the wind drives away."

Although sometimes the chaff is lifted and raised up high - the wind immediately drives it away, and it has no permanence; the same wind that elevates it had previously uprooted it and will later overturn it.<sup>15</sup>

— *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~* —

15. Rabbi Menachem Stein once shared ('Doresh Tov', Shavuot, page 373):

My father, of blessed memory, was a Holocaust survivor, and descended from the family of disciples of the "Ktav Sofer.

Before the Holocaust, he was married to my mother's older sister, and together they had a small son, who at the young age of four years old, was taken together with his mother to their deaths.

After the war, he married my mother, and rebuilt his family.

Decades later at my son's wedding, amid the joy, when hundreds of young men danced energetically, and separately in the women's section as well, the girls rejoiced with the bride. I saw my father suddenly burst into tears.

I asked him, "Father, what happened?" He replied emotionally, "I am beholding a divine vision!"

I wasn't accustomed to hearing such expressions from him, and I asked him what he meant.

Still weeping, he explained, "Our sages say (Midrash Tanchuma, Noach, section 5) that Noah witnessed three separate worlds - the world as it was before the great flood, the world in its destruction, and the world after the flood.

I too have seen three worlds. I remember well the world before the Holocaust - the Jewish nation in its splendor, with sprawling communities and yeshivas, rabbis and great Torah scholars.

"Then," my father continued, "I saw a world in ruins - a terrible Holocaust was taking place, and it destroyed everything we knew. Jewish communities obliterated, rabbis and Jewish leaders were martyred, and millions of holy Jews were slaughtered sanctifying G-d's name.

"I was sure," my father said with a tremble in his voice, "that the future of the Jewish

**Parshat Shemot - The Prerequisite - Stability**

Rabbi Tzvi Grossbard described the importance of stability in the service of G-d:<sup>16</sup>

"Stability and consistency are a cornerstone of a Jew's aspirations. We recite in the morning prayers: 'Grant us wisdom to understand and discern, to listen, learn, and teach, to observe, perform, and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching.' These requests are in ascending order, and the highest rung on the ladder - the peak of elevation - is the ability 'to fulfill' in a permanent and consistent manner with a sense of stability.

As Rabbi Yitzchak Meltzan explains in his commentary 'Siach

Yitzchak' (in the Gra's Siddur) on this portion of prayer:

"To fulfill' means that the observance and keeping of the commandments must be permanently fixed and set firm like an iron pillar; for only a spiritual value deeply rooted in a person's soul, and fixed and established within him, will enable them to fulfill their destiny as a servant of G-d.

Proper Torah education shapes the student's soul fundamentally and unchangeably, so that all of the winds in the world will not be able to move them from the Torah.

The educator's duty is thus, to ensure, through all appropriate

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

people was finished, that the practice of Judaism was over. The newly founded state's leaders declared that within a few years, there would be no more religious Jews left.

And now, I am here at my grandson's wedding, a true Torah scholar. I see hundreds of young Torah scholars, young men who were born 'after the flood,' dancing with Jewish pride and rejoicing with the groom.

I am witnessing before me a heavenly vision of a world rebuilt. The Jewish people have risen from the ashes.

Survivors established new homes; yeshivas and holy communities were founded once more. Torah scholars engage in Torah and divine service.

When I hid from the Nazis' terror, I never once had dreamed that I'd witness this scene again. Now that I see it before my eyes, how can I contain my emotions?"

**16.** From his book 'Da'at Shraga' (Education, page 93).

**Parshat Shemot - Bringing Close to the Torah**

means, that the values of Torah and fear of Heaven that are imparted to a young child and rooted in his consciousness will be permanently embedded in his soul.

As the wisest of kings once said: 'Educate a child according to his path, and even when he will age, he will not depart from it' (Proverbs 22:6).

The mission of education and its supreme task is to build a person spiritually and establish him in such a way that no changes will move him, and no winds in the world will uproot him.

It is alarming when we consider the spiritual state of some individuals; they change so drastically that within a single day, they may change countless times.

