

## **Activating Our Inner Moses** **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

נ"ו

### *Parshat Sh'mot*

**Now, Moses was shepherding the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the farthest end of the wilderness, and he came to the Mountain of G\*d, at Horeb. (Exodus 3:1)**

How was it that Moses was deemed to be worthy to lead the generation of the Exodus? The answer that we all know, the midrash that is taught in virtually every Jewish religious school, in every denomination of Judaism, is that he counted the sheep and discovered that one of the lambs was missing, and he went to look for it. (He was worthy because he was willing to exert himself on behalf of just one little lamb.) He found it nibbling grass and drinking water from a small stream. Realizing that, being hungry and thirsty, the lamb was likely to be tired as well, Moses, after letting the lamb finish eating and drinking, picked it up in his arms and lovingly carried it back to the flock. (He was worthy because he was so perceptive and so loving and caring.)

But there are other reasons as well. (As my teacher, Rabbi Joseph Gelberman, is fond of saying, "Never instead; always in addition.")

Rashi takes as the reason the first part of this verse, that Moses led his father-in-law's flock to the farthest edge of the wilderness, as far as possible from anyone's property, in order to avoid even the slightest possibility of theft (of the animals trespassing – even unknowingly – upon the property of others, let alone eating grass which belonged to others).

Ovadia Sforno, more the mystic than Rashi, cites the conclusion of the verse, that it was because Moses, separating himself from the noise and tumult of the world, sought only (or, at least, primarily) to get himself to the Mountain of G\*d, there to enter into communion with the Divine.

We may understand these two apparently distinct reasons as a polarity rather than a dichotomy. Moses' desire to avoid encroaching on the property of others – even unintentionally – is intimately bound up with his desire to enter into communion with G\*d. It is Moses' determination not to encroach upon the property (and other rights) of others that enables him to enter into full communion with G\*d, and it is his unequivocal devotion to G\*d that inevitably leads him to refrain from encroaching upon the rights of others. The spiritual and the physical are not apart *from* each other; rather, each is a part *of* the other, and only when we learn that lesson, only when we take it wholly into ourselves, only when we examine our actions in its light, will we be able fully to love our Eternal G\*d with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might. Only thus will we be able to activate our inner Moses.

Shabbat Shalom.