

# Don't Kick the Can

BY DON JARASHOW

Last Friday I went to visit Rabbi and Rebbetzin Feuer in Lakewood, New Jersey, with whom I am fortunate to have had a longstanding relationship for over three decades. It was perfect timing.

As the rebbetzin was reminiscing about her father, I casually asked when her father's yahrtzeit was. She replied, "Actually, it's coming up 23 Teves, this Monday."

Her father, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe, epitomized the idea that greatness is not something one is born with. He was a true leader for all of *klal Yisrael*, not only for Telshe in Cleveland. His Torah, his *lomdus*, his *middos*, his fiery *shmuessen*, and his enduring impact can still be felt and heard in the dormitory halls of yeshivos throughout the world. He was an *ish emes*, and he was not born into greatness.

## THE SPARK OF DETERMINATION

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter was born in Portsmouth, Virginia in 1915 and attended public school. There was no framework pushing him forward and no one mapping out a Torah future for him. Yet even as a young boy, he knew one thing with absolute clarity. He had to know Torah. He had to become a *talmid chacham*.

His grandson, Rav Tzvi, told me that he still has the Mishnayos and Tanach his grandfather used as a seven or eight-year-old boy. Every night, he would sit alone by the fire during the cold winter nights, learning from the sacred books. He was completely alone. No encouragement, no audience, no recognition. Just a quiet but burning sense that he was meant for something higher. He did not wait for ideal conditions. He

did not say "later." He maximized exactly where he was and stretched beyond the world he had been given.

## SEIZING THE MOMENT

That same fire followed him into his teenage years when he became a student at RJJ. He was still young and raw in learning, but his inner certainty never changed. He would learn day and night, driven by the knowledge that becoming a *talmid chacham* was not optional. After pulling all-nighters or coming close to it almost every night, spending hours immersed in Torah, he knew that getting up in the morning for Shacharis would not be easy. It was a real challenge.

To make sure he would get up, he made a deal with his roommate, Rav Moshe Bick. If he did not rise immediately for Shacharis, his roommate was to pull him out of bed and lay him on the floor. In the 1920s, there was no heat in the winter and no air conditioning in the summer. The stone floor in the winter was freezing cold, and in the summer, it was stiflingly hot. Being laid on the floor was extreme, but it ensured he would wake up for Shacharis.

He was determined. He did not wait. He had growth to attain, and he knew that if the moment in front of him was the opportunity he had, he could not push it off. He seized the moment, and he grew.

**"Growth and leadership are attained by taking steps when the opportunity is in front of you."**

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Dedicated by Anonymous (Lakewood, NJ)  
*P'zechus refuah shelaimah* for Chaim ben Brocha Dina

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Growth and leadership are not attained through luck or convenience. They are attained through courage, fearlessness, belief in oneself, and, most of all, by taking steps when the opportunity is in front of you. It is recognizing what the moment presents and focusing on that. Doing this again and again, over a lifetime, allows a person to grow, to bring Hashem joy and pleasure, and to become the best version of oneself.

## LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

On the topic of leadership, as we begin Sefer Shemos, we are introduced to the greatest leader of all time, Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah itself tells us, “לא קם בישראל כמשה עוד” – *no one will rise like Moshe ever again.*”

What is interesting is the name by which he is known. “Moshe” was not his only name. It was the name given to him by Basya, Pharaoh’s daughter, when she drew him out of the river. But in truth, Moshe had many other names, each carrying deep meaning. For example, Tuvia, meaning “goodness of G-d”; Avigdor; Yered, connected either to the manna falling or to bringing down the Torah; Shemaya, reflecting his service to Hashem; and Levi, referencing his tribal lineage.

So why does the Torah choose to call him Moshe, the name given by Basya, rather than one of these other meaningful names?

## THE DANGER OF “LATER”

Rav Asher Weiss explains, based on a teaching of Rav Chatzkel Abramsky, the meaning of a well-known Gemara regarding Matan Torah. The Gemara in Shabbos 88a teaches:

מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב, ואם לא — שם תהא קבורתכם.

*Hashem held the mountain over them like a barrel and said, “If you accept the Torah, good. If not, sham, there will be your burial.”*

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky asks, why is it *sham*, there? The burial place should be here, right under the mountain!

Rav Chatzkel Abramsky explains that *sham*, “there,” refers not to a physical location, but to all the moments and opportunities that were pushed off. It is the pile of chances delayed until they were missed, the benchmarks never met, the growth postponed indefinitely. It is not here, because the “burial place” is not under the mountain itself—it is under the heap of times, opportunities, and responsibilities that were set

aside, postponed, or forgotten. *Sham* is the accumulation of “later” that buries potential.

Drawing from that idea, indeed, Moshe had other, much more meaningful names, but the Torah chooses the name Moshe because of the incident with Basya, an Egyptian. Why? Basya saw a baby drowning in the river and acted immediately. She did not wait, calculate, or ask permission. She recognized the moment, seized it, and extended her hand. Hashem completed the rest. The name Moshe reminds us that true leadership and greatness are born from acting courageously in the moment. It is not about waiting for perfect conditions or for something else to happen. It is about now.

## GREATNESS IS FORGED NOW

This is how greatness is shaped and created. Not by living in *sham*, “later,” waiting for things to be different, easier, or lighter. Greatness is forged now, in the moment, whatever the circumstances may be.

When we talk about Moshe, the leader and greatest Navi of all time, the story of Basya and her outstretched arm can easily be lost or forgotten. Yet the Torah calls him Moshe to remind us of that story—of Basya, her courage, her immediate action, and her willingness to seize the moment before her. The name Moshe is a permanent reminder that true leadership begins with recognizing the opportunity in front of you and acting without delay.

Greatness, leadership, and personal growth are not found in ideal circumstances or postponed for “later.” They are forged in the choices we make now, in the moments we are given, and in the courage to act even when it is hard, inconvenient, or uncomfortable. Leadership is not only for rabbis, *roshei yeshivah*, *gedolei Yisrael*, or CEOs. We are all leaders—leaders of ourselves. And the true measure of leadership in those esteemed roles is rooted in mastering the art of leading oneself.

Every day presents opportunities to stretch beyond what we think is possible and to seize the moment before us. You are a leader. The opportunities are endless. Every second presents decisions to be made. Do not push them off for later. Don’t kick the can. The time is now. •

***“It is the accumulation of “later” that buries potential.”***