The reason for this is most often not due to a change in their understanding of right or wrong - they have not previously understood one way and later

realized or thought differently - but rather because they are akin to unfinished dough, which can be kneaded in any which way.

They are not firm in their ways and are subject to influence by any passing wind that blows in the street.

To educate a student is to instill in them a backbone - a straight and solid stature that will not bend or change due to the slightest of winds - as stated in Psalms by King David, "the righteous are like a tree planted by streams of water," they are thus deeply rooted, and their roots cannot be moved even the slightest.

The Psalm continues, 'Not so the wicked' - they are not rooted or planted at all; they are like chaff that any wind can carry and shake from its place.

The righteous, in contrast, are stable and stand firmly despite any circumstances and situations."

**Bringing Close to the Torah**

We return to the discussion of the foundation and heart of

Torah leadership, which is to bring others 'close to the Torah':

## Parshat Shemot - Bringing Close to the Torah

Aaron the priest's immense love for the Jewish people led him to care for their true and eternal welfare, and he therefore endeavored with all his might to teach them Torah.

As the prophet Malachi said:

"True Torah was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness and turned many away from iniquity" (Malachi 2:6).

The Midrash expounds this verse about Aaron, the priest:<sup>17</sup>

"True Torah was in his mouth" - this refers to Aaron, who did not declare the pure impure or the impure pure.

"And injustice was not found on his lips" - this refers to Aaron, who did not forbid the permitted or permit the forbidden.

"He walked with Me in peace and uprightness" - this refers to Aaron, who did not question the attributes

of G-d just as our forefather Abraham did not question G-d.

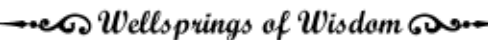
"And turned many away from iniquity" - this refers to Aaron, who brought back sinners to the study of Torah.

Aaron would tie an iron belt around his waist and go around to every Jewish home. Whoever did not know how to recite the Shema he taught to recite it. Anyone who did not know how to pray, he taught them prayer. All who had not entered into the depth of the study of Torah, he taught and nurtured.

At the same time, Hillel the Elder reveals to us that although Aaron loved the people of Israel with all of his heart, he was careful to avoid compromise.<sup>18</sup>

Aaron, the priest, brought people closer to the Torah - not the Torah closer to the people.

That is, you must bring people closer to the will of the Torah by revealing to them the beauty of



**17.** Yalkut Shimoni (Leviticus, 526), 'Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabbah' (Chapter 13).

**18.** As elucidated by the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Commentary on Pirkei Avot, Chapters 1-5, page 64).

**Parshat Shemot - Leadership with Clarity and Consistency**

the Torah and the preciousness of its commandments, so that they will desire to observe all of the commandments of the Torah properly.

However, under no circumstances may you adjust the Torah to fit people's desires by compromising and cutting away parts from it until it pleases them and suits their whims, G-d forbid.

Those rabbis and so-called leaders who constantly compromise, diminishing the Torah and cutting away parts of tradition to suit the spirit of the generation, our Sages refer to in the Talmud (Sotah 49b) and say that before the coming of Moshiach, "the face of the generation will resemble the face of a dog" just as a dog walks ahead

of its master, but whenever it reaches a crossroads, immediately turns its face back to see where its master behind it will turn - similarly, those leaders are "the face of the generation," and make every effort to curry favor with those they're meant to lead; they appear to lead from the front, but whenever spiritual problems arise, they immediately turn to see what public opinion is and what will appease and please the public.

They then act accordingly, even if it involves "cutting" away parts of the holy Torah and its commandments. Thus, indeed, this amounts to 'the face of the generation' resembling the 'face of a dog.'

Let us add a few more words.

**Leadership with Clarity and Consistency**

It is commonly thought that since we live in an age of liberty and openness, people can be free and independent with their opinions and actions.

But is that really so?

A brief examination reveals that we have actually become less

and less independent and more dependent on external influences, which sometimes may even control us against our will.

Notice the herd phenomenon so prevalent among us, where masses suddenly adopt fashions in clothing, food, culture, and leisure - simply

because someone has somehow succeeded in convincing them that 'everyone does it this way.'

The danger of social conditioning and indoctrination is significant in our times.

