

What More Can We, As Parents, Do?

“What more can I do? I respectfully explain, cajole, beg and plead, but my son just refuses to listen. Doesn’t he understand that I have only his best interests in mind, why could he care less about what I have to say?” The aforementioned cry, emanating from the broken heart of an at-risk teenager’s mother upon entering my office, unfortunately echoes that of hundreds I have met over the past number of years. In truth, their question echoes that of *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s, subsequent to *Bnei Yisroel* rebuffing his tidings of their imminent redemption. “Behold, the children of Israel did not hearken to me. How then will Pharaoh hearken to me?” (*Shemos 25:4*)

To resolve this question let us attempt to understand *Hashem*’s response to *Moshe Rabbeinu* as recorded in the following *pasuk*: “So *Hashem* spoke to *Moshe* and to *Aharon*, and He commanded them concerning the *Bnei Yisroel* and concerning *Pharaoh*, the king of *Egypt*, to let *Bnei Yisroel* out of the land of *Egypt*.” This *pasuk* is immediately followed by the chronicling of the lineage of *Bnei Yisroel*. The *Medrash Raba* spells out *Hashem*’s command concerning *Bnei Yisroel*. “My children are disagreeable, short-tempered, and burdensome, with this in mind must you accept upon yourself their leadership - that they will curse you and stone you.” The *Zohar Hakadosh* further explains why this statement is followed by the recording of *Bnei Yisroel*’s lineage. “You must speak to them appropriately for although they are presently under harsh enslavement, in reality they are kings, the descendants of kings.”

The question begs, how does this response provide an answer to *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s question of how *Pharaoh* will listen to him?

It seems that *Hashem* was telling *Moshe* that the reason *Bnei Yisroel* didn’t heed his words, was due to the fact that they were not approached correctly. However, had he initially accepted *Bnei Yisroel* unconditionally, even on pain of being cursed and stoned, and spoken to them with the respect they deserved, as “kings who are the descendants of kings,” they would have listened to his words.

Now let us understand what spiritual level *Bnei Yisroel* were on at that time. *Chazal* comment on *Bnei Yisroel*’s refusal to accept the news of their imminent redemption. “Is there a slave who is told that his master will be setting him free and he is

not ecstatic, still *Bnei Yisroel* did not want to separate themselves from the idols of the Egyptians.” *Chazal* bear testimony to the unbelievable decadence *Bnei Yisroel* had descended to. They were ready to continue suffering the pain of their enslavement, rather than be a free nation in their own land “flowing with milk and honey,” for that would necessitate the cessation of their practice of idolatry. It is in such a state, that *Hashem* says to *Moshe*, if *Bnei Yisroel* are to heed his words they must be accepted and spoken to with the respect that they deserve, as “kings, the descendants of kings”.

This is actually brought by the *Rambam* as Halacha. “A leader may not treat them with capriciousness even though they are common people. He should not step over the heads of the holy people. Even though they are simple people and lowly, they are the descendants of *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov* and the hosts of *Hashem* whom He led out of Egypt with great power and a strong hand. He should patiently bear the difficulty of the community and their burden like *Moshe Rabbeinu*, as *Bamidbar* 11:12 states concerning him: ‘As a nursemaid will carry an infant.’ And *Devarim* 1:16 states: ‘And I commanded your judges.’ This is an admonition to the judges to bear the community like a nursemaid carries an infant. Take an example from *Moshe*, the master of all prophets whom the Holy One, blessed be He, sent to Egypt, about whom *Shemos* 6:12 states: ‘And I commanded them concerning the *Bnei Yisroel*.’ The Oral Tradition relates that *Hashem* told *Moshe* and *Aharon* to accept this mission even though the people would curse them and stone them.” (*Sanhedrin* Chap. 25)

The *Rambam*’s description of the “simple and lowly people” of *Klal Yisroel* as, “the hosts of *Hashem* whom He led out of Egypt”, is perplexing. *Klal Yisroel* was no longer in the low state that *Moshe* had found them in the year prior. Quite the opposite was true, they had repented from their sins and reached such a high level of spirituality that *Chazal* say, “The maidservant on the sea saw what the great prophets did not in their lifetime”. How is that state descriptive of “the simple and lowly” of every generation? This includes the generation regarding which this *Halacha* was originally commanded, which was the lowest in the history of our nation, as described above.

An understanding of *Klal Yisroel*’s self-description in *Shir HaShirim* 5:6 will immediately dispel this seeming paradox. “I am darkened but comely, O daughters

of *Jerusalem!* Like the tents of *Kedar*, like the curtains of *Shlomo*.” *Rashi* explains these words, “Do not look upon me [disdainfully] because I am swarthy, for the sun has gazed upon me, for I am darkened because of the sun’s gaze, but I am comely with the shape of beautiful limbs, and if I am darkened as the tents of *Kedar*, which are darkened by the rain, for they are constantly spread out in the deserts, I am easily cleansed to be like the curtains of *Shlomo*. For my darkness and my ugliness are not from my mother’s womb, but from tanning from the sun, for that darkness can easily be whitened by staying in the shade.” In other words, any ugliness found in *Klal Yisroel* is not of their essence, rather it is simply temporary filthiness that fades away as they are removed from the filth’s source. In contrast their essence (the shape of their limbs) no matter their spiritual state will always remain beautiful.

With all of this in mind I turn to the mother entering my office and respond. “If you were attempting to persuade the president of the United States of the logic of your view on any subject, what would your chance of success be if you prefaced your pitch with “Listen to me right now!”?”

“Zero.”

“So why do you think that you’ll persuade your son without approaching him properly? Does your son feel that your acceptance of him is unconditional, ‘as a nursemaid will carry an infant’? Do you speak with him with the respect he deserves?”

“Sure,” she responds, “How much respect does one who acts as disgracefully as he does deserve already?”

“That of a king a descendant of kings, a member of the legion of Hashem who has merited to see what the greatest of prophets did not.”