



Shemos: Lift Up Your Hand

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

Moshe having grown up in the palace, had not experienced the challenges of the Jewish nation. And so, the day came when he made his way into the fields to see the plight of his brethren. It was there that he observed an Egyptian taskmaster mercilessly beating a Jewish slave. Moshe unable to stand by and witness this unprovoked brutality, stepped in and killed the Egyptian. The next day, Moshe ventured out again.

He went out on the second day, and behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling, and he said to the wicked one, "Why are you going to strike your friend?" (Exodus 2:13)

These two Jews did not take kindly to Moshe's intervention and delivered a nuanced threat to disclose that Moshe had killed the Egyptian. Moshe understood that he was no longer safe in Egypt and fled to Midyan.

Rashi provides a fascinating insight regarding the altercation between these two Jews.

Although he had not struck him, he is called wicked for [merely] raising his hand [to strike him].

Moshe called the aggressor wicked for merely raising his hand against the other. But why? Although he threatened to strike, he didn't actually do so. Why would Moshe call him a "rasha"?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, 1902-1994) advances a truly beautiful explanation. Each and every part of the body has two functions. There is the utilitarian, everyday use, and then there is a higher purpose use. The hand serves many day-to-day functions which allow us to perform useful tasks and earn a livelihood. On a higher level, the hand's sacred purpose is to do and give to the other. Hashem gave me hands so I can outstretch them to embrace and deliver blessing to the other. I can extend my hand as a display of peace and give to those in need. If I use that very same hand to visit harm and hurt upon others, I am misusing a sacred gift. That misuse is sinful and as such, the culpable individual is called a "rasha." Therefore, the mere act of lifting one's hand against another is sinful. Even if I don't strike, being poised and ready to hurt is a transgression. Moshe understood this and tried to convey this message to his brethren.

Hashem gives us many gifts. Each part of our body, each part of our life contains so much beautiful blessing. We must recognize and appreciate these gifts and understand that each gift/blessing comes with obligations and responsibilities. We must use our body, our strength, and our physical ability to benefit the other. My hand must be outstretched, ready to visit assistance and blessing to all who need.