



Beshalach: Heavy Handed

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“Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. So, Moses said to Joshua, Pick men for us, and go out and fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand. Joshua did as Moses had told him, to fight against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur ascended to the top of the hill. It came to pass that when Moses would raise his hand, Israel would prevail, and when he would lay down his hand, Amalek would prevail. Now Moses’ hands were heavy; so, they took a stone and placed it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one from this [side], and one from that [side]; so, he was with his hands in faith until sunset. Joshua weakened Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword (Shemos 17:8-13).”

Amalek attacked us without cause or reason. Moshe tasked Yehoshua with organizing and leading the army into battle. As Yehoshua mobilized the fighting force, Moshe ascended the mountain and raised his hands in supplicatory prayer. The Torah then says, “*Now Moshe’s hands were heavy.*” But what does this mean? Of course, the literal meaning is obvious, yet it is strange that something so “mundane” would appear in the midst of this miraculous story. The fledging Jewish nation was not comprised of warriors; it was Divine intervention which saved the day. Couldn’t God have given Moshe a bit more strength? What is the Torah trying to teach us? Rashi comments, “*Since he had been lax in [the performance of] the commandment [of warring against Amalek] and had appointed someone else in his stead, his hands became heavy.*” Instead of answering our question, Rashi compounds it; why didn’t Moshe lead the army himself? Why did Moshe delegate this responsibility to Yehoshua?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l provided an incredible insight. Moshe’s initial inclination was, in fact, to lead the army himself, but he then questioned this approach. As we will learn a bit later in the Torah, God created age restrictions for army service. No man younger than 20 or older than 60 could serve in the standing army of the Jewish nation. Moshe Rabbeinu was 80 years old, and therefore, decided to hand over this military responsibility to Yehoshua. The problem, explains the Rebbe, is that when one sees a Jew in need, when one sees our nation in crisis, he must put his personal *cheshbonos* (calculations and ideas) on the side, roll up his sleeves, and spring into action. Although Moshe’s logic was sound, God didn’t want logic. He wanted quick and decisive action on behalf of the nation. He didn’t want Moshe to delegate; He wanted Moshe to act. God conveyed this message to Moshe through the *heaviness* of his hands. You were heavy or slow to spring into action while your nation was in crisis. You should not have delegated this to Yehoshua; you should have led the charge yourself.

The Rebbe’s profound insight yields two very important lessons. Lesson #1: When you see a Jew in need, don’t think – act. When there is a crisis, we can get caught in the planning of the response when, in fact, we need to mobilize and help. When you see someone suffering, don’t think about the best person to help, roll up your sleeves and do something. When you see something that is broken, don’t wait for the most capable person to fix it, try to make a difference right here and now. Lesson #2: Don’t spend your entire life planning. There is a time to plan and a time to act. Too often in life, we put all our energy into planning and thinking. We have the 6-month plan, the 2-year plan, and the 3-decade plan. Our plans are polished, well-thought-out, and fully detailed. There is only one problem; we keep the plans neatly filed on our desk – but we never execute, and we fail to engage in dynamic activity. There are times in life when one must stop planning and thinking and start doing and acting. This does not mean that we should not plan and think ahead. We must be forward-thinking people who are able to see beyond our current circumstances. We must be careful to avoid overthinking things to the point of inactivity. Thinking and planning are important – but so is doing.

Yehoshua led the army to victory (with God’s help), but the Torah tells us, it should have been Moshe. We too at times get a bit “heavy,” laden with planning and personal calculations. There is a time to delegate and a time to plan, but we must always be ready to seize the opportunities, to act, perform, and make a difference.