

Parshas Shmos 5762

There has been much talk, of late, about Mayor Rudolf Gulliani, and how, in the last few months of his office, and in the wake of the terrible events of September 11th, has managed to transform himself, and enlarge the way in which the world perceives him, by the brilliant way that he has risen to the level of these fierce events.

In fact, history knows of many people who, in their background and beginnings, gave little hint of their later greatness.

For example, Winston Churchill as a young man was a failure in school and a constant disappointment to his father. Yet as a young cavalry officer in India he found in himself the stirrings of great ambition, and he educated himself, and forged himself - almost by an act of will - into one of history's great statesman.

Perhaps you remember Shakespeare's depiction - drawn from historical sources - of Prince Hal, later Henry V, who spent his youth frolicking in the company of worthless companions. And yet, when the time came to assume the throne, he put away his youthful follies and became a great warrior-king.

And we could doubtless find many more examples.

Yet all these pale into insignificance next to the greatest act of transformation of all time, about which we read in today's parsha.

For in this parsha we read about a prince of Egypt, adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, brought up in the bosom of despotic power and superstitious idolatry, and how he became the leader of an oppressed people, the greatest of our teachers and of our prophets, confidante of G-d Himself, teacher of the Divine law, the man of whom the רבונו של עולם Himself said: בכל ביתי נאמן הוא, in all My house he is the most faithful.

The transformation is so amazing as to almost strain credulity. And, in fact, later when the רבש"ע appeared to him and sent him on his mission to the Jewish people, משה protested: והם לא יאמינו בי - they won't believe me. And the נצי"ב explains that Moshe maintained that the people could never believe that someone who had received his upbringing, in Pharaoh's own home, could ever be the agent of their deliverance.

And yet he was.

How did this amazing transformation happen? Of course, at this distant remove we cannot recover the story of what must have been the spiritual work of a many decades. But still, we might ask, was there one especially fateful moment, one critical turning point, to which we can point and say - *here*, this is where the trajectory of Moshe's life took that critical turning point, towards becoming the איש האלוקים, the greatest of all men?

In fact, the חומש, as understood by חז"ל, indicates that there was. And it is found in the following פסוקים:

ויגדל הילד ותבאהו לבת פרעה ויהי לה לבן ותקרא שמו משה ותאמר כי מן המים משיתהו :

ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו :

Note the seeming redundancy of the word ויגדל - first ויגדל הילד, and then again: ויגדל משה. Why is the significance of this doubling?

The ילקוט explains:

כתיב ויגדל הילד, ויגדל משה. שני פעמים? למעלה בקומה למטה בגדולה, מה היתה גדולה שיצא אל אחיו.

It says ויגדל הילד, and then again ויגדל משה. Why twice? The answer is that the first ויגדל refers to his physical growth, but the second refers to his real גדולה, his greatness. And what was that greatness? That he went out to his brothers.

The Torah, with these words ויגדל משה, is identifying for us the critical moment. From this moment when Moshe went out to see his brother's suffering everything else followed inexorably: His outrage at the beating of a helpless Jew, his smiting of the Egyptian overseer, his flight from Egypt, and ultimately his destiny as the leader of the redeemed people.

It would have been easy for Moshe to remain within the comfortable confines of the palace. And if he took an interest in the welfare of the people from whom he was born he would have been able to help them far more effectively - he might have told himself - from within the palace, using his influence in the corridors of power to alleviate their suffering. What good was there, what benefit, if leaving the palace and going to see their labor for himself? It was quixotic, useless, absurd.

And yet he went. Because Moshe knew that these were his people, flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, and therefore he had to see their suffering for himself. He had to go out to them. He had to be there with them. And that was the root of his greatness.

ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו; because he was great, he went out to his brothers. And by doing so, he set himself on the path towards his ultimate incalculable greatness.

And if we are to be - as the משנה in אבות enjoins us to be - תלמידים of רבינו, then we too have to follow in his footsteps and go out to our brothers and sisters who are in distress. ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו - true גדלות, as Judaism conceives it, cannot live in an

ivory tower. And that is why our shul is sending - just as we did last year - a delegation to our beleaguered brethren in ארץ ישראל. They are going on our behalf to say to our brothers and sisters in ארץ ישראל: עמכם אנחנו בצרה; we are with you in your time of trouble. And as we are united now in distress, so we will be united in deliverance, when במהרה בימינו אמן - ובא לציון גואל.