



Shemot

The Hallmark of Great Jewish Leaders

We're all familiar with the narrative: in Parshat Shemot we're told how Pharaoh, King of Egypt, declared that every baby boy born would be cast cruelly into the waters of the Nile. Moshe's parents, Amram and Yocheved, placed him in a basket on the waters of the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter discovered him.

Then the Torah tells us:

וַתִּפְתָּח - She opened the basket

וַתִּרְאֶהוּ אֶת-הַיֶּלֶד - she saw the infant

וַהֲנִיחַ-נָּעַר בִּכָּה - And behold, it was a lad who was crying

וַתֹּאמֶר - and she exclaimed

זֶה מִיִּלְדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה - This must be one of the Hebrew children.

Now there are two questions we have to ask: first of all, in one and the same sentence, we were told that Moshe was a יֶלֶד, he was an infant, and he was a נָּעַר, he was a lad. How could that be?

Secondly, how did Pharaoh's daughter know that this was a Hebrew child? Some of our mefarshim, our commentators, explain that she noticed that he was circumcised - but there appears to be a direct connection in the text between the crying of the lad and the fact that he was a Hebrew. The Chassidische

Rebbe of Sochatchov explains that a יֶלֶד, an infant, cries for himself or herself. They need comfort, love, or support. They cry because they're hungry, or thirsty. But then, the time comes in the development of the child's life when they start to empathise, to cry for the plight and the pain of others. That's when a boy becomes a lad.

So, Pharaoh's daughter noticed that when Moshe was crying, “וַהֲנִיחַ-נָּעַר בִּכָּה”, it was the cry of a lad. He wasn't crying because of his own pain. He was empathising with the plight of his people, and she immediately recognised that this was a Hebrew child who was crying for the plight of his fellow Hebrews.

A great leader is somebody who notices pain, who is troubled by the suffering, not just of those who are near to him or her, but to everybody - and who does something about it. So here we see how Moshe at the most tender of ages had that capacity to feel the suffering of others. And the more he grew up, the more determined he became, not just to be aware of pain and suffering, but to actually change the plight of others for the better. Making him ultimately into the greatest leader of all time.

Shabbat Shalom.