



KINDER TORAH

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PARASHAS VA'EIRA

EMPATHY

"**R**abbi Gross, may I please speak to you about something important?"

"Surely, Reb Yehoshua. How can I help you?"

"I am in a very difficult situation, Rabbi Gross. I am having a conflict with my neighbor about apartment renovations. As a result of this, we are barely on speaking terms. I want to work it out, but we just do not have the right communication. In addition to that, an older person in my family is very sick, and I must take care of him. I am running from doctor to doctor, getting him tests and treatments."

"Oy vey."

"Rabbi, one of my sons is not doing well in the Talmud Torah. I need to find him a private teacher, but no one is available. In the meantime, he is falling farther and farther behind. To top it all off, my oldest daughter wants to get married, but we have not found someone suitable for her. Time is moving quickly, and she is not getting any younger."

Rabbi Gross listened with a sympathetic ear. His warm eyes full of empathy looked at Reb Yehoshua's sad face. Reb Yehoshua's spirit was crumbling under the stress of all of his problems. The load was too much for him to bear. Tears began to well up in his eyes. Rabbi Gross put his arm around him. He patted him softly on the shoulder.

"**E**verything will be okay, Reb Yehoshua. I feel for you. My heart is with you. Your *tsorus* (trouble) is my *tsorus*. Your problems are my problems. We will work them out together. Hashem will help us. Come; let us come up with a way to speak to the neighbor."

And so, Rabbi Gross sat patiently with Reb Yehoshua, and went through each problem, step by step. Reb Yehoshua's heart lightened with every sympathetic word. He was no longer fighting his battle alone. Someone was with him to share his burden.

"Rabbi Gross, you are such a big comfort and help to me. How did you learn to be so empathetic?"

"Reb Yehoshua, empathy, or 'sharing another's burden' is a Jewish trait that goes back to the roots of our nation. The Shelah speaks about it in this week's parasha. In Mitzrayim, the Tribe of Levi was not enslaved like the rest of Klal Yisrael. They did not undergo the hard, cruel, labor. Although they did not suffer

themselves, they were empathetic with the plight of their brothers. How do we know this? By the names given to the sons of Levi – Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. Gershon comes from the word 'ger' – stranger. The Levites were sympathetic with the fact that the Jewish people were strangers in a land that was not their own. Kehas comes from the word 'kehos' – blunt. The Mitzrim blunted the teeth of the Jews. Lastly, Merari is from the word 'mar' – bitter. The taskmasters embittered their lives. Although the tribe of Levi did not endure this cruelty, they were empathetic, and recorded this fact forever with the names of the heads of their tribe. This teaches us a lesson for all times – that a Jew must be sympathetic with his



friend's plight. He should lend his ear to hear the other's problems, and his heart to feel the other's pain."

"Rabbi Gross, that is so comforting. One of the most difficult parts of a problem is feeling that you are all alone. Knowing that someone is with you gives you the strength to go on."

"Reb Yehoshua, let us move forward together, and face our problems with a renewed strength and confidence."

Kinderlach . . .

Your friend is nervous because he has a big test coming up. Comfort him. Encourage him. Learn with him and help him get a good grade. Your neighbor is down because he is sick. Visit him. Bring him a warm smile and cheer him up. Your sister is sad because someone hurt her feelings. Put your arm around her and give her a comforting hug. Listen to her while she unburdens her heart. Make her feel that she is not alone in her problem. These are all ways to be empathetic. Empathy is a wonderful middah, kinderlach. Lend your ear. Lend a comforting hug. Lend your heart.

THE VOICE OF PEACE

"**T**zviki, you took my ball!"

"You gave me permission to play with it!"

"No, I didn't!"

The two brothers begin fighting. Imma, who was listening in the next room, calmly steps in.

"Come, boys. Let's not fight. There is nothing to be gained, and a lot to be lost. Making peace is the best thing."

The boys calm down and Tzviki smiles at his Imma."

"Imma, your soft words always make peace."

"**T**his was Aaron and Moshe to whom Hashem said, 'Take the Children of Israel out of Mitzraim'" (Shemos 6:26). The Malbim comments that theirs was a twofold mission: the physical redemption from the slavery, and the spiritual salvation from the *tumah* (defilement) of the Egyptian society. Moshe Rabbeinu had the main responsibility for the physical redemption. He spoke to Paroh. He initiated most of the plagues. Aaron HaKohen shouldered the burden of the spiritual salvation. He uplifted the spirits of a downtrodden people who did not know the ways of Hashem. Why were his words heard? Because he was a lover and pursuer of peace. His soft words warmed their hearts.

Kinderlach . . .

To whom do you listen? To one who shouts at you and makes a fool of himself? Or to one who speaks softly and patiently. Aaron HaKohen was able to make peace between people. Therefore, his words were able to raise the Jewish people from the lowest levels of tumah. He is a role model for us to emulate. Speak kind words of encouragement and peace to everyone. Lift up your self and those around you.

Parasha Questions:

- Why does Hashem bring calamities upon the nations of the world? (Rashi 7:3)
- How old were Moshe and Aharon when they spoke to Paroh? (7:7)
- How many frogs came out of the river? (8:2 and Rashi)