People recite ideas and arguments devoid of any foundation or logic simply because they have been repeatedly told it, and it has been driven into their minds over and over. Someone may have voiced an idea, his friend repeated it, then it became a headline, and that's it - from now on, people will keep repeating it without knowing why.

Hollow slogans then form into public opinion, and nothing can uproot them. Even a leader - a mayor or a prime minister - may encounter difficulties in his role because of these ideas that have become entrenched.

A true leader, however, is someone whose path is entirely clear and illuminated before him.

A leader must guide his community members without being under their influence or fearing them, without looking back to see their reactions to his actions.

As it is said about the disciple of Moses, Joshua: "Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom there is spirit" (Numbers 27:18), which Rashi explains: "Who can contend with the spirit and opinions of each and everyone." Meaning he does not look to the people to see to where their spirit is inclined, but he rather has the strength to go up against the spirit of anyone who does not act according to the spirit of the Torah, and he would not cower in fear or be intimidated by them.<sup>19</sup>

To summarize: Softness of character in leadership, where it is not appropriate, constitutes an enormous and terrible flaw. In contrast, a firm character stemming from conviction, broad intellect, clarity of mind, and purpose constitutes a model of leadership that needs to be adopted.



## Good or Not ?

The corners of Daniel's eyes welled up. "Father, your description of true Torah leadership is indeed quite demanding, but now that I am aware of your views, I will strive with all of my might to display a strong personality and not be like a wandering leaf that moves in every direction with the changing opinion of the hour."

His father continued to look at him with a serious expression before adding one last insight into the perils of leadership:

"It's very commendable that you have accepted upon yourself to follow in the path of Aaron, the priest that I have described: to be 'a lover of peace and a pursuer of peace, a lover of people and one who brings them close to the Torah.'

However, despite all this, there is still a danger that I want you to be aware of.

I will explain:

In a talk delivered by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, he said:<sup>20</sup>

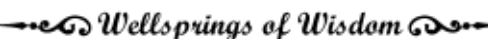
'One who always strives to bring people closer to the service of the Blessed Creator must guard himself that the klipot (negative spiritual forces) and the evil of the people draws near, do not cling to him.'

Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel, of blessed memory, explained:<sup>21</sup>

'Indeed, the virtue of one who engages in bringing the hearts of the Jewish people closer to their Father in Heaven is exceedingly great, and he most certainly brings immense satisfaction to the Holy One, blessed be He.

However, at the same time, one must also know that the work of bringing those who are distant closer to G-d is dangerous, and not all are suited for it.

If G-d forbid, the personal conduct of the person who brings others closer is incomplete, and in



20. 'Likutei Moharan' (Part I, Torah 59, section 1).

21. 'Imrei Noam' (Toldot, Discourse 3).

## Parshat Shemot - Good or Not ?

his soul, some traces of evil and klipah still exist, there is a chance that an aspect of evil - of those people he wishes to bring close - will cling to his soul and harm his spirituality, as well as that of family. Because he has some connection with the evil in them, and in him too, there still exist some aspects of evil, despite them being minute, the "similar attracts its own kind."

This is also the reason why, often, the children of those who engage in the work of bringing others closer, unfortunately abandon or have difficulty following the way of G-d.

Their parents were themselves returnees to Judaism, and before they managed to correct all of their behavior and purify their souls properly, they hurried to go out into the world to give lectures and engage in the work of bringing others closer to Judaism.

Since an aspect of evil still resides within their souls, when they come into contact

with others who are 'distant,' an aspect of evil of those individuals clings to them because "like attracts like." That impurity and evil spirit that clung to them then clung to their children as well and caused them to leave the path of Judaism, G-d forbid.

Therefore, people must purify their souls thoroughly, distance themselves from all foreign desires in the world, and perfect their deeds and attributes completely - only then can they engage in this holy work without any worry, for the evil in people will then not cling to them, since he has no connection with it and is not of its kind to any degree.'

Upon Daniel's face, the burden of the role he was about to accept was clearly visible.

His father gave him a final word of encouragement:

"Do not - G-d forbid - ever have the foolish and absurd idea of giving up - you must confront these challenges each and every day anew with vigor and joy!"

