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# GROWTH

## At The

# SHABBAT TABLE

## PARSHAT SHEMOT

### Becoming Big

In introducing Moshe's background, the Torah recounts "וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֵּלֶד – and the lad grew up." This is quite strange of the Torah to narrate; why is it important for us to know that little Moshe became a 'big boy' and got taller? Why is this an essential part of his origin story?

I once heard a fascinating insight. The Torah is not conveying that Moshe hit a growth spurt; it's communicating that he reached a level of unique greatness and is in essence teaching us a timeless jewel of a lesson. "וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה," the verse (2:11) writes – *And Moshe became great*. How? Why? What was so special about him that would ultimately bring out his inner spark to become one of the greatest men to ever walk this earth? The verse immediately clarifies: "וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו" – because he went out to his brethren.

The Torah here is attesting to the true source of Moshe's grandeur. He grew up in a palace; he never had to lift a finger in his life. Had he merely stayed out of trouble, he could have lived a life of wealth and luxury. Yet, this didn't appeal to him as a viable option. He couldn't just ignore it; their pain was his pain. He was so connected to his fellow brothers and sisters; he couldn't bear to turn his shoulder, let alone abandon them. The moment he "went out to his brethren" was ultimately the first step to his journey of untold greatness. He would come to liberate G-d's Chosen People from the grip of an oppressive, tyrannical, and cruel power. He would come to lead his nation to Matan Torah, the most cosmic event in world history. He would come to mediate between G-d and His traumatized, rebellious children, advocating for their forgiveness even as they committed egregious acts of betrayal. He would ultimately come to teach, inspire, and bring the Jews all the way to the Promised Land. All of these unparalleled achievements were made possible because of one simple thing – extending himself outwards towards others. This was the source of Moshe's greatness.

Perhaps, this idea is hinted to in one of our timeless traditions. When performing a circumcision, we bless the child: "זה הקטן גדול יהיה" – "this small one should become big." Here, too, the intention is not merely a hope that the minor should gain some weight or grow a few inches. We are in essence blessing this child to also exemplify greatness – to become someone who, like Moshe, went out to his brothers and sisters. When we indeed do so, we can look back with pride and genuinely appreciate our own journey of "זה הקטן גדול יהיה" – how we too, tapped into true greatness.

(Based on a d'var Torah recounted by R' Yaniv Meirou)

### A Real Leader

R' Yisrael Salanter, founder of the Mussar movement, had two primary disciples: the Alter of Novardok and the Alter of Slabodka. Ironically, although both learned under the same towering Torah giant, they emerged with dramatically different approaches to life and *avodat Hashem*.

The Alter of Novardok emphasized *shiflut ha'adam* — the nothingness of man. In Novardok, the focus was on breaking one's ego entirely and subordinating oneself fully to the Creator. It was even common for students to intentionally place themselves in embarrassing situations — such as walking into a hardware store and asking for milk — simply to experience humiliation and be "put in their place."

The Alter of Slabodka, by contrast, taught the opposite approach. His philosophy centered on *gadlut ha'adam* — the greatness of man. He believed that when people recognize their own value and potential, they strive to live up to it. Slabodka emphasized dignity, self-respect, and the responsibility to use one's strengths and abilities to their fullest.

What is truly remarkable is how this divergence came about. Both the Alter of Novardok and the Alter of Slabodka learned from the same rebbi: R' Yisrael Salanter. How did they emerge with such opposite worldviews?

The answer itself reveals R' Yisrael Salanter's true greatness. He did not teach his students to imitate him or follow a single path. Rather, he taught each student how to discover their own path — how to understand themselves, their strengths, and their mission, and to serve Hashem accordingly. Each student was empowered to succeed in their own unique *avodah*.

Often, parents or teachers look to mold their children and students into their own box, but true greatness is achieved when the focus is helping them tap into their own potential.

*Leaders create followers. Great leaders create leaders.*

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by R' Menachem Goldberger)

"Your fellow is your own mirror. If your own face is clean, the image you perceive will also be flawless. But should you gaze into this 'mirror' and see a blemish, it is your own imperfections that you are seeing."

(Ba'al Shem Tov)