Assembly Notes
PARSHAS VAERA 5786
Assembly Theme: A Leader Has A Higher Vision and Compassion

Dvar Torah

When you offer to help someone who is in anguish, struggling with a prolonged, high pressured crisis, how are they likely to react to your intervention? The answer: highly unpredictable.
In this week's Parsha (Va'era) the Jewish people have been enslaved for many decades. They were under severe stress because of the slave labour and atrocities visited on them.
Moshe speaks to the Israelites on behalf of Hashem Himself, with the good news of their imminent redemption. But they did not listen "due to shortness of breath and hard labour".
You would expect that because of the terrible condition they would jump at the opportunity to be redeemed; why did they reject it?!
One explanation given is because Moshe was not subjected to the hard labour; he didn't experience what they did. So, they couldn't accept that he could deliver their salvation.
But in reality, to free someone, and to be free oneself, one needs an awareness and a vision of a better life, a higher existence is needed.

The commentator Ibn Ezra (12th century Spain) says that Moshe was raised in a royal palace, so that he would be accustomed to a higher sensitivity to learning and behaviour, and not be subject to a slave mentality. He was ultimately able to teach the Jewish people to respect themselves, not to accept a life of subjugation to Egypt, not its slavery and not its culture.
We are created so that we should lift our perspective and raise ourselves to a higher purpose in existence, to elevate the world and to bring G-dliness into this world.

But how can someone from a privileged background, an "outsider" help another if "he doesn't know what we are going through"?

A true leader combines the two: the higher perspective he is coming from and a pfeeling for his flock. On the one hand an awareness of a higher level of existence; and on the other hand absolute empathy and compassion for the other.
The first act of Moshe that the Torah records is that he left the royal palace and immediately risked his life to save his fellow Jew. He also rescued the daughters of Yisroel from the hostile shepherds. Moshe had a royal upbringing, but that did not stop him from activism on behalf of the less fortunate.

Story of the Rebbe

A teenage Chabad girl (around 1970) was struggling with her emotional and spiritual health. She wrote to the Rebbe a letter describing her struggles. She was very straight and said that she did not believe that the Rebbe could understand her feelings, because he was never a teenage girl.

The Rebbe responded that he is confident that she would grow and eventually marry and have children. When her young baby is teething and crying bitterly she will cuddle and soothe the child, feeling pain herself because she cannot do any more since this is part of the growing process of the child. When that happens, you will know how I feel for you.

(The Rebbe also organised a mentor who would be able to be more available to speak to her than the Rebbe himself).

Good Shabbos!

גוט שבת!