

Lesson 12 - No Good Deed Goes Unpunished

Goal:

- Students will perform perek 5 in order to bring to life the perspectives and feelings of the various individuals and groups involved.
- Students will offer examples of cases in their own experience where their effort at doing good failed and discuss the importance of not using failure as an excuse for giving up.

Activity:

1. Perek 5 is very dramatic with many personalities and emotions involved—perfect for a play. Have students perform a dramatic reenactment of this perek. One student will direct the play while some students can act as exegetical advisors who look up commentaries in case something requires clarification. Students should be cast the day before the play so that they have time to prepare what they will do and say.

Characters:

Hashem
Moshe
Aharon
Pharaoh
Egyptian taskmasters (נגשים)
Israelite taskmasters (שטריו)
Bnei Yisrael

2. Evaluate

Analyze the pesukim and how well the play brought out the sense of the text. This analysis should bring up several points:

- Compare Moshe and Aharon's request of Pharaoh with what Hashem told them to say in Shemot 3:18. *Do they say exactly what Hashem tells them to say?* Moshe and Aharon first add their own bold and unconditional demand for release. They seem to want to challenge and provoke Pharaoh so that he takes their demand seriously. Pharaoh, however, is so haughty that he places himself above Hashem. Moshe and Aharon then continue with the language Hashem told them, except they add a persuasive reason that Hashem might smite Bnei Yisrael if they do not go and Pharaoh would then lose his servants.
- Search for “making bricks with straw” in youtube for a video (there are lots of them) that shows how clay, sand, and straw are mixed into adobe bricks that can be quite strong.
- *Why are there Egyptian and Israelite taskmasters?* Compare this to how the Nazis used prisoners as guards over their fellow prisoners in the concentration camps. They were called *kapos* and *sonderkommandos*. This was a very effective way of controlling many prisoners with a relatively small force.

Note that keeping people very busy and under pressure is also an effective way of controlling them. Jim Jones, for example, would purposely overwork the citizens of Jonestown and keep them sleep-deprived so that they would not think about questioning his authority.

- *How does the outcome of Moshe and Aharon's intervention compare with their expectations? Hashem did tell them that Pharaoh would refuse, so why does Moshe complain so bitterly in pasuk 22? He expected Pharaoh to refuse but not that Pharaoh would make their labor even harsher.*

3. Discuss: Did you ever try to do something good but were not successful? Did you ever try to do something good but ended up making things worse? Can you think of a time when you were yelled at or punished for trying to help? Did that make you feel guilty, angry, both? Did you want to continue helping or give up? What is the meaning of the saying: "No good deed goes unpunished"? Does that mean we should stop doing good deeds?

Read this poem:

No Good Deed Goes Unpunished
(So Shines a Good Deed in a Naughty World)
by Franklin P. Adams (1881-1960)

There was a man in our town who had King Midas' touch;
He gave away his millions to the colleges and such;
And people cried: "The hypocrite! He ought to understand
The ones who really need him are the children of this land!"

When Andrew Croesus built a home for children who were sick,
The people said they rather thought he did it as a trick,
And writers said: "He thinks about the drooping girls and boys,
But what about conditions with the men whom he employs?"

There was a man in our town who said that he would share
His profits with his laborers, for that was only fair,
And people said: "Oh, isn't he the shrewd and foxy gent?
It cost him next to nothing for that free advertisement!"

There was a man in our town who had the perfect plan
To do away with poverty and other ills of man,
But he feared the public jeering, and the folks who would defame him,
So he never told the plan he had, and I can hardly blame him.