

Mordechai Malka

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Chairman of the Worldwide Committee of

STa”M (Sifrei Torah, Tefillin, and Mezuzot)

Member of Chief Rabbinate of Israel



עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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OHR

Parashat Ha'azinu and Sukkot

HAMELECH

Hoshea or Yehoshua

At the end of Parashat Ha'azinu (32:44), Moshe Rabbeinu's star disciple is called "Hoshea ben Nun." Now, that was his given name, but for several decades already, he has been called by his new name, Yehoshua. So why here, at the end of the Torah, is he called by his previous name?

Rashi clues us in. Yehoshua here is being given the mantle of leadership of the entire Jewish Nation. Rising to power could bring a person to conceit. But not Yehoshua. No sooner is he appointed to this most prestigious position, and he immediately reminds himself of his humble beginnings. The rise to power does not affect him negatively. He is the same humble Hoshea.

And not only Yehoshua. His ancestor Yosef is also referred to in a similar manner. "And Yosef was in Mitzrayim." (Shemot 1:5) This teaches that he was the same Yosef. The same Yosef Hatzaddik as his father's prized son, the same Yosef in the pits, the same Yosef in the dungeons, the same Yosef on the throne of Egypt, the greatest empire of the time. His righteousness did not waver. He adhered to Torah and Mitzvot in all circumstances – grey, black, sky-blue and royal purple. He exercised control over physical urges, withstood temptation in superhuman terms. He ruled over his own inclinations, proving himself worthy of ruling over all of mankind.

Yosef's reign was truly amazing and unparalleled. It was against the law for a slave to reign. It was unheard of for a foreigner to take a royal position. His young age was also quite uncommon for people who assume such roles. But all that did not matter. He was a ruler. He exercised self-control, and became ruler of Egypt for eighty long years.

Other Great Humble Leaders

Our Sages also stress that David Hamelech remained humble even after becoming King of our people. Thus, of him it is said, "And David was the small one," (Shmuel I 17:14) because he kept a low profile. In his eyes and heart and deeds, he was the same little David as a child, adult, commoner and king.

We also find this idea in reference to Moshe and Aharon. "They are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to liberate the Children of Israel from Egypt; that was Moshe and Aharon." (Shemot 6:27) Rashi explains: The same ones who were commanded were the same ones who acted. I.e., they remained humble and unassuming, despite having been given the most lofty mission of being sent to undermine the king of Egypt, the leading world power. Here they are, appointed to positions of such authority, becoming the leaders of the most elite nation in the history of the world, and they do not let that get to their head. They keep their focus on following Hashem's command to the best of their

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ability, not getting sidetracked nor disillusioned by fame and honor. Since Hashem is the One in charge of such (and all) appointments, maintaining focus and exercising self-control are key factors to longevity in holding tenure.

Test of the Midwives

Let us study, for a moment, the verses which speak of the Jewish midwives in Egypt. Pharaoh calls for Shifrah and Puah and orders them to terminate the life of each baby boy the moment he is born. The midwives fear the Almighty. They do not do as Pharaoh decreed. They keep the boys alive. They come up with farfetched excuses to explain their actions. The Almighty rewards them for their courage and has the Jewish People multiply. When the midwives feared the Almighty, He had them become mothers of great households (kehunah and malchut, priesthood and royalty). (Shemot 1:15-21)

As we read these verses, we wonder why their fear of Elokim and their reward are reiterated. It seems reasonable to suggest that their nisayon (challenge) had two stages. At the initial stage, when they first received orders to kill, they were in a dilemma – Catch 22. If they listen to the king, they could have reason to be concerned that Bnei Yisroel will not tolerate the bloodshed and will retaliate in turn. If they disobey the king, that is punishable by death. Nonetheless, they mustered the Yirat Shomayim necessary to be staunch and disobey the king. This certainly was one level of Yirat Shomayim, because the king was in a much stronger position to harm them.

Now, once Hashem rewarded their efforts and had the Jewish population grow by leaps and bounds, this set the stage for part two of their challenge. Now, with all these tons of babies around, it would almost go unnoticed were they to execute the king's decree on a fraction of the newborns. Had they done that, they would be able, perhaps, to be in a better position to "save their skin" from the wrath of King of Egypt. At least they could say that they tried and succeeded in part. And with all of the babies who would be left alive, perhaps the Jews would also not be so upset with them.

Despite all of these possible considerations, the approach of the midwives was unwavering and uncompromising. Fear of the Almighty was their primary concern, through and through. They did not seek any leniencies or methods to appease flesh-and-blood tyrants. Their one concern was to please Hashem. And that they did. When Hashem saw this even greater display of Yirat Elokim, He then decreed that they be rewarded handsomely, personally producing the most prestigious people of the most noble of nations.

