

"Why Me?" – Parashat Shemot

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Have you ever felt called to do something meaningful—and your first response was not yes, but why me?

That question sits at the heart of Parashat Shemot.

At the beginning of this week's portion, Moses's life is already complicated. He is born into danger, raised in Pharaoh's palace, witnesses injustice, and in a moment of fear and anger kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew slave. When the consequences catch up with him, Moses runs. He leaves Egypt and becomes a shepherd, living a quiet life far from power and leadership.

It is there, while following a lost sheep, that Moses encounters the burning bush.

God speaks to him and tells him to go back to Egypt and help free the Israelites. Moses's first response is not confidence or excitement. It is hesitation. In one form or another, he asks God: "Why me?"

Moses offers excuse after excuse. He says the people will not listen to him. He says they will not believe him. And, finally, he offers what may be the most honest excuse of all. He tells God that he is not a good speaker.

Moses does not see himself as a leader. He does not feel prepared or qualified. He does not believe he has what it takes.

And God's response is not to magically turn Moses into someone else. God does not dismiss Moses's fear or suddenly make him eloquent or outgoing. Instead, God gives him a partner. God tells Moses that his brother, Aaron, will speak for him—and Moses will lead alongside him.

When I was younger, I related deeply to this part of Moses's story. I was shy and introverted, and speaking in front of people was hard for me. Confidence did not come naturally. For a long time, I believed that leadership meant being the loudest voice in the room.

Reading this Torah portion helped me realize something important. Leadership does not only look one way. You do not have to be the best public speaker or the most outgoing person to lead. You can lead in your own way.

I have worked on my confidence over the years, and I am more confident today than I was in the past. But like Moses, it is still something I work on every day.

Moses teaches us that you can lead even when you are unsure. You can lead even when you are still working on your confidence. Moses does not stop being hesitant. The Torah moves forward with him exactly as he is.

I once heard a teaching that Moses never led alone. The Exodus was not the result of one person, but of a team. Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and Joshua each brought something different. Vision, words, courage, and organization. None of them could have done it by themselves.

That idea begins here, at the burning bush. God builds partnership into leadership from the very beginning.

Moses was able to help lead the Israelites out of Egypt not because he was confident or perfect, but because he was willing to step forward and because he did not do it alone.

If you have ever felt unsure, unqualified, or hesitant to step forward, know that you are in good company. Moses felt that way, too. Judaism does not ask us to be perfect leaders or even fully confident ones. It asks us to show up, to grow, and to be willing to offer what we have.

May this Shabbat remind us that even when we are not confident in ourselves, each of us has something to offer. And when we bring those pieces together, we can do far more than any of us could do alone.