## Summary and Practical Conclusions

1. To be a good leader of the Jewish people, a person must have a great and genuine love for the Jewish people. A love that leads him to increase peace and unity between the Jewish people and their Father in Heaven, between the Jewish people and the sages, between one Torah sage and another, between one Jew and another, and between a man and his wife.

2. This love must give birth in one's heart to heightened compassion and sensitivity toward every person, whoever they may be: "He must be gracious to the creatures, compassionate to the poor, a savior to the needy, a scholar among the wise, a brother to the righteous, a companion to the innocent, a friend to the devout, merciful to his students, a father to the orphans, wise among the enlightened, a teacher to the simple, and a joy to the troubled."

3. A true leader must be careful to bring people close to the Torah - and not to lower the Torah close to the people.

He must draw people toward the word of the Torah by revealing to them the beauty of the Torah and the preciousness of its commandments so that they will desire to observe the commandments properly. However, under no circumstances should he adjust the Torah to fit people's desires by compromising and cutting out parts of it until it pleases them, G-d forbid.

4. Above all, one must guard himself so that the evil powers and the evil of others - that he wishes to bring close - do not cling to him.

If G-d forbid, a person who brings others close contains in their soul some trace of evil, the evil of others will more easily cling to his soul and harm him spiritually. Being that he still has some connection with evil, and in him, too, evil still exists to some degree, he must be even more careful and cognizant.

5. One who has purified himself and elevated his soul and who is able to distance himself

**Parshat Shemot - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

from all of the foreign desires in our world is most suitable to dedicate oneself to this task of bringing near those who are far from the observance of the Torah.

Such a person will be successful in engaging in this holy work without any fear of the evil within others clinging to him, being that he has severed all ties to evil and impurity.

**Shabbat Shalom!**



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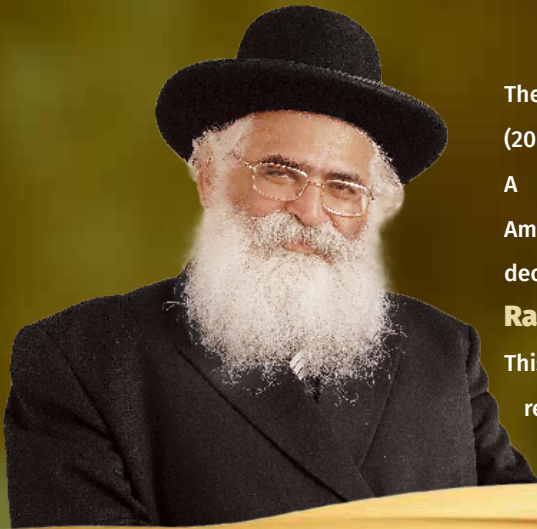
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# Shabbat Times Shemot

18<sup>th</sup> of Tevet, 5785



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:38 pm	5:41 pm	6:09 pm
Miami	5:38 pm	6:30 pm	7:06 pm
Los Angeles	4:52 pm	5:50 pm	6:23 pm
Montreal	4:22 pm	5:30 pm	5:54 pm
Toronto	4:51 pm	5:57 pm	6:22 pm
London	4:06 pm	5:21 pm	5:38 pm
Jerusalem	4:44 pm	5:36 pm	6:09 pm
Tel Aviv	4:41 pm	5:32 pm	6:04 pm
Haifa	4:38 pm	5:33 pm	6:05 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:42 pm	5:37 pm	6:09 pm

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*We must remain steadfast in our service to G-d. The Talmud teaches that four areas require constant reinforcement: Torah, good deeds, prayer, and worldly responsibilities.*

*It is natural to feel a decline in strength over time, but we must exert ourselves to continuously strive upward. While it is crucial to avoid falling, if one does stumble—spiritually speaking—they must take care to rise again and resume their service to G-d.*

*This principle is beautifully illustrated by children. When they fall during play and cry bitterly, a simple gesture, like offering a candy or something similar, quickly soothes them. They immediately rise and return to their activities with renewed energy.*



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