Reb Yosele of Slutsk

Nisyonot – challenges – are what bring out the best of us. This can be illustrated with the following true story.

In the city of Slutsk was a young boy who could not sit still. While his friends sat and learned, he was up to antics and annoyances. He would commonly pick on neighborhood cats and dogs,

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pulling their tails and hurling at them stones. Defenseless people were also among his victims. Yosele's parents gave up on educating him. In their eyes, he was beyond hope.

One day, Yosele overheard a man reprimanding his son. The father raised his voice and yelled, "Do not act like Yosele! I'd rather you die then turn out like Yosele!"

When Yosele heard this, he was taken aback. Was he really that bad that he had become the symbol of every parent's nightmare? Yosele decided to better his ways. He said goodbye to the cats and dogs, giving them some cake. Then he asked his father for money to cover travel expenses to Yeshiva. When his father saw that he was serious, he gave him the necessary funds.

Yosele found himself in the Yeshiva of Volozhin. He asked to meet with the Rosh Hayeshivah. He was shown Reb Chayim's house and proceeded to knock. Reb Chayim opened the door and asked, "How can I help you?"

The young boy said, "I want to learn in Yeshiva."

Reb Chayim asked, "How old are you?"

"Twelve years old," was the reply.

"And what have you learned until now?"

"Nothing," said the boy.

"Well," said the Rosh Hayeshiva, "boys come to our Yeshivah when they are considerably older than you are now, after mastering two sedarim of Gemara."

"But," cried Yosele, "I so much want to learn!"

Reb Chayim was impressed with the young boy's sincerity. He accepted him into his Yeshivah and arranged for suitable tutors, older boys who would learn with him Chumash, Mishnah, and then Gemara.

Yosele was diligent in his studies. He celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in Yeshiva, the Yeshiva became his home. He did not go back to visit his family in Slutzk. He just kept learning.

After a number of years, he received a letter from his mother that his father's shop had burned down, and now that Yosele had learned for a few years, the time had come for him to help the family with parnasah. Yosele showed the letter to the Rosh Hayeshivah. Reb Chayim told him to keep on learning.

A little while later, a second letter came from his mother, informing him of his father's fatal illness, imploring him to come and take leave of his father and also to help the family's financial plight. Once again, Reb Chayim said to stay in Yeshiva and be diligent in his studies.

Finally, a third letter arrived, informing him that his father had passed away. That's it, wrote his mother, no more excuses. We need you.

Reb Chayim told the boy to sit Shiva in Yeshiva and then continue learning.

A bit later, the Rav of Slutzk passed away and community leaders came to Volozhin to ask Reb Chayim for a replacement to the position. Reb Chayim told them, "I have the man for the job. Did you once have in your town a young boy, Yosele?"

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"Sure," they said, "he was a restless boy who could not learn a thing. He disappeared years ago. We have not seen him since."

Reb Chayim called for his talmid, Yosef. When Reb Yosef entered the room, Reb Chayim stood up, out of respect for the young budding scholar. "Here is your 'Yosele', Reb Chayim exclaimed, "Harav Yosef of Slutsk."

The community leaders were astounded. But they valued Reb Chayim's word, and upon his approbation, they immediately accepted Reb Yosef as their Rav, promising to marry him off to the best of matches, and guaranteeing to support him and his family, including his widowed mother.

Reb Chayim then turned to Reb Yosef and said, "I knew it was very difficult for you to surmount all of these challenges. I saw your tremendous growth, but I was not the only one. Satan saw it too. He was jealous of your success. He could not bear to see little Yosele turning into such a great Talmid Chacham. So he received permission from On High to test you, even burning down your father's shop and setting your father ill. It was all an attempt to remove you from your studies. But you were steadfast. You were diligent. You surmounted all your difficulties and now your mother will enjoy your accomplishments in this world and the next, and your father in Gan Eden is beaming at your appointment as Rav of Slutsk."

Then When?

In Avot (1:14) we are taught: Hillel said... If not now, then when? And in Perek 2 (Mishna 4): Hillel says... Do not say, 'when I get some free time, then I will learn, for perhaps you will never get the time!'"

The Chofetz Chayim explains: There is no time like the present. Each moment is its own opportunity! Even if you do learn later, that does not make up for what you could have learned earlier when you had that opportunity!

A person's true level shines through at a time of challenge. Then we see who he really is.

The mitzvah of Sukkah is most unique. It is an opportunity to put our entire being into a mitzvah activity. It does not involve just one aspect or limb. We place our whole body, clothing and shoes, spending a week eating, drinking, sleeping, learning – living in the Sukkah. It is not always easy. Many of the comforts of the home cannot be brought into the Sukkah. It is a test. Let us do this mitzvah joyously. In that merit, may Hashem soon spread out over us His Sukkah of Peace, Amen.

Fondly,

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Samei'ach

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